

NOFHARIM: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF WOMEN IN A JEWISH WEST BANK
SETTLEMENT

By

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To Ori, for inspiring every part of this endeavor

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This thesis interrogates modes of perception regarding Jewish settlements in the West Bank. I question the often polarized and un-complicated way settlements are imagined by those outside by examining how settlers view their own lives and how they perceive Arabs in neighboring communities. Unlike previous studies that concentrate on extremist Jewish groups, their mainly male members, and their fringe, illegal activities in the region, this research considers the different perspectives found among women in Nofharim, an established settlement town. Though many people outside of this region perceive it to be characterized by danger, fear, and not uncommon death, women, specifically, depict busy social and religious lives, many choosing to move here for practical reasons such as cheaper housing prices, an intimate community, and good schools. However, by focusing on those aspects that are normal, women reproduce a political-economic discourse that obscures the security fences and disregards the dramatic political tensions a few dozen meters off from where they live. More than the modern state, women also speak about the importance of the Biblical land, seeing themselves as the natural, indigenous people of this geographic area. Such a discourse of belonging locates Arabs as a theoretical blip on a predominantly religious and

historical landscape. Hearing women's voices thus reveals a much more complex network of political, economic, religious, and emotional concerns intricately webbed beneath the surface of the West Bank conflict. Deep down, mere ignorance about cultural others seems to be a dominating issue plaguing the anatomy of this social landscape.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Perception

One morning, when I had just begun research, I was speaking with an Israeli real estate agent, a family acquaintance. We were sitting in an apartment in Bakka, in the South-Western part of Jerusalem. She asked me what I was doing at the moment in Israel and I told her that I was embarking on a project in the town of Nofharim¹. “That’s right beside Ramallah?!” she blurted, before I had even finished responding, in the combined tone of a disbelieving question and declaration of horror. “I wouldn’t go there! It’s dangerous! And it’s so far!” she exclaimed further, eyes widening and brows knitting in dismay. “It’s only about twenty-five minutes outside Jerusalem,” I replied calmly, “and honestly, it doesn’t feel dangerous at all.”

Behind where she was sitting, through the window, I could see the southern edge of the sprawling neighboring hilltop suburb of Gilo. Beyond Gilo is the infamous Green Line. Five more minutes down one road is the city of Bethlehem, and fifteen minutes down a very different road is the large modern settlement of Efrat. But for most Israelis, towns like Efrat to the south of Jerusalem and Nofharim to the north may as well be in other countries. They are imagined to be far away, dangerous areas, and for political reasons, most Israelis would never visit.

My brief and awkward conversation with the real estate agent raised issues about visual and conceptual perception – the relationship between seeing with the senses, and perceived, intellectual understanding; and, similarly, the difference between visually

¹ The name of the settlement is changed in this thesis, in order to maintain the anonymity of the community and the individuals who participated in the research.

seeing and intellectually noticing, versus seeing with the eyes but not noticing. In this thesis, I interrogate common perceptions of West Bank Jewish settlements and their inhabitants. I address this topic by zooming-in ethnographically on the female residents of a Jewish settlement, examining the ways in which these women perceive their own lives, their land, and their Arab neighbors. I argue that female voices, often softer and more seldomly heard in this region, show that this internationally recognized zone of conflict is thicker, knottier, and more complex than often presumed.

Listening to the voices of individual people, in order to understand other ways of life and worldviews, has, for over a century, been a critical and greatly debated anthropological method. Bronislaw Malinowski's famous and profoundly influential first strides of field research involved paying explicitly prominent attention to what people say, their "views and opinions and utterances" (1984: 22). Later scholars in the discipline have prodded and poked the concept of voice, and even turned it upside down, but it is still a central methodological tenet. Questions about representing the heterogeneity and vitality of informants' voices (Marcus and Fischer 1986), the lack of attention to women's voices (Behar and Gordon 1995), and the powerful role of the writer in choosing and editing those voices (Appadurai 1988; Wolf 1996), are among many other issues that have emerged.

As a student of such a methodological tradition, I was inspired to document a group of voices that seem to be only faintly represented in academic and public arenas. Many people don't want to listen to these voices because they issue from a site of perceived homogeneity and fundamentalism; yet, I think it is worthwhile to be attentive to them, in the project of understanding the nuanced contours and underlying processes

of a conflict with global significance. Consequently, digging beneath the façade of the heavy term “settler” brings about a confusingly complex web of relationships and contentions that is not apparent in simplified depictions of “Israelis versus Palestinians.” Thus, through the representation of women’s voices specifically, I hope to throw into relief a network of sights and perceptions concerning the subject of West Bank settlements: how we may perceive settlers, how female settlers perceive themselves, and how they perceive others. Through discourses of pragmatic normalization about their peaceful, suburban community, and through a powerful, spiritual conception of the land, women seem to simply not see their Arab neighbors. At the same time, they also don’t express hatred and violence, as commonly depicted in popular, media, and even scholarly representations. What emerges from the particularity of the women’s own words and an illustration of such thickly entangled social, religious, political, and economic circumstances, is a startlingly common theme of distance and ignorance – of non-perception – dominating both the settlers’ view of Arab others, and, through juxtaposition, the way many people outside the area imagine settlers and settlements.

Close, But Very Far

Three years ago I stayed for several weeks in Nofharim, in the West Bank, at the home of my – at that time – boyfriend’s grandfather. I was curious about this town “over the line,” and I rationalized my politicized movement by telling myself that this experience was balanced by earlier moments of activist work in Palestinian West Bank communities when I was in my late teens. During that first visit to Nofharim in 2008, I often went into Jerusalem to spend time with friends. I was startled by the curiosity expressed by my Israeli friends, as though each visit I was coming from a foreign land. My Jewish, Israeli-born god-mother who lives in central Jerusalem even asked me to

show her photographs. I remember being struck by her intrigue, watching her recognize the geographic proximity of a place she could not imagine, that she had never been to, and that she would not travel to for definitive political reasons. She once told me: "When you said that you were going to Nofharim, I had this image that you were traveling far away, abroad even. For me, that area is *Hu'l* [*Hutz la'aretz* - outside of the land (of Israel)]. For me, it's another country."

I, too, was confused and troubled. On the one hand, I felt uncomfortable entering into a space heavily tainted with extensive discrimination against a demographic majority, hard, concrete walls of separation, and the reported shadows of hatred and violence. And yet, on the other hand, the bus that got me to Nofharim was modern, like any other, the roads opened to sweeping, hilly vistas, and more than anything else, the community resembled any other modern religious Jewish town in Israel. In fact, I found aspects of Nofharim particularly lovely. People were nice and friendly, busily going about their daily business, living inside modern homes, and working regular, professional jobs in nearby Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. There were fruit trees and flower bushes at almost every turn, clean, refreshing air, and early morning orchestras of chirping birds. It all seemed so normal and pleasant. I struggled to bridge the great, international fuss over "the West Bank", or my Israeli friends' declared disgust with "the settlements," with my personal positive experiences in this peaceful community. Emotionally, my enjoyable visit in Nofharim was challenged by creeping anxieties that I "shouldn't be here" – that despite my shallow self-justifications of previous "lefty" activism and merely brief sojourns, I was somehow inculcating myself in politically controversial and morally unjust processes. Something didn't jive.

Though I went to Israel in the fall of 2011 with the intention of studying a different topic, my polarized perceptions of Nofharim nagged at me. Discomfort, I believe, can be a productive location from which to engage in investigation. In the end, I decided to make use of my own personal challenges with regards to this issue and to probe the matter more formally through an ethnographic project. My mixed attitudes about Nofharim also reflected an attentiveness to a relatively diverse spectrum of political positions, something not necessarily common among those who have emotional stakes in and personal ties to the area. From the start, my project is wholly biased because I was only able to conduct research on one side of the fence; nevertheless, I aim to take a bundle of perspectives with me through the study: my positive experiences with those called “settlers” (that have grown out of personal relationships and shared religious traditions); my horror and frustration about continuing Palestinian suffering in the West Bank (that has emerged, too, from first-hand stories and sites); feelings of empathy towards personal accounts of desire (for safety, happiness, and meaning); and, critical and more distanced anthropological modes of social analysis. These angles often bump-up or even crash against each other, but it is specifically such locations of uncomfortable friction where further inquiry can constructively emerge.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes’s *Death Without Weeping* is a noteworthy example of ethnography that emerges from a place of personal, or ethical conflict. Scheper-Hughes, from the very beginning, places her own discomfort center-stage, and from there traces-out the network of social, political, and economic conditions that lead mothers in a poor Brazilian shantytown to abandon sickly infants. “[T]his ethnography has its origins not in certain theoretical conundrums,” she writes, “but in practical

realities and dilemmas” (1992: 4). In fact, she asserts that only because she experienced profound feelings and distress about the topic was she able to engage such a complex project (16). Scheper-Hughes further believes that “Anthropological work, if it is to be in the nature of an ethical and a radical project, is one that is transformative of the self but not (and here is the rub) transformative of the other” (24). In this sense, it is the writer or researcher who experiences the journey, whose beliefs are challenged and questioned. Scheper-Hughes, in her ethnography, is therefore honest with her personal sympathies and values, allowing them to appear transparently in her text, thus taking account of, yet not privileging, her own cultural presuppositions. But, at the same time, *Death without Weeping* is anything but a self-indulgent treatise about its author. I am inspired by the way Scheper-Hughes’s own feelings form the thin spine that structures the large-scale body of her investigation, while opening a much greater space for the voices and experiences of her informants.

In a parallel manner, Lila Abu-Lughod calls for anthropologists to map themselves and their emotions into the social landscape of their ethnographies. Candidly including the self, and tracing the similarities and differences between her and her subjects, she argues, obscures the sense of dichotomous distance between anthropologist and “cultural other.” As she demonstrates in *Writing Women’s Worlds*, Abu-Lughod incorporates herself into the scenes she describes – not as an abstract observer but as a fellow subject, with affective desires and struggles, learning and transforming through the narrative. She writes herself directly into the opening paragraphs of the preface, positioning herself “by the side of the road” (xi), passively awaiting the return of her husband and father, anxious about the coming reunion with her Bedouin host family. In

contrast with the image of the lone, confidently authoritative anthropologist, Abu-Lughod flattens the hierarchy of power by positioning herself on the side, yet still on the main route, vulnerable, uncomfortable yet excited, hoping to have learned Bedouin social rituals correctly, and just like the female subjects that she will soon introduce, a daughter, niece, and wife – part of a larger family. It is from this location of personal affective multiplicity that she begins the unfolding of her ethnographic investigation of the Awlad ‘Ali women.

Abu-Lughod actually goes so far as to recommend the unrecognized advantages of “halfies” – anthropologists who themselves are caught between cultures and places, never completely “home,” and through their own blurred, overlapping identities inherently break-down the self/other boundary². According to Abu-Lughod’s definition, I could consider myself a “halfie”, and indeed, there are certainly many theoretical and practical benefits of this position. However, in response to Abu-Lughod’s praise of the “halfie” condition, I think it is critical to remember that being a “halfie” is not common, not always easy, and more of a rare privilege.

Major influences of feminist critique include the deconstruction and acknowledgment of the researcher’s positionality and the socially situated nature of all knowledge³. For some, this can lead to dismal questioning about the benefits at all of scientific inquiry, if, at the end of the day, it merely provides a partial, prejudiced, and fragmentary view. However, standing on the other side of this critical outlook,

² She argues for the anthropological value of “halfie” researchers in multiple publications, but an especially detailed explanation is contained in 1990: 26.

³ Sandra Harding (1991) summarizes these concepts in the introduction to her book about feminism in the social sciences. More specifically, Diane Wolf calls for greater attention to be paid by researchers on the self and the politics of their own location in the field (1996: 35).

positionality and partiality can actually become exceptionally productive locations: engaging one's personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts can potentially lead to especially deep and sincere investigations of social issues and the unraveling of hidden structures of injustice and discrimination.

Feminist research has also raised concerns about the power relations between the researcher and her subjects, and the consequences of intervention, observation, and publication for the subjects. Diane Wolf, for example, lists an array of such potential problems in the introduction to her volume on feminist fieldwork (1996: 19), but she does not mention the struggle of ethnographers who engage practices or behaviors that are personally uncomfortable to them, and their challenge to balance intimate relationships in the field with critical analysis that can possibly place their subjects in a negative light. Scheper-Hughes, in contrast, speaks directly to her tremendous discomfort and inner tensions. She honestly and self-critically relates her own concerted efforts to save a "mortally neglected" (342) infant, leaving space for the reader to judge between the actions of the Brazilian mother, and the values and beliefs behind the anthropologist's move that could potentially lead to an ultimately ill-fated life (345). Judith Stacey (1991), in her honest reflections about feminist ethnography, similarly wrestles with the question of betraying critical, yet problematic or potentially-damaging knowledge given to her by her subjects. Here, a second sense of discomfort emerges. In addition to my personal struggles about hanging out in a West Bank settlement, I experience a second feeling of betrayal towards the kind, generous women who shared time, energy, and honesty. I feel challenged, as Scheper-Hughes and Stacey describe,

to balance close-up intimacy and trusting relationships with distant, analytical critique of intense social and political circumstances.

Methodologically, I turn to the artistic method of juxtaposition, engendering spaces of contradiction and friction, often rooted in personal emotion, in order to provoke deeper reflection. As a visual example, Barnett Newman's *Abraham* involves an enormous canvas of gray paint, and through it, a thick, darker, vertical line. A subtle streak of luminosity peaks through in the long cracks between the black and the gray. Side-by-side with this overwhelming image is the title "Abraham." What is the relationship between the gloomy backdrop and a lightless boundary drawn through the middle? What are the relationships between the faint distinctions in color fields? And what is the relationship between such a moving and meditative painting and its name – Abraham as the Biblical forefather, Abraham as Newman's own father, or both? Multiple spaces of potential meaning are pried open in Newman's work of art, and most importantly, it is the work of the viewer to consider, reflect, and interpret. I am influenced by this creative technique, and, as I struggle with my own opposing experiences of settlers and settlements, I attempt to place voices, portraits, and imaginations side-by-side in order to highlight the contrasts between them, and cultivate a space that motivates reflection on the intricately contested complexity of what is often referred to as "the West Bank conflict".

Main Themes

In my personal experience, I have found that both within and outside of Israel, imaginations of the Jewish West Bank settlements are most often quite blurred, usually characterized by themes of danger, fear, and war. In the academic realm, ethnographic studies on the topic have generally concentrated on extremist, fundamentalist Jewish

groups, their mainly male members, and their fringe, illegal activities⁴. Across a wide variety of scholarship and public discourse, criticism against the “settlers” often overlooks the narratives of spiritual belonging that are at the heart of their controversial activities. Though there are many ways in which their behaviors may resemble the colonial processes in other parts of the world, Jewish settlers in the West Bank claim a powerful, personal, spiritual connection to this identified geographic area. Whether we agree with them or not, whether their actions are deemed legal or illicit, I believe it’s valuable to understand the shape of their thoughts, desires, and perspectives.

Many people I have met, including those who are passionately entangled in the “Middle East situation,” have never made acquaintance with a resident of a Jewish settlement. I have therefore set out to introduce a group of nine women from Nofharim, an established, middle class Jewish community in the West Bank. These female settlers, I argue, reveal emotions and thoughts which are not commonly associated with typical images of settlement residents. Through profiling a glimpse of their characters, I hope to illustrate the women’s individual dispositions and the diverse, complex ways in which they relate to living in this location. I specifically record women’s words and narratives that express their reasons for residing in such a contested space, their affective experiences, their relationships to the land, and how they perceive their Arab neighbors.

Though all the women are ideologically supportive of Jewish settlement in the West Bank, many recount how they were motivated to move to the region for practical,

⁴ For multiple examples, see entries by Aran, Don-Yehiya, Heilman, Liebman, and Sprinzak in Marty and Appleby’s five-volume *The Fundamentalism Project* (1991). More recent examples, despite being more nuanced, continue to focus on extremist communities and their male members (Feige 2009; Fischer 2007)

political-economic reasons, attracted by affordable housing prices, good schools for their children, and the opportunity to live in a safe, family-oriented, and religious community. For them, Nofharim is a secure, peaceful environment, in contrast with the anxieties of urban life in cities like Tel Aviv. These mothers, perhaps more than their husbands, stress the pragmatic benefits of such a location for raising a family. And in general, the women's busy and fulfilling social and religious lives are not obstructed in obvious ways by any threat or danger. However, such a discourse of normalization keeps the many positive aspects of life in focused view, concealing matters of unease behind a conceptual (and physical) fence. Broader issues of political conflict and territorial control, as well as geographically-proximate Arab life, are maintained at the far edge of the women's conceptual radar.

For this segment of the modern religious Israeli population, the land is highly valuable, primarily because it sits in the heart of the Biblical geography of Israel. Inspired by ancient history and religion, the women perceive themselves as – what I suggest – the indigenous people of this particular territory. Their “return” to it, after centuries of exile and yearning, is seen as the joyous unification of people and place, designated for one another by God. As Jews, this is their “natural” dwelling space. Though they are clear supporters of the Jewish state, I argue that it is nevertheless the spiritually distinguished land that the women value, more than the sovereign country. Could such an indigenous approach to land, as well as recognition of the settlers' narratives of “indigeneity,” present new possibilities for this politically contested geographic area? Though it is assumed that the settlers are primarily concerned with territorial boundaries and borders, I suggest that, perhaps, if we are attentive to their

spiritual discourse, new questions about non-sovereign land-based coexistence may arise. Polarized depictions of a land-grabbing West Bank conflict thus become inadequate. Indeed, with a treatment of political economy, spirituality, and historically rooted desire, the picture becomes a lot more complicated.

The women's primary focus on this God-given, rugged, hilly terrain represents a second discourse which leads to a disregard for the Arab other. Theoretically, the women are aware of the conflict, but day-to-day, they are not obviously effected by, and even ignorant of, the dramatic political tensions a few dozen meters off, beyond the barbed wire fence that surrounds their settlement. More than the modern state, women speak about the importance of the Biblical land, and Arab citizens therefore become a theoretical blip on a predominantly religious and historical landscape. The surrounding Arab populations are referred to with vague, abstract terms that cannot acknowledge who they are as individuals, the discrimination they face, and their fundamentally problematic political situation.

The discourses of political-economic normalization of their community, and spiritual naturalization of their relationship to the land, push the existence of Arab others to the conceptual periphery. For the women, the result of this perceptive distance is a conflicting combination of feelings that waver between sympathy and sadness, and anger and fear – but not hatred or violence. Ultimately, blindness and ignorance seem to be quiet, unobserved, yet immense obstacles in any imagination towards peace. Looking forward, the sheer complexity lying beneath such a chasm of knowledge about the other makes the project of reconciliation seem all that much more complicated and challenging.

Women's Voices

I am very much influenced by the theories and methods of feminist ethnography, and these approaches have guided the way I carried out and structured this research. I focus on the voices of women for several such reasons.

Feminist anthropologist, Ruth Behar, introduces her edited volume, *Women Writing Culture*, with the theme of seeing – those who are seen and those who are not seen; those who are regarded with respect and those who are gazed upon as objects. It is this sensitive lens that influenced me to think about the lack of detailed representation of Jewish women in the settlements, and, similarly, the dearth of documentation about how these women themselves see their surrounding world. “Feminists have argued for the decentering of masculinity in society’s thoughts and practices... The centering of men’s needs, interests, desires, visions ensures only partial and distorted understandings and social practices,” states feminist philosopher, Sandra Harding (1991:13). In the West Bank specifically, extremist and male perspectives and experiences have dominated social analysis. Ethnographic publications on Jewish communities in the West Bank have mostly focused on men⁵, and much of this literature concentrates specifically on passionate ideologies, illegal activity, violence, and the influence of male rabbinic figures and male-attended *yeshivot*. I would like to argue that an examination of women and their experiences generates a very different set of stories, and an undocumented landscape of thoughts and emotions towards this territory, and towards the Arab population. In contrast with published articles and books that concentrate on the fundamentalist ideologies of male settlers, my conversations

⁵ See again the entries by Aran, Don-Yehiya, Heilman, Liebman, and Sprinzak in Marty and Appleby’s five-volume *The Fundamentalism Project* (1991), as well as Feige 2009 and Fischer 2007.

with women highlight more practical benefits for habitation in this area, the advantages of living in an intimate, cooperative community, and also more sensitive approaches to the Arab population.

The second reason to document women's voices is that I am engaging research within a cultural group where gender roles are stressed and often separate. Practically, it is much easier and more comfortable for me, as a woman, to speak, listen, and connect with other women. Furthermore, my identity as a married Jewish woman meant that I was often spoken to with ease and openness, and with regards to most subjects, as one on the inside⁶. Nancy Hartsock (1987) and Harding (1991), among many feminist ethnographers, argue for the benefits of one's position as a woman in gaining understanding of other women. Sociologist Diane Wolf similarly writes:

According to feminist standpoint theory... one's positionality as a woman is crucial in gaining knowledge and understanding of other women... The epistemological contribution of women researchers is their 'embodied subjectivity' – their own knowledge and experiences are crucial for creating knowledge and for determining how fully they can understand a phenomenon (1996: 13).

⁶My "status," according to the women, was generally ambivalent. As a non-Israeli and a student in a U.S. university, I was regarded with distance, and often deference. I also do not dress as they do, nor live in a settlement. However, because I can converse in Hebrew, discuss Jewish law and custom, and understand many of the cultural references, and because I am married, and most of all, because I am related (through marriage) to two households in Nofharim, initial distance in a first meeting would quickly dissolve.

Interestingly, since I was hanging out in a settlement (a socially prohibited destination for left-wing Israelis), and since I was seen as modern religious (because I covered my hair, in respect to Jewish law pertaining to married women), it was often simply assumed that I was politically right-wing. Furthermore, since I am Jewish, many women assumed that I had recently become an Israeli citizen. These are just a couple of examples of the stiffness of religious and political categories of identification in Israel and the corresponding inferences that are assumed.

It is also important to note other assumptions that biased the information I have received. Some of the women perceived me as a potential new resident of Nofharim, asking if my husband and I were considering such a move. Others, in varying degrees, saw our conversations as a way to publicize their settlement to audiences overseas. Both attitudes influenced women to embellish the positive aspects of life in Nofharim, and only reluctantly expose the challenges, fears, and anxieties.

Consequently, in my case, not only are my gender and cultural background technically advantageous in forming relationships with the women that I study, but the embodiment of my female religious Jewish identity provides me with added senses of spiritual and performative depths of understanding. These advantages, however, come with a counter-side too: The proximity of my identity with the women who I study makes critical analysis that much more difficult, as I discuss above.

Feminist scholars and writers have often been especially attuned to questions of power and domination, turning to methods of representational particularity and documentation of voice in order to subvert authority and generalizations. Abu-Lughod (1990; 1991; 1993), for example, maintains that the process of writing and describing “culture” creates artificial and hierachal distance between the researcher and subject. She suggests, however, that by using the method of voice – by documenting the true diversity of multiple voices and engaging the intimacies of individual particularities – the writer can instead reflect her subjects’ agency to speak for themselves. Furthermore,

By working with the assumption of difference in sameness, of a self that participates in multiple identifications, and an other that is also partially the self, we might be moving beyond the impasse of the fixed self/other or subject/object divide that so disturbs the new ethnographers... What feminist ethnography can contribute to anthropology is an unsettling of the boundaries that have been central to its identity as a discipline of the self studying other (1990: 25-26).

More specifically, Abu-Lughod (1991) proposes a shift in focus, from culture to discourse and practice; she stresses the significance of connections, “historical and contemporary, between a community and the anthropologist working there and writing about it, not to mention the world to which he or she belongs and which enables him or her to be in that particular place” (148); and lastly, she recommends writing “ethnographies of the particular,” which are wary of generalizations (150) and focus on

particular individuals in order to “subvert the most problematic connotations of culture: homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness” (154).

Anthropologist Andrew Beatty, citing Abu-Lughod’s work as a key case in point, contends that such a focus on everyday narrative and the particular distinctly allows us to grasp the humane significances that define the experience of emotion. An awareness of emotion in narrative context brings to light the contradictions and conflicts that people experience in their social life, their not fitting, their resistance or unwilling capitulation to social pressures, their abrasions with reality, their struggles for meaning (2010: 438).

Beatty is arguing for more concerted efforts in the ethnographic representation of emotions. He asserts:

only a narrative approach, because it locates emotion in practice; in the indivisible flow of action, character, and history—can reveal the dimensions of emotion hidden by other methods. There is nothing very new in this claim. Novelists have known it for centuries. But as ethnographers we have still—most of us—to learn the lesson (440).

Thus, my third reason for placing women’s voices centrally in this study is to make as much space as possible for my subjects to represent themselves. I do not elide myself that the types of questions I ask impact the answers given, and that my own perspectives and values shape what data is collected and the ways in which it is reproduced. Nevertheless, my aim is to reflect the individual characters of the women, their varying positions and beliefs, the complexity of their political, economic, and religious desires, their multiple roles (as mothers, daughters, wives, sisters, teachers, and friends), the very real contradictions of their affective experiences, and their wide spectrum of emotions. I believe that only their own words can truly reflect this multi-dimensionality. As Abu-Lughod recently declared, “At its best, ethnography constitutes the deepest form of respect for others and offers really rich possibilities for challenging dominant ideologies, intellectual and political through the lives of others” (2011: 2).

More specifically, Susan Harding, an anthropologist who works on religious and rural political communities, calls for such particularistic analysis in the investigation of fundamentalisms (1991). She problematizes the stereotypical terms and broad, vague statements that are constructed in our modern imaginations, suggesting more nuanced, partial, and local readings to understand these people who we so often push to the side. Harding herself studies Christian fundamentalisms, but her approach applies correspondingly to my research on religious Jewish settlers as I too try to pry open generalizing terms such as “settlers” and even “fundamentalists”.

More recently, Dána-Ain Davis and Christa Craven (2011) argue for the value of feminist ethnography as a form of scholarly intervention into neoliberal processes and uneven global patterns. My own study departs from the authors’ form of interventional feminist ethnography, in that I do not study those who are politically or economically oppressed or marginalized in obvious ways. Yet, I employ tactics of feminist ethnography (focus on the particularity of individual experiences, writing that is accessible to those outside the academy, and analysis that views power as subtle, intersectional, and multiplicitous) in order to investigate underlying flows of discursive power and authority beneath claims to territorial space and habitation. In other words, I write with a future wider audience in mind, with an ambitious hope of even slightly cracking open the door on the polarized discourse surrounding the West Bank. And, as Davis and Craven suggest, I use feminist ethnographic modes to look for insinuations of power beneath discourses of speaking, behind practices of seeing, knowing that they can often be camouflaged by everyday innocent-seeming routines and unremarkable-appearing attitudes.

Finally, I argue that women's voices, to a greater extent than men's, reflect more practical thoughts and approaches and stronger senses of routine and status quo. The women from Nofharim with whom I spoke expressed explicit desires to just get on with their lives, to maintain comfortable, safe routines, to provide their children with productive and healthy spaces to grow and learn. When I pushed for stories, incidents, or moments of tension, most women would shrug their thin, loaded shoulders. Past conflicts and dramas fall to the side of memory, I believe, when five children have to be coaxed into doing their homework, fed, bathed, and eventually put to bed. The crises of the upcoming few hours are what take precedence in women's minds, despite all my provocation. Only the older women, those whose children and even grandchildren are out of their responsibility, could reflect on larger expanses of past time and pull out the narratives of marked moments.

In a sense, the anthropological tradition attributed to Max Gluckman and Victor Turner, of focusing on dramatic events, could be said to represent a more "male" analytical method. I would like to suggest that women, especially those preoccupied with the incessant and unpredictable flows of childcare obligations, are more likely to emphasize and aspire towards routine. These women do not have energy or time for external, interfering crises and conflicts, and they may in fact accentuate routine in order to iron-out dramatic incidents, playing up the safety, predictability, and peace of mind of repetition. Conflicts that do not directly involve them are thus pushed to the far ends of their intellectual radar, left to be dealt with by others who are more available for such matters. Pivoting thematically around exceptional incidents may therefore inaccurately reflect women's experiences and frames of mind. Abu-Lughod, for example, writes that

“ethnographies of the particular” (her proposed type of in-depth, intimate ethnography) should be made up of everyday stories (28), presenting humans “as people going through life wondering what they should do, making mistakes, being opinionated, vacillating, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragic personal losses, enjoying others, and finding moments of laughter” (1993: 27). In fact, I would like to contend further that it is only through patient attention to the magnitude of the uneventful mundane that powerful hidden discourses can come fully to bare. In the case of Nofharim, persistently repeated descriptions of safe, peaceful, ordinary-seeming life reflect the considerable extent to which security fences, military surveillance, and potential violence are kept intellectually at bay. Likewise, continuous reference to the biblical landscape reveals the extent to which contemporary Arab inhabitants are overlooked.

Methodology

In addition to the feminist writers I cite above, I am also inspired by the literary styles and extended representation of informants’ voices in Vincent Crapanzano’s *Waiting* and Jack Kugelmass’s *The Miracle of Intervale Avenue*. Crapanzano’s model has specifically influenced the way I have structured this thesis. In this first introductory chapter, I introduce the main, overarching ideas and frameworks. In the second chapter, I contextualize the research, exploring common perceptions and terms surrounding the West Bank settlements, and describing the geographic location of my fieldwork. The core of the project – profiles of nine women from Nofharim – follows next as the third chapter. Influenced by the writings of narrative anthropologists, this central section includes lengthy passages of the women’s words so as to let them represent themselves in their own voices. However, unlike Crapanzano’s thematic organization of

conversations (which, I find, confuses the development of distinct characters), I represent the women one at a time. Acquaintances from outside the academic arena, who read early drafts of these profiles, were captivated and grateful for the opportunity to “meet real settlers,” encouraging me to record as many as I could. I recognize that nine such accounts is a lot of material, however, I have included all of them with the hope that readers will peruse through them as much or as little as they desire.

In the fourth chapter, I examine common themes that reappear through the words of the nine women. At certain points in this analysis section, I include short vignettes of ethnographic events, incorporated in order to further illustrate both social life in Nofharim as well as main ideas. I label these episodes according to the time in which they occurred (during a two-day period from Saturday morning to Sunday night) to demonstrate what can transpire within such a short interval. I conclude the thesis with a discussion of perception, the thematic thread that weaves through the ethnography and its analysis.

In addition to textual representation, photography is another important dimension in this project. The photographs were taken in and around Nofharim, and these are distributed at the end of the first and third chapters. All photographs are my own.

The research for this project was conducted over the course of two and a half months in the fall of 2011. I traveled to Nofharim each week or two, staying for two to five days in order to meet women, speak with them, hang around, attend events, and photograph. (Previous to this research, I had visited Nofharim a handful of times for personal reasons, and I was therefore familiar with the location, but did not know more than a couple families.) Nofharim is a “closed community,” along the lines of a planned,

communally-oriented town. New residents are first screened by a committee before they are allowed to rent or purchase property. I was able to visit so often because I was staying with an established family in the community, to whom I am related through marriage.

Nofharim is a pseudonym. I have also changed the names of all individuals mentioned in the ethnographic research in order to protect their anonymity.

CHAPTER 2

A WEST BANK SETTLEMENT

Perspectives from those Outside

Both inside and outside of Israel, I have found that people imagine the Jewish settlements as dangerous, war-torn spaces. I conducted an informal experiment to investigate this further, and emailed a couple dozen friends from all across the world, of different ages, both men and women, mostly university-educated, and of multiple religious and cultural affiliations. I asked them to briefly describe how they imagine the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. I have listed below excerpts from some of these emails, before moving forward towards the West Bank:

This is how I imagine it... The West Banks are a continual struggle, a ghetto, a dirty place filled with uneducated masses who want to fight. The West Banks are war. It is a place of hunger, poverty and need. I imagine it is dangerous to live there, and dangerous to go there, particularly for Jews.¹

I imagine them as very, very gated communities, more religious than most of Israel, adjacent or close to Palestinian communities. Lots of security. I imagine they are pretty tightly knit, everyone knows each other. Very right wing people.²

I imagine it to be less developed or sophisticated [than the rest of Israel], less cultural, and the energy more tense because of the threat they [people who live in the West Bank] live under.³

I imagine the Jewish West Bank Settlements as being clusters of homes and farms; people trying to create self-sufficiency along lines of the American frontiers during the Westward push of pioneers on a much smaller scale.⁴

Places where people experience fear, sadness and conflict as part of their daily lives; where a small incident can act as trigger for something life

¹ Email to author, August 25, 2011.

² Email to author, August 25, 2011.

³ Email to author, September 19, 2011.

⁴ Email to author, August 25, 2011.

threatening in a very short space of time; where there is a strong Israeli military presence; where both Israeli & Palestinians are in a form of prison; where the world media often focuses; where most people live a fairly humble existence; where the landscape is dry ; where life can be a struggle for the inhabitants; where individual thought is found less frequently than in some other places on this earth; where family & friendships exercise an exceedingly key role in the inhabitant's life.⁵

To be honest, there's a big question mark in my head because I don't know much about it... I think of violence and chaos, perhaps people having to learn how to get on with their daily lives despite this.⁶

A Jewish family member, who has visited Israel, wrote:

As far as the West Bank goes, I used to think it meant the west bank of the Mediterranean sea, which would put it at Gibraltar (almost kidding). Only for the last ten years or so do I know that it means the west bank of the Jordan river, therefore I can only assume it means it borders with Jordan. I don't know what the green line refers to... and I can't imagine how it is to live in the west bank... Sadly, I could easily have googled all these words before responding, but it's like knowing the depth of a tooth cavity - you want to avoid unpleasant details, and the west bank, for me, is one... I assume the west bank is a hot zone...⁷

Another friend wrote me the following list of word-associations: "Monocultural; Predominantly religious; Sectarian; Old-worldy; Big families; Tribalized; Devolving; Isolated."⁸

Though it is referred to very often in the media, and though it is the theoretical center of many heated political debates, I find that the West Bank is either a question mark or a war zone in many peoples' imaginations.

In a parallel manner, in the academic arena, West Bank settlers, conflated with the Israeli state at large, are often glossed as colonialists, frequently compared to those in

⁵ September 18, 2011.

⁶ Email to author, August 29, 2011.

⁷ Email to author, August 25, 2011.

⁸ Email to author, August 28, 2011.

South Africa or Australia⁹. Indeed, some settler practices may certainly follow the distressing patterns of colonial settlement; however, this critical and comparative discourse rarely considers the diversity amongst settlers and their activities, or the distinct nature of the settler's indigenous claims and religious motivations. Generalized settler behavior is simply labeled as "wrong" or "illegal," overlooking the historical and spiritual beliefs of individuals, as well as the divergent ways in which "settlement" is understood and acted out¹⁰. Anthropologist Joyce Dalsheim (2011) argues that the discourse of conflict in the Middle East, which pits the "left" against the "right," simply reproduces hegemonic categories and limits any form of productive debate. While acknowledging the problems of Jewish settlement, she also states: "To discard as meaningless that which gives meaning to so many lives seems impractical if not impossible, but more importantly, it is a form of violence that contradicts its very rationale" (165).

In contrast to blank, vague, or violent images, my own experience has exposed me to towns and villages that hardly resemble the perceptions I have quoted above nor the descriptions found in academic writing. I am therefore setting out to paint a picture of daily life, as I observe it, in one Jewish West Bank town. Beyond large questions of

⁹ Lorenzo Veracini (2006), for example, argues that Israel is a settler society and apartheid state, like that of South Africa. Perhaps it can be excused because he is a political historian, but in his entire book on this comparison, he does not discuss the possible differences or similarities between the actual settlers in these respective cases. An influential article on power and sovereignty in postcolonial states, by contemporary political theorist Achille Mbembe, is another example. Mbembe (2003) unfortunately does not distinguish between the activities of settlers and those of the Israeli state. In addition, Mbembe's descriptions of territorial fragmentation, surveillance tactics, and "absolute domination" (29) in the West Bank are rather exaggerated, in my opinion. Though far from an acceptable situation, it is nevertheless important to note that the majority of West Bank Palestinians live in areas where the Palestinian Authority holds civilian and administrative control, as well as control over internal security.

¹⁰ Joyce Dalsheim's recent book, *Unsettling Gaza*, represents an important exception. Dalsheim records several examples of particularly varying attitudes amongst settlers, demonstrating how "settlers" are not a politically, culturally, or religiously homogeneous group.

rights and legality, I am interested in how individual people, specifically women, live day to day and lay their claim to this land. Because of practical and logistic reasons, I will root this exploration in the experience of modern-religious, female residents of Nofharim. Why have they chosen to live in such a place (and for many, why have they chosen such a place to raise their families)? How do they rationalize this decision? How do they interact with their highly politicized area? With what fears, anxieties, concerns, and pleasures do they move through this space and time? What is the shape of their claim to this land, and how do they feel about the Arab others who live right nearby, and who are also staking title to this geography?

Terminology

In Israel, the general term for the entire West Bank area is *Yehudah ve'Shomron*, reflecting Biblical geographic nomenclature. It is used in rather broad terms to indicate this land area of more than 5000 km², populated by 1.5-2.5 million Arabs and over 350 000 Jews. Some people also refer to *Yesh'a*, which stands for Yehudah, Shomron and Gaza.

The Jewish areas in the West Bank are sometimes referred to as the *shtachim*, which in Hebrew means areas or territories. The term *shtahim* is not political in its origin, yet it has taken-on a wholly new valence in the context of contemporary Israel. The “*shtahim*” are the settlements, home of mostly politically-minded, often religious settlers, in a region that many Israelis would not even enter. For many Israelis, the *shtahim* are out there, places geographically and ideologically outside the familiar territory of their country.

Individual settlements are sometimes referred to as *yishuvim* (*yishuv* in singular). This term has a distinct history, often used to define the Jewish community at large in

pre-State Palestine before 1948. The word itself means “a place of settlement” and is used to refer to settled, sometimes communally-inclined, communities or towns across the state of Israel. Using “*yishuv*” to refer to settlements within the West Bank can reflect a politicized choice. For some, the term deliberately stresses the settlement’s location within the broader state of Israel, and negates the continuing significance of the 1967 borders.

In both English and Hebrew, people talk about “crossing the Green Line,” or, “la’avor et gvul hayarok”. While *shtahim* and *yishuvim* are specific spaces, this phrase denotes a particular vector of movement. To “cross the Green Line” is a form of travel that carries with it heavy ideological and political nuance, expressing support for the settlements and their inhabitants. One always “crosses the Green Line” *from* undisputed Israeli territory *to* the West Bank area.

The Green Line is the border of the West Bank, the line that divides this area from the rest of Israel. The West Bank lies on the West side of the river Jordan, in the center of the rather long and narrow shape of Israel’s geographic territory. After World War II, the West Bank area was allocated for a proposed Arab state, part of the two-state solution passed by the United Nations General Assembly. However, following the Arab-Israeli War in 1948, the area was captured by Jordan. The handful of Jewish settlements that had been developed in the West Bank area in the early 20th Century were demolished. In 1967, during the Six-Day War, Israel captured the West Bank and it has since been under Israeli military control. Since 1967, Jewish Israeli settlements have been re-established and developed in this region.

A Complicated Situation

People say that the Middle East conflict is complicated. Many people have sides and opinions, but when pressed to defend these perspectives, they resort to “It’s just such a complex situation.” Indeed, it is complex. Thousands of years of history, and disparate perceptions of the nations, religions, rulers, and relationships of power that have moved through this geographic space – all this sits in the active imagination of different people and multiple groups, each with their own heavy baggage of pain, suffering, and desire.

Nevertheless, this project is about drawing smaller circles and zooming-in on narrower places. For the sake of contextualization, I have attempted to condense the “situation” in the West Bank into a comprehensible – though admittedly simplified – story¹¹.

Some boiled down history: For centuries, Christian and Muslim Arabs have lived in towns across the West Bank region. These individuals are also referred to as Palestinians. Until 1920, the area was part of the Ottoman Empire, stretching across a large part of the Middle East. After WWI, the geographic areas, known today as Israel and Jordan (with the West Bank in the center), were allocated to the British Mandate of Palestine. After WWII, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 (II) Future Government of Palestine aimed to establish a two-state solution in Palestine, and the West Bank area was designated for a proposed Arab state. In the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, however, Jordan captured the West Bank area (and hence its name, since it is located on the West bank of the river Jordan). Arabs living in the West Bank area

¹¹ A remarkably thorough and detailed historical account is provided by Shafir and Peled (2002).

became Jordanians. There were a few Jewish settlements in the West Bank area that had been there for centuries, and several others that had been established in the 1920s, and these were evacuated and then destroyed.

Then, in the 1967 Six Day War, the West Bank area was occupied by Israel. Though the West Bank came under Israeli military control, it was not annexed. This is where it gets tricky.

Because Israel has not annexed the area, Arab (Palestinian) inhabitants in the West Bank do not obtain Israeli citizenship. In this ambiguous situation, they are not given the rights of Israeli citizens, they cannot easily travel across borders, and they cannot benefit from Israeli infrastructure, education, etc. The Palestinian National Authority has authority over civilian law and internal security in the main Palestinian centers, but this administrative body was only meant to be a temporary, interim solution (established following the Oslo Accords) until negotiations would be concluded with Israel. For decades, Palestinians in the West Bank have sought to gain recognition as a state, according to the 1967 borders between Israel and Jordan.

Meanwhile, the West Bank area is the heart of Biblical Israel. Since the occupation in 1967, Israeli Jews (mainly from the national religious political camp) have petitioned for permission from the government to establish settlements in this sacred territory. In recent decades, the Israeli government has often supported such construction. Occupation of the area is said to be topographically strategic and critical in the military defense of Israel proper. Geographically, however, since the area is occupied, and not annexed, Israeli settlement of the area is illegal under international law.

So why doesn't Israel just annex the area and bestow Israeli citizenship on all the Arab inhabitants of the West Bank area? A major reason is because Israel wants to maintain a Jewish majority in its population. The West Bank Arabs number between 1.5-2.5 million, and their birth rate is relatively high. If they all suddenly become Israeli, then Israel as a Jewish state could be threatened.

In sweeping generalizations, Palestinians in the West Bank area are becoming increasingly frustrated and angry and want rights as any other human population on the globe. This anger, it is said, feeds the fanaticism of Palestinian terrorists in the region. Secular and left-wing Israelis, as well as many Muslim and Christian Palestinian Israelis, as well as Druze Israelis, do not agree with the occupation, and want to give up the land and let the Palestinians in the West Bank create their own state.

In opposition, national religious Jewish Israelis and politically right-wing Israelis focus on the Biblical and/or militaristic significance of the territory and want to tighten their hold. These national religious and right-wing groups are also often frustrated and angry about Palestinian bombings, shootings, and other terror attacks, and they claim that occupation and control of the West Bank is necessary to protect the entire state of Israel. The Palestinians in the West Bank are quoted as aspiring to ultimately take over the entire territory of modern-day Israel, and their repeated acts of violence are cited as evidence that individuals, groups, and leaders cannot be trusted. This fear amongst Israelis influences increasing efforts to regulate, survey, and restrict the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank. And of course, this leads to further Palestinian frustration and anger.

It is important to add that there are approximately 1.5 million Israeli Arabs (also referred to as Israeli Palestinians, among many other terms) who live in undisputed Israeli territory. They comprise approximately 20% of the Israeli population. These Arab Palestinians have been legal citizens of the state of Israel since its establishment in 1948, though in the first years of the state (and in some ways, until today) many suffered from land displacement and discrimination. Their history and current affairs are therefore different from those of Arab Palestinians in the West Bank¹².

Going There

Since the Oslo Accords in 1993, the West Bank area has been divided into three administrative divisions, Area A under Palestinian control and Palestinian administration, Area B under Israeli control and Palestinian administration, and Area C under both Israeli control and Israeli administration. It is necessary to pass through an Israeli-controlled checkpoint in order to enter in and out of the West Bank area.

There are public buses that go to many of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, but they are not too frequent. Many residents drive personal cars. Another common form of transportation into the West Bank is hitch-hiking (Fig. 1-1, Fig. 1-2). For example, at a checkpoint at the northern end of Jerusalem, travelers stand on the side of the road with one arm out, forefinger pointed downwards towards the road. Drivers entering the checkpoint, who are interested in taking along others, will slow down and

¹² Rabinowitz (1997) argues that “the level and intensity of involvement on the part of Palestinians in parliamentary and local-level politics [in Israel] as a medium for public action implies a certain faith in negotiated improvement” (143), and this is a major difference between the attitude of Palestinian Israelis and that of Arabs in the territories occupied in 1967. The latter group, like Arabs outside of Israel, see Israel in a dramatically different way, as “an evil entity, irrationally and inexplicably obsessed with dominating Arabs and harming them... driven by satanic forces rather than by reasonable pursuits of realistic goals and interests.”

yell out their final destination. If your destination is along the announced-route, you hop into the back or front seat, depending on room inside the car.

I once asked a friend who has previously lived in the settlements if Arab drivers ever offer to pick-up Jewish hitch-hikers, or vice-versa. The answer was no. At the larger intersections and junctions, Jewish drivers slow down for other Jews, and, a few meters away, Arab drivers slow-down for groups of waiting Arabs.

Many Jewish people who live in the settlements make the effort to pick-up other Jewish passengers along their route. I get the sense that there is a feeling of shared experience and affinity with these other travelers. Though they probably don't know them, people who live or travel into the settlements are interested in helping-out others who are traveling along the same geographic, political, and ideological route. What creates this sense of affinity? Perhaps shared views and aspirations, and perhaps shared emotions of fear in the face of the same dangers. In this vein, I also get the feeling that drivers pick up passengers as part of a large-scale relationship of reciprocity. They do unto others what they would want others to do for them: perhaps tomorrow or next week they, their child, or their spouse will also be waiting in the hot sun, on the side of the road, for a lift.

The etiquette of hitch-hiking (*tramping*) into the settlements is quite particular. After the driver slows down their car beside the waiting travelers (*trampistim*), potential passengers approach the car to find out the destination. If it works for them, the *trampistim* will quietly climb into an empty seat. Choosing to *tramp* also means accepting the auditory and climatic conditions of the car one enters – If it is a burning hot day, and the driver of the car has not put on the air-conditioning, you have to suffer

through heat without comment. Similarly, if the driver is listening to a radical, right-wing, chauvinist lecture about God's perfect micro-management of the world, or if he/she is blaring trance music, you just have to look out the window and bare it.

Since most Jews who live and travel to the settlements are religious, men generally sit in the back if a woman is driving, and women sit in the back if a man is driving. There is also often an attempt to maintain space between men and women if they have to sit together in the backseat. Interestingly, if a driver already has a full car (of their own passengers, or of *trampistem* whom they picked up along the way) and they pass other, waiting *trampistem*, they will hold up an open hand – which means that their car is fully occupied. Rather than just wiz by, this hand motion seems to indicate a courtesy and recognition of others who are waiting. In addition, the gesture seems almost apologetic, expressing momentary regret that they cannot help and participate in the *tramping* network of communal kindness and service.

Many people who live in the West Bank rely on this system of *tramping*. In the settlement in which I am doing my research, many of the residents work in cities outside of the West Bank, and some of them depend on lifts each morning and evening to get to and from the cities in which they work. There are public buses, but most do not come very often. Instead, families will often have one car, and so the spouse without the car for the day, and university-age children, will rely on *tramping*. *Tramping* is also a common form of transportation for friends and family who are going to visit in the settlements.

In my experience, an equal number of men and woman use *tramping*. There are generally many teenagers and young adults at the common *tramping* stops

(intersections, checkpoints, or other particular spots with relatively heavy traffic, where *trampistim* wait for lifts), and often middle-aged men and women as well. Sometimes there are older men and women too.

I have also found that *trampistim* are always very quiet, reserved, and polite. When they first get into the car, they tell the driver where they'd like to get off, and afterwards, throughout the drive, there is semi-awkward silence. When the driver slows down where they want to get off, they hop out, mumble thanks, and close the door on the experience.

The Checkpoint and the Wall

The checkpoint at the northern end of Jerusalem, that opens to the road to the northern part of the West Bank, is quite simple and small (Fig. 1-3). It consists of four drive-through concrete structures through which cars pass, each manned by one or two young Israeli soldiers. Cars entering the West Bank pass through fluidly. Drivers exiting the West Bank area are scrutinized: cars with Israeli license plates are generally waved through immediately; cars with Palestinian license plates are stopped, often asked to open their trunk, and sometimes questioned. As a Jewish traveler driving through, the checkpoint can be barely noticed – a concrete and metal stand that slightly slows traffic, through which we drive and continue onwards.

Despite the simplicity of the checkpoint, the shift in landscape is significant. Before reaching the checkpoint, the road is flanked by the modern housing developments of the northern Jerusalem suburb, Pisgat Ze'ev, and beyond, the arid, green-studded thorny Judean hills. Once through, however, the view opens to dry browns and dusty grays (Fig. 1-4, Fig. 1-5). The road winds along the side of increasingly bare hills, looking out onto further and wider stretches of rocky inclines that plunge into wadis, and

then up other, rough elevations. Here and there, the homes of tiny towns spill over the side of slopes and into the narrow valleys. Quintessential red-roofs demarcate Jewish settlements; multi-story white structures often indicate Arab areas.

The checkpoint at the northern end of the city is also a controlled crevice in the long, infamous, concrete wall that divides and is professed to protect land under the authority of Israel from areas under Palestinian authority (Fig. 1-6). From both sides of the checkpoint, the wall seems to cut through the landscape, blocking the vistas of inhabitants on either side, aggressively creating a heavy, thick, opaque barrier between towns, individuals, hopes, and futures.

Jewish settlements on the “other” side of the wall, as well as the roads that lead to them, are protected and patrolled by the Israeli authority. In the past, there has been shooting from Arabs on Jewish-Israeli cars along these roads. In certain places, fences have therefore been erected to shield from Arab villages that border routes used by settlers. Personally, I find traveling the most uneasy part of my trips to Nofharim. As a passenger in a car with an Israeli license plate, my mere geographic movement in such a vehicle labels me as a supporter of the Jewish settlements. I feel embarrassed by this identification when I look at the Arab drivers traveling alongside me. I understand their possible feelings of anger and frustration, and I feel vulnerable. Only once I am inside Nofharim, or within the boundaries of any other Jewish settlement, do I feel safe again, and no longer necessarily standing out as “the other.”

Barbed wire fences surround most settlements, and entrance is limited to guarded gates. Before Oslo, the route to Nofharim involved a road directly through Ramallah and an entrance facing a suburb of Ramallah. After Oslo, with the attempts to separate

Israeli and Palestinian life and authority, a new road was built that indirectly leads to Nofharim from the other direction and thereby by-passes Ramallah. In the second Intifada, there was shooting from Ramallah towards homes on the northern side of Nofharim. The entrance was then moved to the southern side which is where it is today.

Nofharim

Entering Nofharim involves a short, steep climb, since most of the settlement is on the top of a high hill. After passing through the gate (Fig. 1-7), the narrow, dusty entrance road is surrounded on both sides with olive and fig trees. As I write this, it's early October; the last of the season's figs are still on the trees and the olives are in full ripeness.

During my most recent trip to Nofharim, I arrived mid-afternoon on a Sunday, a regular school and workday here in Israel. Cars and people passed every few minutes along the main street that loops around the hilltop. I passed two little girls, perhaps eight or nine years old, walking together alone, chattering quickly in Hebrew. A few moments later, two little boys, about the same age, zoomed along the middle of the downward-sloping street beside me on something that looked like a tricycle.

The main street in Nofharim is paved, well maintained, with pedestrian sidewalks on both sides (Fig. 1-8). Some parts are flanked by nicely tended grass or bush areas. The light is especially strong in Nofharim. Most days, bright blue sky contrasts sharply with the white stone of many homes and buildings, the red roofs, and green gardens. Lavender, rosemary, myrtle, and other fragrant plants spill over onto the sidewalks, diffusing their aromas into the nostrils of passerby.

There are several different kinds of homes in the settlement, all modern and simple. When one first arrives at the top of the hill there is a section of gray, stucco,

multi-storey residential buildings surrounded by tall pines, reminiscent of simple and practical kibbutz architecture (Fig. 1-9). Past this area, the homes on the top of the hill are mainly large, unpretentious but elegant, and built of white Jerusalem stone (Fig. 1-10). Some are single-family houses – many with colorful flower bushes, tended gardens, or fruit trees (Fig. 1-11); others are complexes with several apartments (Fig. 1-12). Almost all of these homes are built on a slope, with windows looking out on the excellent views in whichever direction they face (Fig. 1-13 Fig. 1-14).

Below the hill top homes, two and three-room rectangular, white caravans overflow down the southern slope (Fig. 1-15, Fig. 1-16). These especially inexpensive habitations often house young families. Like the grey stucco buildings on the hill, and like many of the stone homes, the caravans tend to display a scattering of children's toys across the front steps and lawns. There are no street numbers in Nofharim; instead, brown signs with "Family X" are planted in the front of many of the properties.

Nofharim's one large, main synagogue (Fig. 1-17) abides by the customs of Jews of European descent. Residents who are descended from (or are themselves from) North African and Middle Eastern countries conduct their own services on Shabbat in a separate room in the synagogue building. Recently, Yemenite Jews have also begun their own separate prayer gathering. There are several large nursery schools and one primary school in Nofharim. Beyond that, there is a girls' high school and a boys' high school in two nearby settlements, and school buses shuttle the students back and forth. Some high school students, however, choose not to attend these two designated schools; their parents instead organize either lifts or they rely on public buses or *tramping* to travel to other educational institutions. In Nofharim, there is also a high

school for “problem kids” from the whole area. Nofharim has a modest grocery store, as well as a small health clinic, staffed by alternating rotations of nurses and doctors, generally only for a few hours per day. Nofharim also houses the municipality office for approximately thirty settlements in a wide area. (It was reported to me that this is the biggest municipality office in the country.)

Nofharim was officially established in 1981 and is therefore currently celebrating its thirtieth anniversary. The founding families requested permission from the government to build in the area, to develop a Jewish presence near the growing Arab city of Ramallah. When I spoke briefly with one of the founding members, he told me that they chose the spot because it was the highest in the area, and therefore the best for protection and security. Before 1967, when the area was under the Jordanians, there had been plans to develop the area for wealthy families, and so roads were already built.

There is also an archeological site in Nofharim, on the southern slope of the hill, evidence of extended habitation in this location over the course of centuries and even millennia (Fig. 1-18, Fig. 1-19). A stony path leads past several building foundations, a surprisingly deep *mikvah* (constructed with architectural peculiarities that are proscribed in Jewish law), remains of an olive oil press, a collapsing surveillance tower, remains of a clay oven, a second smaller *mikvah*, and an ancient (possibly Canaanite) wall. Excavated items include pottery from the Middle and Late Bronze Age, tomb from Iron Ages I and II, seals from the Persian period, cooking pots from the Hellenistic period, an Early Roman refuse pit, an underground dwelling from the Early and Late Byzantine period, and a complete olive oil making structure from the Early Islamic era. One

archeologist has theorized that this may be the location of the Biblical Ai mentioned in Genesis, several later books of the Bible, and early Christian texts¹³.

The Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel reports that in 2010 the population of Nofharim was 1658¹⁴. The regional council's website lists 290 families as of last year.



Figure 2-1. Tramping to the West Bank from a northern road in Jerusalem.

¹³ Livingston, David. "Locating Biblical Ai Correctly." Web source. Accessed 10 October 2011. <http://davelivingston.com/ai15.htm>

Livingston, David. *Khirbet Nisya: The Search for Biblical Ai*, 1979-2002. Manheim, Pa.: Associates for Biblical Research, 2003.

¹⁴ <http://www.cbs.gov.il/ishuvim/ishuv2010/bycode.xls> Accessed 10 October 2010.



Figure 2-2. Two individuals waiting for *trampim* at a popular spot.



Figure 2-3. The checkpoint at the northern edge of Jerusalem.



Figure 2-4. The road that leads to Nofharim, looking west. The wall in the distance separates an Arab village on the left and a Jewish settlement beyond it.



Figure 2-5. Along the road that leads to Nofharim, looking east.



Figure 2-6. Approaching the northern Jerusalem checkpoint from the West Bank side.



Figure 2-7. The entrance gate to Nofharim.



Figure 2-8. The main street in Nofharim.



Figure 2-9. The oldest houses in Nofharim towards the entrance of the community.



Figure 2-10. Newer houses in Nofharim.



Figure 2-11. The front garden of a house at the top of the hill.



Figure 2-12. The apartment-style homes, looking west over a suburb of Ramallah.



Figure 2-13. The view over Ramallah from the newer apartments



Figure. 2-14. "Warning: shooting." A sign from the second Intifada.



Figure 2-15. The view looking east: some caravans, the outlook called the "Ai," the Judean Hills, and beyond the Jordanian Mountain Range.



Figure 2-16. The view looking south-east: caravans and the sprawling suburbs of Ramallah.



Figure 2-17. The synagogue.



Figure 2-18. The archaeological site at the location called the “Ai.” A) “Pure *mikvah*”; B) remains of an ancient building and a watchtower.



Figure 2-19. Standing at the archaeological site, looking west towards the houses of Nofharim and the caravans below them.

CHAPTER 3

THE WOMEN

Shoshana

Shoshana is the first resident in Nofharim with whom I met to discuss my project. She came to Nofharim as a child thirty years ago, as the daughter of one of the founding families, and has lived here, pretty much, ever since. Even throughout national service and university studies in Jerusalem, her home base was at her parent's house in Nofharim. When she married in 1991, her husband came to live here too, and it is here that they are raising their seven children. She is also involved in the community and seems to know just about everyone. Shoshana is a part-time teacher for special education in a settlement nearby. Her husband works for a government office in Jerusalem.

Perhaps it is because she has lived in Nofharim for so long, or maybe it is just her relaxed personality – but either way, Shoshana is remarkably nonchalant about the contestation surrounding the location of her home community. “What’s the big deal?” she kept asking, laughing, “What is there to worry about?” Shoshana is the type of person who looks at the glass half full, who doesn’t dwell on anxieties and worries. As far as she is concerned, Nofharim offers her family a positive, safe, comfortable place to live. She is distantly aware of the Arab suburb in full view from her back balcony, but as long as there isn’t any trouble coming from that direction, she isn’t terribly interested, emotionally or intellectually.

What was also interesting about speaking to Shoshana was that her husband, Dror, seemed to represent the opposite perspectives. Dror, when he joined our conversation, emphasized a definitively ideological and aggressive attitude towards the

project of settlement inhabitance. For him, living in Nofharim is an active political move. For Shoshana, it seemed more like a passive, natural, and convenient choice, living a couple blocks from her parents, and providing her children with the same religious and suburban atmosphere which she had enjoyed as a child. Shoshana and Dror's differences are obviously the result of a combination of factors, but I think that gender plays a significant role. Women, like Shoshana, express more pragmatic benefits of living in Nofharim, including quality of life and abstract biblical connections. Their emotions are softer and more complicated too. Political and forceful, solid-colored opinions seem to be more commonly in the male domain.

Shoshana is tall, and her posture is quite relaxed, reflecting her disposition. She dresses as most national religious women, with an elegant hat covering most of her short brown hair and modest, simple clothes – her shirt covers her elbows, and her skirt reaches almost to the floor. I find Shoshana especially kind and open – she has a bright smile, speaks with a lot of energy, and seems to want to help whomever walks through her door. I thought that our meeting would be more practical and technical, but as we spoke, I realized that she is also very thoughtful and reflective. After opening several questions to her, she spoke to me for over two hours in our first meeting. (She spoke mainly in Hebrew, and the translation below is my own. In various cases, I have included especially poignant phrases in her original words, in transliteration.)

Throughout our multiple conversations, I was impressed how Shoshana would stop suddenly for a minute to respond gently to her children who were coming in and out of the salon with various complaints, questions, and issues, and then immediately plunge back into the heavier topics of our discussions.

In the beginning of our first meeting, I explained to Shoshana my motivations for wanting to create a social illustration of her settlement. I told her how “The West Bank” is a hot topic in the United States and in global political discourse, but that very few people have any knowledge about what it is actually like. “Lots of people also in Israel don’t know about it here,” she responded. I nodded, adding how the media and many people both inside and outside Israel imagine settlers as fanatical individuals who live a radically-political life in the face of constant danger. I presented to Shoshana my speculations, that many people choose to live in settlements for all sorts of other reasons beyond just the political – because it’s picturesque, because they can purchase relatively cheap land and housing, or because it’s quiet.

Shoshana thoughtfully considered my hypothesis. “That is partially true, especially in the case of couples where one wanted to move out of political motivation, and the other is convinced because of the practical reasons you mentioned. But pretty much everyone here believes in the religious and political importance of living here... to some degree.”

I asked Shoshana about her memories of moving to Nofharim as a child. “My father instilled in us a lot of pride for coming here, like a commander to his soldiers. Suddenly it was like ‘Wow! We’re pioneers! We’re strong people!’” Shoshana was laughing as she imitated her childhood thoughts, but she became more serious as she reflected further on my question. “There were hard aspects, like leaving friends, not being able to visit friends’ homes after school or hang-out with them on Shabbat... But coming here was quite an adventure, almost like camp! I wasn’t miserable at all, and my parents made it a positive experience. They took us twice a week back to our branch of

Bnai Akivah [youth group] in Jerusalem. We weren't hungry or cold. It was more like a big party every day. Everyone lived together. And we traveled almost every day to Jerusalem for school, so we didn't feel isolated. We just continued our life. As a girl, I felt like I was a pioneer..."

Shoshana pulled out of the immediacy of these memories for a moment, reflecting on those earlier conditions with the distance of her present-day adult self, "Honestly, now that I look back, if I was a mother, it might have been a lot harder for me." There was a quiet awe in Shoshana's voice for her parents' courage and fortitude.

"One of my sisters didn't want to come because she wanted to continue studying in Jerusalem and she didn't like the fact that it took time to get there each day. I didn't mind that part. It was hard for my sister, but for me it was *fun!* Maybe because I was only fourteen..." It was as though Shoshana was trying to defend her positive experiences, against her older sister's objections.

Her tone quickened, "It was exciting! Sometimes, I brought friends from Jerusalem to sleep over the night, and they were so excited! Everything was new. There was another girl in my age group, but she was more friendly and social. If we had somewhere else, we would never have been friends. All the time she was inviting me, all the time she was organizing things... In the summer we coordinated a summer camp, us bigger girls for the younger ones. That girl – she brought action into the scene. And you know? She's still here. She got married to a man from here, and her sister married his brother!" Shoshana was laughing. "Two brothers married to sisters! But, it wasn't like that for everyone. There was one woman who came with two young children. I remember that it disturbed her that there weren't friends for her kids. But, she also

stayed. In the beginning it was really hard, and I mean *really* hard for her... Some families left. One came for six months and then left. But in general, there was a good social environment, so people stayed.

Sometimes I felt alone or separated from my friends in Jerusalem. But for sure, there would have been hard things too if I had been in the city. What was hard about being here? I had to wait for hours for a *tramp* sometimes, in the heat or cold. There were times when it was scary, like when I had to wait outside in the dark. But, in general, it was really good."

Shoshana sat back into her memories for a moment, but she promptly returned to the conversation, summarizing her generally positive experiences, "People asked me 'Doesn't it bother you that you can't order pizza in the middle of the night?'" Shoshana chuckled, "'No,' I would tell them, 'I'm used to it.' That's the way of life is here. You get used to it." She turned directly to me, asking ironically, "Does it bother you that you can't always find kosher food in *hu'l* [*hutz la'aretz* – outside of the land (of Israel)]?"

I asked about the population of Nofharim. A few weeks earlier, I told Shoshana, I had seen a little girl and little boy, with especially dark skin and slanted eyes, walking away from the elementary school.

"It's true, it is pretty mixed here. There are Sephardim and Teimanim. The kids you saw are probably the children of a woman here who is from the Bnai Menashe [a group from North East India who claim to be the descendants of the tribe of Menashe, one of the ten lost tribes]. At one point, there was a Chinese couple who had converted, who lived here, but they left. Outside of Israel, they have proper professions, but when they come here, they can't find work. It's frustrating and hard. It's also like that with the

Russians. They have some kind of degree, but they are teaching little children, like Sarah's *ganenet* [nursery school teacher]." Shoshana's voice became sweeter and slower as she mentioned her youngest daughter. Sarah, who was quietly playing in the corner, looked up at us, smiling shyly as she discerned her name.

"That's everywhere in Israel," Shoshana continued, "It's a problem. Part of it is the language barrier. There is a whole group of Russians here too, by the way. They came in the early 1990s. Several *yishuvim* agreed to accept groups, to increase their populations and to provide a community for these new immigrants from the Former Soviet Union. About ten families came here to Nofharim. They agreed to become more religious, to fit in with the *yishuv*. They still stay together." Shoshana shrugged her shoulders, obviously on the outside of the group and the issue. "They're a group within a group. They have a different culture, in many ways. And they look at us as less intelligent than they are." Shoshana wasn't upset by this, and just thought it was funny. Her manner suggested a distanced respect for their strong focus on arts and culture.

"There was one man who an international violinist. They [the Russians] decided to organize concerts for themselves, but also perhaps to educate *us* in real music." A self-deprecating smile spread across Shoshana's face. "We were low – you know, the masses. They looked down at us, in some ways. In every place, the Russians have constructed their own groups. They have their own schools so that they can teach what they want to their children, like more 'culture'... The sister of a famous prisoner in Siberia lived here!" Shoshana added with an ironic, humorous pride.

She then told me, with sincere admiration, "My father, however, figured it out with them."

"Is it cheaper for people to live here? Do you know if there are tax benefits, or any such things?"

"It didn't cost a lot for land when we came, and maybe my parents got a special loan to build in the *yisvhuvim*. There are special conditions, too... You pay less for school, I think, and I know that teachers here get paid more... But I don't know about the taxes or anything else."

It was interesting that Shoshana *didn't* know about the governmental initiatives for settling the area. Even though she moved back here on her own, as an adult, it wasn't relevant to her. The political aspects, and the state's involvement, were not much on her radar.

We talked about security and fear, and the difference between living in the settlements versus living in the rest of Israel.

"We don't feel the fear any more than other places..." Shoshana commented, noting how living in other parts of Israel also involves constant security checks, police and military observation, etc. She reminded me that shooting and suicide bombs are as likely to happen in the rest of Israel as in the West Bank. "There's a feeling [from those who live outside the West Bank] that all the time it's dangerous and violent here, but we're not in the middle of the violence. People here don't even lock their doors."

I noticed Shoshana's blurring of larger political security and domestic safety. I asked her how the constant army surveillance makes her feel.

"I feel safe... But you know in Itamar there was a murder and they have surveillance."

In March 2011, two Palestinian teenagers from a nearby town entered the Jewish settlement of Itamar, broke into one of the homes, and murdered five members of a family. By mentioning this story, Shoshana was again expressing the overlap between political security and domestic safety.

She stood up and led me out to the veranda which overlooks a suburb of Ramallah. It is so close that I could see people walking along the streets. She showed me how vulnerable her home is to potential political shooting.

“Yet, I just don’t feel the fear,” she repeated.

“Is it there?”

“Perhaps, yes. But this is my home. I live here, so I don’t notice the dangers or reasons to fear the same way as someone who is coming from outside the *shtahim*.... But perhaps I’m more relaxed than others in Nofharim.”

“Are you scared to travel here?”

“No, I’m not scared. And, no, my kids aren’t scared.”

But Shoshana’s extended family does not think the same way. She described the challenges she has had with her husband’s relatives. She and her husband organized their eldest daughter’s *bat mitzvah* (coming of age ceremony and celebration) in Nofharim. However, her husband’s parents were too afraid to come, and despite the fact that this was their eldest grandchild, they did not attend. They weren’t upset, and she wasn’t upset. Her parents-in-law were truly scared and both sides understood the other. After the *bat mitzvah*, all significant occasions have since been organized in Jerusalem, or other towns outside the settlements area.

Shoshana says that her in-laws would actually like her family to move because they are fearful about safety for their grandchildren. They are “super right-wing,” she clarified, and they support the *shtahim* completely, but they don’t want her and her family living there.

I asked Shoshana how she feels about the tension between ideological ideals and responsibility to her family.

“I think it’s important to live here. If I go, I know that somebody will replace me, so / don’t need to be here. But I still think it’s important.”

“They [her parents who founded Nofharim] brought me up well,” she added with a laugh.

Beyond ideologies, Shoshana further explained that she doesn’t want to live in a city: “*Haya noah lagur kan.* [It’s been really pleasant to live in Nofharim.] I can leave my door unlocked, there is a nice sense of community, my kids can run around and play with their friends without constant supervision...”

“But do you feel that you are bringing up your children with a higher level of stress, because of the location you have chosen for your home?”

“Bringing up my kids with stress? The opposite! In the city, there are all sorts of dangers. Here, they don’t have that.” She shifted gears, and continued at a slower pace, “We do worry – I won’t tell you that we don’t. But my kids are proud to be here. Many of them will also live in the *shtahim!* Well... you know what? Actually, I don’t know. But their high schools are in settlements. They don’t know anything else.”

She recounted to me how the school buses that take her children to schools in other settlements just switched to bullet-proof glass. “We thought it was funny.” For her,

this new policy seemed to derive from the fears of those who live outside of the West Bank area, people who imagine travel along the West Bank roads to be dangerous, attitudes that do not understand the day-to-day reality of life in the *shtahim*. It seemed over-the-top to Shoshana.

I was surprised by Shoshana's lack of fear. "You're not scared?" I asked her again, not able to believe her sense of security, trying to uncover some deeper feelings of unease.

"Nothing happens!" she explained, "Car accidents [known to be relatively frequent across Israel] are more scary." She paused and continued, "But not everyone is like that and many are scared. There's a woman who has lived here for thirty years and I know she is still scared."

Though she is energetic, Shoshana's attitude is very relaxed – which comes through in her comments. I noticed how she spoke openly about all topics in front of her young children.

At another meeting one evening, Shoshana's husband, Dror, joined the conversation. Two of the elder teenage children quietly joined us as well, sitting in the corner and listening. Dror is very kind, like his wife, but in contrast to Shoshana's unworried approach, he seems more serious about the ideologies that underlie their choice of location for their home. The discussion that ensued from his participation in our conversation highlights the difference in their approaches.

I asked Shoshana if Dror carries a gun when he drives to Jerusalem each day to get to work. Dror responded directly from the next room that he didn't anymore, but he

used to think it was important. He came into the main room where Shoshana and I were sitting.

"Did you ever use your gun?" I asked him.

Dror: "When we went to Ramallah, there were a few times that they shot on us. Mostly they threw rocks. We never had to, but others shot in the air to scare the Arabs."

Hannah: "Do you ever use it now?"

Shoshana: "We take it out once a year."

Dror: "No, never ever!" He corrected his wife with a chuckle.

Shoshana admitted that perhaps he was right and added with a laugh that it's locked up somewhere in the house, and that she doesn't even know the code!

Dror (still humorously, yet seriously): "Statistically, having a gun can be helpful in ten percent of terror attacks, and so anyway, it's better to run... Really, in only rare occasions can it actually be helpful."

The conversation shifted to the period before the road was moved, when they used to drive through Ramallah to get to Nofharim.

Shoshana: "When we came to the settlement, it was fine. In the first Intifada, they [the Arabs] threw a lot [of stones]. In the second Intifada in the early 90s it started again. There were periods when we traveled in quiet, and periods that it was bad."

Dror (asking his wife): "Do you remember when they used to actually throw stones on cars?"

Shoshana: "No, I don't really remember..."

Hannah: "Every day?!"

Shoshana: "No!"

Dror looked at his wife, and then at me: "Yes! Not everyone encountered such an issue every day, but that there were such incidents several times a week."

Hannah (to Shoshana): "You weren't scared to travel then? You weren't scared that your husband was driving every day along that road?"

Shoshana: "It was my home. I was used to it here. I didn't see any other choice. I just wasn't scared. I can't explain it."

Dror stood up again and asked Shoshana if she had heard what had happened that day in Itamar, one of the nearby settlements. She had, and I seemed to be the only one who hadn't heard. Dror reported that Israeli soldiers went to protect Arabs who were picking olives from their trees, located quite close to the edge of the settlement. The residents of Itamar demonstrated against the situation, and the Arabs yelled at them that they'd "Fogel" them – the name of the family in Itamar that was murdered recently. Dror told the story with disgust and frustration.

Before I left that evening, Dror suddenly interjected, reminding me of the political ideologies underlying all of these emotions and situations we were discussing: "You've been asking Shoshana a lot about fear and how we live, but the most important thing is our political motivations. There were periods when it was really hard to live here. If you didn't have the strong political ideologies, you couldn't survive."

While for Shoshana the political ideologies are obvious and the challenges of living in Nofharim don't seem too large, for her husband the discourse is quite different. He spoke about courage and strength in the face of stone-throwing Arabs, and about the need to have rock-solid ideologies to remain in such a place. I wondered if the difference between them is related to gender, contrasting personalities, or is based on

the fact that Shoshana came here as a child while her husband chose to come as an adult.

When I later asked about her political ideologies, Shoshana exclaimed that this was the Jewish homeland. For her, there wasn't much to talk about on the topic: The Bible makes it very clear that Israel is the promised land for Jews for all time, and that ideally, Jews should reside in this territorial area. According to Jewish law, many religious rituals are intended to be performed in this particular geographic region.

At a later meeting, right before the Jewish holiday of *Sukkot* (the Jewish harvest festival where religiously-observant Jews eat and sometimes even sleep in temporary constructed booths) Shoshana's husband expressed his incomprehension of how Jews in the diaspora celebrate this intimately land-based festivity in rainy England or cold Canada. More broadly, Dror's comments are part of his general belief – and a common conviction among many religious Jews across Israel – that Jews and Jewish practice belong in the land of Israel. After praying multiple times a day, and for two-thousand years, to return to the land, it is now possible. Israeli Jews like Dror get frustrated with those Jews who continue to utter these supplications from other countries.

In addition to Jewish claims, Shoshana proceeded to add historical, non-Jewish rationalizations. She reminded me of the Balfour Declaration (the 1917 British statement of support for a Jewish home within the geographic borders of Palestine) as well as the United Nations General Assembly Resolution in 1947 (recommending the partition of Israel into one Arab and one Jewish state) which was accepted by the Jewish community, but rejected by Arab political bodies. We spoke further about claims and arguments, and Shoshana agreed that her ultimate claim to the land of Israel is

religiously-based. It's difficult to assert and argue for present-day Jewish rights to this land, she concluded, without acknowledging religious authority to what is written in the Bible and specifically to its repeated demand for Jews to live in and rule over this particular territory.

While were still standing outside on the veranda during our first meeting, I pointed out towards Ramallah's suburb and asked Shoshana how she feels about those who live there.

"I don't mind if they live there. I live here. I don't want to throw the Arabs out! In the Galilee, for example, there are many cities with Arab Israelis and that's fine." Pointing to the Ramallah homes not far off, she continued, "They too built this themselves. They're right – they've built their lives here. There was so little before. *Aval mishesholet hamedina zhe anahnu*. [But the ones who govern the land is us.]"

I raised the question of a two-state solution.

"There can't be two countries because we both want the entire land," Shoshana responded with a tinge of sadness.

I asked her if she is worried about the current Palestinian request for recognition at the UN.

"There might be *piguim* [terror attacks], but what will be new?! I trust the army and the country to protect my family and community, no matter what happens."

The night before, several families in a settlement nearby were evacuated from their homes at 1am and their houses were immediately demolished. They had built illegally and ideologically, wanting to claim space in the West Bank area, but without

legal permission from the state. I asked Shoshana how this incident made her feel, if this diminished her trust in the country's protection.

"We're disappointed. We see ourselves as good citizens. I don't understand why they do that [demolish the homes] and not more important things. Personally, I wouldn't build illegally – I'm not idealistic like that. But I'm disappointed."

Several minutes later Shoshana reminded two of her young daughters that there was a kid's event scheduled to take place across the street: card-making to send to the children who had lost their homes the night before. The little girls ran out but returned after only two minutes, reporting with tears that they had missed the event. Shoshana gently told them to make the cards themselves. An hour later, the older girl interrupted us to show her mother her creation – a cute card with a simple note expressing her sympathy for her schoolmates' situation.

I asked Shoshana how she feels towards Arabs. Despite the barbed wire fence and complete separation of daily life, she told me that she and her husband try teach their children that Arabs can be good people. She expressed the difference between her feelings towards individuals, and towards the nation: "When I meet *Aravim* [Arab people], I don't feel that they are enemies. But, as a nation, they don't want to have peace with us. They really want it all. You know, we gave almost all of it to them, but they didn't want it. And this is not their country historically. There certainly were Arabs living here, but not as a nation. The Arabs who have been here for hundreds of years should definitely stay..."

I prodded the issue of individual citizens – the fact that many Arabs who live in the West Bank struggle to obtain permission to travel into the rest of Israel, how many suffer economically, and how they are often hassled at checkpoints.

“Be-tzad ishi, hem bematzav kashe. [On the individual/personal level, they are in a bad situation.] With their authorities and government – obviously it’s hard for them! Aval ma ani tzriha la’asot? [But what am I supposed to do?] They play a game – they don’t want to help each other. So why do we have to help them?”

I reminded Shoshana that it is Israeli army personnel who make it hard for Arabs at the checkpoints.

“That’s true,” she said.

“And Israel won’t give them citizenship...”

“We don’t want them to be Israeli citizens because they will enter the *Knesset* [the Israeli government].” She said this, despite the fact that there are three Arab political parties represented in the *Knesset*, in addition to several Arab MK’s (Members of *Knesset*) in other Israeli parties.

Shoshana’s very real sympathy for Arab individuals seemed to bump-up against her strong belief in a secure, non-threatened Jewish state in Israel. Where were the boundaries of these very different ideas? Where did sympathy end and political ideologies begin? But human sentiment and thought is often not black and white, just as the West Bank is not a two-dimensional political landscape that can be painted with two bold colors. Shoshana’s words expressed overlapping ideas, a grey-zone of contradicting sentiments and unlikely circumstances.

Shoshana repeated her agreement with my statement that Arabs are sometimes ill-treated at checkpoints. Her next intriguing comment summarized her opposing attitudes: “Thank God it’s men and not women who staff the checkpoints. Women would be too merciful. I can’t defend, or check, or look for bombs. *Yesh devarim she-tzarich la’asot bli lerahem.* [There are things that need to be done without mercy.] That’s the way we protect ourselves. I’m just always glad I don’t have to do it.” (Ironically, as opposed to Shoshana’s statements, there are sometimes young female soldiers manning checkpoints, but this is both new and uncommon.)

I had heard stories of positive Arab-Israeli relations in the early days of the settlement and I wondered about how this history was shaped in the memory of those who live in Nofharim today.

“What was the reaction of the Arabs living here when your family first came thirty years ago?” I asked Shoshana.

“We used to travel through Ramallah. We bought at the shops there along the way. Sometimes they threw stones at us, but we continued buying there. My father knew them.” Shoshana shrugged. She didn’t have much to say on the subject.

Later, Shoshana’s father recounted to me how he in fact had quite positive relations with some of the Arabs in the area. There was a car garage at bottom of the north-east side of the hill, he told me, and he used to bring his car there. “You could drive the car down there without even turning on the engine!” he said with a laugh. “One day I received a call from one of the mechanics, asking if I could go down the road and help him re-start his car which had broken down along the way. When they ask you for

a favor like that, you know they think of you as a real friend," he explained, smiling proudly.

"The Arabs living in this area weren't angry that your father was building his own home on the hill?" I asked Shoshana.

"They wanted to make money. That's all that interested them. At least in this area, no Arabs were sent out of their homes. All the Jewish settlements have been built on land that was formally empty. Some of that empty land was even bought from Arabs."

"How did your father choose this spot?"

"There were roads already here because the Jordanians [who captured the West Bank in 1948 and ruled until 1967] planned to develop this area as something for the wealthy." This tree..." Shoshana pointed out the window, "The Jordanians planted it."

"So all this land was Jordanian, and when Israel took the area in 1967, it became the possession of the Israeli state?"

"Most of it. But near the caravans, that land is owned by Arabs who left, but can't be located now. They say the land was given to them by Hussein."

"And so no one builds there, even today?"

"The country respects these claims. We can't build any more in Nofharim because of it." A thread of frustration ran through Shoshana's words. "And in the end, no Arabs are going to move here, and we can't even buy it from them. It's the law of the land."

Towards the end of our first meeting, Shoshana told me that there is more fear lately about what others will say in the world about the Jewish settlements. She told me a story where an Israeli, left-wing peace organization told the Israeli government about Jewish settlement houses on allegedly stolen Arab land. The houses were demolished,

and shortly thereafter it was discovered that the peace organization had been wrong, and in fact the land had been directly purchased by the settlers from the Arabs who previously owned it. There is a growing recognition, I think, of the power of the media and global opinion.

Shoshana also expressed sadness about the fact that there are very few new settlements today. When she was thirteen and her family came to Nofharim, she was very excited. She repeated me in multiple conversations that she felt a lot of pride, imagining herself like the Jewish pioneers who came to Israel and settled the land in the early 20th century. “I want to give that feeling to my children,” she explained, “but I can’t because nothing moves here anymore.”

Esther

I met Esther in her home on the top of the hill in Nofharim. I knocked and greeted her in Hebrew, but immediately found out that she was born and raised in the U.K. The rest of our conversation was conducted in English.

Esther is a small woman, but with a lot of energy. Before she sat down, she darted around her home, finishing up a few chores. The extra few moments gave me time to notice the shining, clean floor tiles, the piles of fresh laundry partially folded on the sofa, and the neat and tidy appearance of everything in the open-concept salon where I waited. After less than two minutes, Esther plunked herself down on the sofa facing me with a large plate of lunch. She apologized for eating, and she seemed both irritated by the interruption of my visit, yet excited for a break from all her domestic duties.

Behind her half-smile, Esther is cautious and aloof. Her dark eyes twinkle, yet they are also critical and impatient. Throughout my visit, she was increasingly open and relaxed, and we eventually even had an intimate and absorbing conversation, but there

was also a cynicism towards the world and a sense of agitation lurking in the background of her words and expressions. Physically, Esther reminds me of Henri Matisse's painting of his wife seated with an elaborate red headdress; though, of course, Esther wears a more modest fabric cap over her shoulder-length, reddish-brown hair. Like many other modern-religious women in Israel, her floor-length skirt and long-sleeved shirt are simple and solid-colored.

An important distinction between Esther and the other women is that Esther is both divorced, and originally from another country. Esther expressed strong emotions about the settlement project, and though these are clearly her own opinions, I wonder if they are strengthened by the fact that she is basically a single parent. Esther, unlike most of the other women, does not have a husband to assert aggressive attitudes – with regards to the political realm, or in the household. I also got the sense that her divorce was not a congenial affair. As one who has been dealt a challenging deck of cards, stronger, harsher, and more negative feelings become more natural. Esther has learned from experience that people can be nasty towards others and that patience or sympathy are not always productive, so why shouldn't this apply as well to the relations between cultural groups and religious communities? More importantly, perhaps, Esther was born and raised in England. She describes her independent move to Israel as the immigration of one who doesn't belong in their place of birth, to a new location which is actually their true home. While she felt foreign in her parent's country, she feels a powerful sense of connection in the land of her ancestors. Israel is her indigenous geography. More than for others, any threat to her right to live in this country is inherently a threat to her exerted efforts, cultural and religious identity, and

psychological safety. Since she came alone, all of the territory is, in a sense, her home and the nation is like her family. Undermining these factors means deep personal instability and insecurity.

Though she doesn't look it, Esther is the mother of eight children. Some of her kids have moved out, some have taken paths very different from hers, but it is clearly important to her to maintain her home as an open hub for all her family. I was impressed by her strength – she has accepted her situation and is standing up straight in the face of her challenges. The day we met (in the middle of the autumn holiday of Sukkot) she was busy planning for her son's wedding one month later. During the school year Esther teaches at an English school in another settlement thirty minutes away.

Once she sat down, I told Esther how surprised I was that she is British.

"I know," she exclaimed, smiling, "When I'm in London people say to me, 'You don't look like a settler!'"

(I'm not sure what a settler looks like, but I didn't bother asking.)

After I explained my project, I asked Esther to tell me about herself, and she plunged into a quick enumeration of autobiographical facts – details rattled off as though they were detached from herself:

"I was born and raised in London. My parents were Jewish, traditional but not religious. I had a Jewish education. I came to Israel when I was eighteen. I felt at home here. I felt like an alien as a Jew in England. I went to Kibbutz, I studied here, and then I got married. I have eight children. And I have been living here in Nofharim for twenty-eight years."

"How did you first come to Nofharim?"

"My ex-husband studied in a yeshiva where the other people who founded Nofharim were studying. I didn't know what I was coming to. I was scared. I was very pro-Israel, but there was *nothing* here. No buses or shops. No amenities of any kind. That made me nervous. My husband was a doctor so he was not home a lot, and that made me more scared. I was with two young children, and that made me nervous." She looked me straight in the eye and continued, "But... I'm still here! You get used to it. I like the open space. When you open the window, there is no one in your face. Ideally, I think it's very important to be here. Because if we're not here, the Arabs are here. Whoever is here holds the land." Esther's tone was systematic; her responses emitted with almost no emotion.

"What was it like when you first arrived?"

"It was very hard. I came from a home with carpets, central heating. I came here and moved into a caravan. I didn't know how to heat the place. In the winter, the water froze in the pipe. I came from a civilized place. I didn't know how to manage."

She told me a story to illustrate how she had no clue how to deal with her new situation: "My eldest was two. One day the nursery teacher brought him home and showed me how to put *gatges* [long underwear] under his pants. His lips were blue. She had to show me how to layer his clothes! I was used to one layer of clothing. The first winter was terrible. I don't know how I stayed..." She reflected for a moment, "But on the other hand people were really nice. You could knock on the door whenever you needed. When we came, they offered us cake. That too I wasn't used to."

"What did your family back in England think about your move to Nofharim?"

"My mother was very against me coming here – to Israel in general. She didn't quite know where it was, and she just thought I was crazy. But she already thought I was crazy because I was religious... I didn't pay much attention to it. My mother couldn't care about this land. She couldn't figure out why I left England when everything is so easy... my husband was a doctor so he could earn a good living there. Why rough it here? Why not live and have a cushy life?"

"So why *did* you choose this harder life?"

"Wherever I go [outside of Israel], it's nice and pretty, but it's not mine. It's not connected to me. But this, here, this is me."

"Why is this you and yours?"

Esther shrugged her shoulders. "I'm not sure. Education, perhaps. When we first came – it was a caravan. We had a generator – no electricity. In the beginning, we had no landline. I felt I was *doing* something." For Esther, bearing hardship is associated with active engagement.

"When I had my first child, I cried, and my husband didn't understand. To have my child born in Israel, born in *Jerusalem!* That was very big for me. (My husband didn't understand. His parents are from Tunisia, but he is born here. He took it for granted a bit more)."

Despite the emotional intensity of the information she was conveying to me, Esther's tone remained unaffected.

"How did you get from the caravans to this big, lovely home?"

"We rented first. Then we moved to the apartment buildings when you first enter Nofharim, at the top of the hill. Then we bought a ready-made. Later, when my mother

passed away, I built this house. I planned it, with an architect.” Esther’s tone grew softer, “That was a lovely feeling. I used to come a lot, walk around... my little one was a year old at the time.”

“Do you have any specific memories from the construction of this house?”

She laughed, “Well, the bathtub – they put it in and it was broken. They suspected one of the Arabs of doing it on purpose. Now it has a bed of flowers inside it – it’s right outside.”

“When you first came, what was your relationship with the Arabs in the area?”

“I wasn’t scared of the Arabs – I was scared of how to cope with living here! We used to even shop in Ramallah. They had the products I was used to from England,” She smiled in the recollection. “I used my British soaps and paper nappies, whereas in the rest of Israel it was very rare and hard to find these things.”

“You didn’t have any problems shopping in Ramallah?”

Esther seemed surprised at my question. “They wanted our business! We gave them a lot of *parnasa* [income]. You know, people used to get off the bus at the stop in Ramallah and walk up the hill to Nofharim.”

“When did this situation change?”

“The fear started gradually. With the first Intifada it was terrible. There was no barbed wire until then – everything was just open. We had guard duty, but that’s it.”

“So why did you stay through that hard period, during the Intifada?”

Esther responded immediately, and matter-of-factly. “It’s ideological. If you move from here, they’ll move in. At the time, the average Arab was quite happy that we were here. The issue was the leadership, and today, it is several generations that have been

brought up with hatred. It's unbelievable. When my ex-husband used to do duty on Shabbat, he used to have an Arab taxi driver that would take him. The man lived right nearby, and he'd even come to fix stuff sometimes."

"Did you have friends, then, in Ramallah?"

"No." The answer came down heavily, without wavering even for a moment in the air. "It was always very clear: you're an Arab and you're a Jew. There was no hostility – at least from our side. But then in the first Intifada they started to throw stones. I drove home once and had stones thrown at me. I was pregnant. I was really frightened. On the one hand, you say to yourself, 'I'm going to move,' but on the other hand, where to will I move? Because they'll just follow you. It was very scary, but you calm down when you can think rationally. Since then I've had loads of stones [thrown at me] and it's been horrible. There was broken glass, but thank God none of my children got hurt. But others did. A baby from Ofrah had a stone hit his head. Another couple... they had just gotten married, and she went with her husband, and she got a stone to her head. She had operations and thank God she's ok now. My next door neighbor was shot in the shoulder... I don't remember when it was.

We stay for ideological and religious reasons. This is our land and what belongs to us. If you don't believe it religiously, you can't stay here. You just wouldn't be able to make it through."

"Were there ever any moments of friendship? Did you ever have a friendly relationship with specific Arab individuals in the area?"

Esther repeated what she had told me before, "I'm very aware that they are who they are, and we are who we are. Even in England, there were many Arabs in the

English department where I studied. There was always civil courtesy, but I'm not interested in anything more.

I went to England in the summer a few years ago. I went into Primark, a large grocery store, and there was a woman standing in front of me by the cashier, covered completely except for her eyes. And when she spoke, I was horrified! She spoke English better than me! She was completely in black, covered. She looked like she had been taken out of Saudi Arabia. And everywhere in London, loads and loads – there are Arabs everywhere with British accents. It scared me. They're taking over everywhere. Also in Paris, when I was there a few years ago. It's frightening. I feel threatened by it because they want their way of life. It's not like they accept your way of life or accept who you are. When I grew up, only English people were accepted. I don't know if they accept the Arabs... I'm sure they don't. But they wouldn't dare do anything against them. They've got a mosque in a well-known park in England now. That never would have happened when I was a kid!"

"And here in Israel – what do you think will happen?"

"I don't think they'll go. They're brainwashed... and dedicated. I wouldn't say they're more religious. But their claim is much harder than the Jews – especially the secular Jews. They [the secular Jews] have given up the country. I don't think the land means that much to them. Whereas for the Arabs, the land is part of their body. They won't give it up." Esther paused for a somber instant. "We're religious. So we have God on our side. But I don't know his plans... I can't answer your question."

It frustrates me to see the secular Jew – he's happy as long as he has his four walls around him. I feel very hurt that the rest of the country is not behind us, and we're

looked upon as second or third class citizens, and we always get the label ‘trouble-maker’. When they took the houses down in Migron [an illegal settlement nearby], three quarters of the country couldn’t give an iota.

I never like to say where I come from. You get looks, faces. I don’t want to get that, or have to go into it with people. Since the first Intifada – we are portrayed as people with guns, looking to hit or rob someone.”

An hour before I met with Esther, Gilad Shalit – the Israeli soldier held in captivity by Hamas for five years – was returned to Israel. Shalit was released in exchange for 1027 Palestinian prisoners convicted of murder or carrying out terror attacks against Israelis. For Israelis, the event was historic and momentous, and many were talking about it for days before and after. For Palestinians, the day was also one of great celebration, and all afternoon I heard the firecrackers going off in neighboring Ramallah.

Esther had the TV on when I first entered her home, and she left it on silent throughout our meeting. The news channel played repeated scenes of Shalit descending from the helicopter, being transferred from Egyptian to Israeli personnel, being interviewed, etc.

She gestured towards the TV. “I watched this today, and even though I’m a mother, and I’m really happy she has her son back, I also think ‘how many mothers will cry now because all these terrorists were released?’ – because they will go back to violence. They’re trained for that.”

The silence, left by her disheartening statement, was uncomfortable. I shifted the subject of conversation.

“How do you connect with this land?”

"I planted fruit trees in my garden," She smiled a bit sheepishly, "though they haven't been terribly successful. But we have a winery here, and I'm proud of that, and other things in area..." She vaguely mentioned several successful agriculture ventures in the region, but wasn't specific.

Esther pointed towards the south side of the house, "From here you can see the Dead Sea, from this window on a clear day. And on Yom Ha'atzmaut (Israeli independence day) I can see Jerusalem, and sometimes even see the fireworks." She reflected for a moment. "On holidays, mainly on holidays, when you have time – during most days you don't think. But when you stop your routine and have time to think, then you notice. Then I feel connected. I think about my role as a mother, as a daughter of Israel, as a homemaker – it's all mixed together."

"You've struggled a lot to be here – what motivates you to stay?"

"When I go to Tel Aviv, I feel that I can leave it alone because people are there. I have to be in places where the Israeli people are giving up. But I don't think of this area as any more or less holy than any other spot."

Her tone became more frustrated and high-pitched and her words accelerated as she continued, "An Arab can go anywhere he wants in Israel. But I can't. If I go too much off the main road I could be killed. I feel very sorry for the average Arab person who wants to earn a living and feed his family, but how many countries does he have to go to? I can't. I can go to England, but that's because I was born there. Their claim is a new claim. Our claim goes way back. And we're not to blame that we're thrown out of so many countries so many times. Their main land is Mecca, not here."

You know, it's like two children having a fight. There's a toy in the middle of the room, and one child starts to play with it. As soon as she starts playing with it, the other one wants to play with it too. If the first one hadn't picked it up, the second wouldn't have either. The same with the Arabs and the Jews. The minute it's precious to the Jews, it's precious to the Arabs. There's not one of them that's agreed to the State [of Israel]. They want all of it. The west bank and east bank. It's not that they want Nofharim.

I lived in England. As a kid, my mother wouldn't hang the washing on a Sunday because she didn't want to irritate the neighbors. We respected the fact that it was a Christian state. But I didn't like living in a Christian state, so I got up and left. It's common sense. Get up and go somewhere else. They don't like it, so fine. They can try all sorts of other places." Her cynicism picked up a bit of humor, "In the end, they'll probably come back here because it's a lot better.

Shira

I visited Shira mid-day during the week. She works part-time as the community director for Nofharim, organizing activities for the entire settlement. During a typical day, she generally goes back and forth between her home and the office, since they are less than a one-minute walk apart.

Shira is distinctly active, passionate, and energetic about life in Nofharim, and she clearly makes an excellent community director, mobilizing involvement and participation. Yet, she is so busy with what happens within the borders of the community that she doesn't really pay attention to what occurs just beyond. And why should she? As Shira demonstrated to me, life is especially pleasant and fulfilling in Nofharim. Her job, in fact, is to take daily life from normal, to particularly enjoyable, and she is clearly succeeding. The myriad of organized activities for all ages and types underlines the ordinary, safe, and desirable conditions of Nofharim life.

The fact that Ramallah's residents are off her radar, however, doesn't mean that Shira feels anything necessarily negative about them. Shira reminded me that she shops with Arab women, and described pleasant, though fleeting, interchanges. Her abstract consideration and sensitivity carries over to political questions as well. Shira's deep connection to the Bible dictates a powerful claim to the ground beneath her feet, but again, it is not expressed aggressively. Since the land is the absolute most significant matter for her, she will even live in a Palestinian nation rather than leave. Shira's case demonstrates an oft-repeated tension between sincere sympathies towards unknown Arab individuals, anger towards an abstract group of possible

terrorists, and ever-maintained distance and anxiety about people who live so close yet so far away.

Shira's five-room apartment flat was spotless when I walked in, and all items of furniture were perfectly placed. The large square tiles on the floor were shiningly pristine. I used the bathroom, and noticed from the hallway that even the bedrooms were neat and tidy. Back in the salon, one wall was covered by a series of polished dark wood cabinets with glass doors, encasing four packed bookcases. The books were mostly thick religious texts, like in many of the other homes I have visited in Nofharim. There were tall volumes of the Talmud, a variety of historical commentaries on the bible and Jewish law, and in the middle bookcase, a shelf of contemporary books on Jewish life. On the other walls were hung paintings of flowers, a drawing of a bird, and a scene from the Bible (from my experience, the latter being a rather uncommon find in modern religious Jewish homes). I later learned that the pictures on the wall were all Shira's own work.

Shira is tall, slim, and vivacious. The day we met, a colorful cloth hat hid most of her dark hair. She wore a long-sleeve white shirt, and over it a cute white t-shirt with little green and yellow flowers. (This is a common style for modern religious women in Israel. In these communities, wearing colorful and patterned clothing is absolutely accepted, provided that modesty is maintained. Elbows should be covered, and necklines should not be too low. It is thus quite usual to see women wearing all sorts of t-shirts, but with an additional long-sleeved shirt underneath, or, similarly, short skirts and dresses, but with a second longer skirt underneath.) Shira's floor-length jean skirt is also a popular item among modern religious Israeli women.

Shira's dark eyes and eyebrows express an earnestness which also comes across in the way she articulates her strong beliefs and ideas. At the same time, her face is very open and cheerful. Particularly in the beginning, her responses were exceptionally confident. On the topic of life in Nofharim, and all the activities she has promoted, Shira spoke with much enthusiasm.

There is nothing lazy about Shira. Even though she sat back on the couch beside me, drinking her coffee, and speaking sincerely at length, I still felt as though she was perched on the edge of our conversation, soon to spring up and tackle the next twenty tasks in her day. She strikes me as one of those people who has some form of extra super strength battery somewhere inside her gut.

I commented with admiration on the cleanliness when I walked in to her apartment. Shira shrugged, apologizing that she hadn't yet had time to finish vacuuming the couches. Strict routines of pristine domestic maintenance are apparently the norm for Shira, despite the fact that she has six young children and her husband works full-time. In fact, since he works with emissaries for Jewish communities around the world, and must therefore sometimes travel abroad, Shira is not uncommonly left alone with their large family. They also have two colorful love-birds, kept in a cage in the salon. The birds were quiet for the first part of our conversation, but then began to screech and squawk for a while, as if they too wanted to join in on the discussion.

Since Shira spent a few years in the USA, she speaks English, and most of our conversation was therefore in English. I translated those words and phrases that she said in Hebrew.

I asked Shira why she moved to Nofharim.

She answered passionately, “We wanted the sense of community, no matter where we were. Sometimes, when you live in a big city, you don’t have a real community – friends for the kids, friends to help, support people... My sister is going to give birth next week in Jerusalem, but no one will cook for her. But here, for me, when I give birth, people will cook for me for a month! Also for *shiva* [the seven days after the death of an immediate relative]... People hold you. Here, it is very strong. We have one rabbi who can help, advise, and even organize for charity. We build things together. You feel like the place belongs to you. You build the place. Here everything is yours – it’s a big family, a big home. It’s a better way to raise kids and a better way to live. I was used to it because I grew up that way in the Golan Heights. And also as a married couple, we lived in smaller communities.”

“How did you come here – specifically to Nofharim?”

“We lived in Merkaz Shapira, but felt we couldn’t live outside...” Shira stopped in the middle of her sentence and explained apologetically, “I can’t use those terms. West bank and *shtahim* are terrible words. West Bank means that this land belongs to the west bank of Jordan, which means that it belongs to Jordan. *Shtahim* also... you don’t call something you love ‘areas’... you don’t call the center, the heart of Israel ‘areas.’ We call it mainly Yehuda Ve’Shomron.”

She continued, “Anyway, in 2000 we moved with two babies to a settlement. We felt we couldn’t leave the *ma’avak* [struggle]. We couldn’t leave people to fight with the situation while we go off and live a quiet life. We wanted to live in a community that *builds* the land. We lived in a place on the way to Chevron [Hebron], and it was more problematic. We felt safe then, but maybe because we got used to it. We got rocks

hitting our car sometimes. And there was a couple, neighbors... their first son was about to be delivered. It was the end of the ninth month, and both were shot and killed. We heard everything." She became quiet with the memory.

"This didn't traumatize you or your family?" I asked softly.

"It was hard, but it didn't affect our lives at all. We knew it could happen. We knew it could happen at home, or on the way home. We did everything we could to protect our kids. But living there has a price. And you know what? Anyone can pay the price in Tel Aviv or Eilat... It wasn't easy. It was hard. But it happened once in the two years we lived there." She reflected and repeated once again, almost like a justification, "It can happen in a community, in a town... it happened yesterday in Tel Aviv. [The previous day, in Tel Aviv, a woman was murdered by her German employee.] It happens much more on the roads all over Israel. [The statistics for car accidents in Israel are known to be very high.] It can happen of course, but it is less likely than in other places. We didn't feel that it was more of a problem. Then we went to the US for three years on *shlihut* [as emissaries to global Jewish communities]." She added laughing, "We went with three kids and came back with four!"

Shira explained, "After building the land of Israel, we thought we should help build the people of Israel [generally understood as Jews, and not the citizens of the political land of Israel]. Not all of the people of Israel are here."

Shira made this last comment as though she's said it many times, as though she has had to defend her family's temporary move before. Perhaps others have questioned – or perhaps she has even questioned – the value of their work abroad versus the importance of living in the land of Israel.

"When we came back, we moved to a settlement..." Shira paused, "I'm not sure if that's a good word either. We prefer *yishuv* [a settled area, usually town] and not *hitnahalut* [Jewish settlement, used today with a political valence, and understood to refer to the settling of locations within the post-1967 borders of the West Bank]. We do not want to differentiate between this side and the other side [of the Green Line]. We don't want to draw lines... Anyway, we went to a beautiful *yishuv*. We would have stayed if we could. There were sixty families. It was very quiet. There was a big Arab city there, but no problems. Then my husband got a job in Jerusalem and we looked for a place in Gush Etzion [the area of the West Bank just south of Jerusalem, inhabited by Jewish agriculturalists before 1948 and then re-settled after 1967]... But those settlements are more like cities! Not everyone knows each other. You can live there and no one will know you. We didn't want such a huge place, but rather somewhere where we know everyone, and with a school so our kids won't be on the roads every day. And it's also not as safe there – the winters are really hard, and the situation with the Arabs is more problematic... The problems of nature and human nature!" she added with a laugh.

"But there's not even a high school in Nofharim, so your kids will have to be on the roads?"

"Oh, but it's very close. The high school is right nearby. And the kids have to leave home anyway, at some point! I feel lucky that I work here and that I don't have to drive to work. Many people actually work here in the *yishuv*, especially women. They teach, work in the nursery, work in the *moatza* [municipality office], work at the post office. The fact that the regional municipal offices are here in Nofharim gives women a lot of

opportunities to work. Some of them take care of their kids at home, so it's easier to have their job nearby. They don't have to drive. I actually like driving – I am happy to go anywhere myself with my six kids, even to the Golan Heights [a three-hour drive]... It's not a problem for me to drive. But it takes time. During the week, I like to be here, to give my kids lunch, to be with them when they get home from school. That's why we chose Nofharim – because it's a community that has school. It's not too big. Maybe we would have preferred somewhere slightly smaller..." She reflected, "I grew up on a farm in the Golan, and we always had a big yard. But here there aren't so many options, and when we arrived, only this apartment was available. For us it wasn't perfect or a dream, but we enjoyed coming here." Shira is not the type to complain. She assured me, "It's a good place for us. The house is fine. It's very close to the post office, the *shul* [synagogue], my office... everything is a one-minute walk away. I don't even have to call the doctor – I could even walk barefoot to the doctor! I don't have to drive... Sometimes people think 'You don't have the bank and the superstore!' But even here they sell things when you need them. They sell clothes before the holidays. They bring everything you need. I find life here very comfortable. There's no crime. I don't lock the house, even when I leave the home! Even for a few days! I heard... it happened that there was something... a robbery... but it's very rare. I'm not afraid. But you know what? When I have to sleep in the city, I'm terrified! I locked the windows, the doors. My grandfather lives in Jerusalem, and when I stay there I feel that I have to constantly watch the kids. I have to take them everywhere. I'm constantly nervous that something will happen to them. But here in the *yishuv* it's *gan eden* [the garden of Eden]!"

"There are *yishuvim* on the other side of Jerusalem, outside the 'West Bank' area, also with small-knit communities. Did you consider moving there?"

"Some of the *yishuvim* on other side of Jerusalem are far more expensive. We did go to other places not in the *shtahim*. Living in other places is also important because we can bring Torah everywhere. Living with the *hilonim* [secular Jews] is good too – not in order to change them, but just to share life with *Am Israel* [the people of Israel]. Living in Yehuda Ve'Shomron is not the only thing to do. But I couldn't live in city. It's personal. I can't stand the noise, the air, the pollution. It's so busy and hectic. Not for me! We did consider other *yishuvim* outside of the region. Some we couldn't afford, some were not close enough. And we also want to feel that we live in a place that's not just comfortable, but also meaningful. It's not too expensive here, it's really nice, and most of all, the people are really nice."

Shira thought for a minute and clarified, "It might sound weird to you, but Nofharim is not a perfect community. Someone from outside might think that it's ideal, that we are all the same, that we are all religious and right-wing... But it's not true. We are not truly united enough. We do not help each other enough. We have to work on it and develop the community." At this point, the strong leadership part of Shira's character really came out. "My job is a community director. I'm in charge of the cultural programs. We *have* culture in the *shtahim*! We had a dance performance the other night. A ballet! Women for women [Female performers for a female audience]. It was amazing. I'm sorry you missed it! They come from around here. They have a group and they perform in Jerusalem. They're very professional."

Shira was truly in ‘community-leader-mode,’ trying to convince me, the outsider from the big cities as well as the student from the secular world of academia, of the ‘realness’ of this performance and the high standards of their arts programming. The shape of this encounter is not unusual among modern religious people who are involved in the arts. A parallel tension emerges when these individuals, who reside within the psychological and/or geographic confines of their religious communities, try to demonstrate the authenticity of their work within a field and discourse that are populated by diverse, sometimes morally threatening, and often secular attitudes.

Shira continued, “For this performance they worked with choreographer from the Bima Theatre in Tel Aviv! They really got a hold of the best people. And they came here even though we don’t have a big hall. They came to our humble place. The theme was about being a new married woman – how marriage can feel like it’s strangling your life, how it can be good, how it ushers in a new phase. And they connected it with the seasons of the year. The performance was amazing! So I bring those types of things here. I make *shabbatot* [communal Sabbaths]… I want people to know each other better. Another example: a woman here was in a car accident so I organized teenagers to come and take care of her kids each afternoon. I want the community to be a better community, to do things together. We also did a mosaic project together – we made signs for the ancient archeological site.”

“What they call the ‘Ai’?”

“I call it the Ai too because we don’t have another name for it, and we don’t know that the real ‘Ai’ from the Bible was anywhere else. And it’s a very unique name, full of meaning. We made a big mosaic sign. We asked two artists from the *yishuv* because

it's very important to use people from here, to strengthen our own individuals within our community. They ordered all the materials – stones, glue, etc. And we had volunteers come. In the end, it was all women."

"Why do you think only women came?"

"Well it was a very professional project. We wanted the sign to stay for years, and not just be a temporary thing, so we didn't want kids involved. And also the artists preferred that we not have kids."

"But why didn't men come?"

"Maybe... Well, I don't know. I think it was the way they advertised it. The artists are women, so maybe people assumed it was only for other women. And it became a social thing, and sometimes it's nice for women to have their own events. And men, I guess, felt uncomfortable to sit with women and chat with them. Maybe from the beginning we should have written 'everyone is invited' and been clearer... but still men wouldn't have come. In the *yishuv*, these events are more of a women's thing. If I did a cooking session..." She stopped and reflected, "Though you know, we did a baking session, and we had five women and five men. But it was more like a formal class. The mosaic project was more like a friendly meeting."

Shira looked at me and clarified, "We do have co-ed programs, it's not *charedi* [ultra-orthodox] here! Sometimes women are more busy because they have their jobs *and* the house jobs. Of course husbands do help, but the husbands – even those with modern lives – they don't do as much. Women do more things. They do other stuff beyond home too..." Shira meditated on this for a moment and returned to the subject of the mosaic project. "Maybe it's something in women's minds. They're more open to

doing creative projects perhaps... But then again, you also find men doing creative things. Anyway, when we were making the sign, we didn't know if we should write the 'Ai', or 'Ai-Alek.'" She was laughing. "In Arabic, 'alek' means 'not really,' or 'not true.' We're not sure if it really is the site of the Biblical Ai. But in the end we just called it the Ai."

"What other activities have you organized recently?"

Shira was more than happy to proudly describe the list, "When the children were on vacation during Sukkot [the Jewish harvest festival that happens in the autumn], I took all the kids in the *yishuv* to the *moadon*. We brought an artist, and we made decorations for the sukkahs [traditional booths built for Sukkot]. There is a basketball group for men, and now I am starting a group for women! I have four women so far, and we'll have more. Really, I organize whatever activities people want, whatever they express interest in."

She thought for another quick moment. "In a typical week? We have a lot of activities! We had a small newsletter before Rosh Hashana [the Jewish New Year] to summarize the events during the past year. We had a lot things in there, and the rabbi wrote something." She pulled out the newsletter and showed me the multiple page-long columns of activities.

"There are activities for kids and for women. We have pilates for women once a week. We have art classes once a week. The women pay a small amount each month, depending on the cost of activity. We have folk dancing for women and girls. Women learn Torah twice each week – we have one class in the morning and one in the evening. The group changes all the time – a wide range of ages and types of people

come. I teach one of the Torah classes for women, usually *parsha* [the portion of the week] or *mishna* [the oral code of law, written down in the 4th century, which provides the structure for the Talmud]. There is a *kollel* here [full-time program of Jewish legal and textual study, normally for men]. Many people who live in Nofharim are rabbis and teachers, so many people can teach. There is a *rabbani* [rabbi's wife] who gives a class on Shabbat. Usually about ten people come, of all different ages. For men, there is *daf yomi* [Talmud study which follows one page per day] every night, and classes all the time. There is even a group that studies every night of the year from 8-9pm. There is a very small workout center too. Women have a new, large workout center in Sha'ar Binyamin [nearby strip-mall with large grocery store] so the one here is now closed to women. And we have an old age club for senior citizens of Nofharim... For kids, we have everything! Music, Judo, dancing, art, everything! I can show you the book! This is the regular schedule, and once a month we have a show for kids – like a puppet show. The theme is generally connected to the holidays, or environmental issues, or teaching good social behavior. We do not want to bring Cinderella. And we have shows for adults too. Thank God teenagers have their own manager, because they have their own world! Kayaking, jeeps, food! Thank God I'm not in charge! But they have a lot of fun. Teenagers in Nofharim are really lucky. But they also give a lot back to the *yishuv*. This past summer we had a huge celebration commemorating thirty years since the establishment of Nofharim. We had a big *Shabbaton* [a celebratory event on the Sabbath], and we invited a lot of people. And Yom Ha'atzmaut [Israel's independence day] is when everyone meets everyone. You can find two people in Nofharim who may

not have met each other in many years – you can find it, but it's rare. It depends on what people want out of their experience living in such a community.”

“Why do you think people choose to live here?”

“Some people live here because it's important for ideological reasons, but now the existence of Nofharim is a fact... at least for the near future. So why live here now? There are many other reasons why people live here. It's quiet. It's nice. It's a suburb of Jerusalem. It's cheaper...”

“You just said that you think Nofharim is a fact at least for the near future. But what about the long term?”

“I hope it is a fact! At least for the near future! A large part of *Am Israel* [the people of Israel] is not sure that the State of Israel has to stay in Yehuda Ve'Shomron, and it is a possibility that there will be an Arab state here. If they would give me the options: leaving and destroying this place, or living here with a Palestinian passport – I would for sure live here! Jews lived here before the state, with a Turkish passport, a British passport. It's a *mitzvah* [commandment from God] to live here. Of course I would prefer for it to be a Jewish state, and ideally, please God, for the Arabs to be citizens too. If it is possible, then it would be better for them to be citizens than the way it is now, for those who really believe in democracy. For me as a human being, I want everyone to be equal and to have the right to choose their government. That is the ideal world. Everyone in Nofharim wants peace. But there is also the reality, and I don't know if it's possible. If there is an Arab state here, God forbid, I would prefer to stay. I think it's important for Jews to live in the land of Israel. The problem is I don't know if it would be an option for me to stay. The Arabs won't like it. There are Arabs in the Israeli state but

I'm not sure if they will let us stay here. Some of them like us, but not all... It is also possible that one day the Israeli government will tell us to leave. They have the power. What can I do?"

"Does that scare you?"

"Maybe it does... but you know, you do things not only because they are comfortable. You give birth not because it's easy. When you give birth it can scare you and it can hurt, but you want what comes out of it. Does it scare me in a way that I can't stay here? Maybe if there will be an Arab state around me, and it will be really bad, then maybe I'll say that it's too much. For example, I won't live in Chevron [Hebron]. It scares me. I say *kol hakavod* [all the honor to you] to those who live there. But I don't want to drive through Arab areas every day. I choose what level of danger I want to live with. You do what you think is right, even if it may not survive. I have faith, because the Right is in government right now, and I trust in God. When they established Israel, they were building something that other nations could destroy. And it's the same with Nofharim – we are building it knowing that there are others who could destroy it. I also do my best as a single citizen. I don't have big power. But if the Right is ruling, then the majority of the nation must be Right-wing. I hope, I really hope that this means that the people have a connection to the land. There is a small chance that something could happen... But I believe in doing this now, and I'll pay the price later if something happens.

The *yishuvim* in Gush Katif [the former Jewish area in the Gaza strip] rebuilt a strong community in a new place. But communities that weren't so united fell apart and they lacked the emotional support that they needed to begin a new life. Now it's known that in those communities where they didn't have such a sense of connection, many got

sick and died, families fell apart, there were a lot divorces, teenagers got really crazy and needed medical help – all from the move. If you’re connected to the *adamah* [earth, land], and they take you from it, it’s like...” Shira searched for the right word, and then shifted to a metaphor: “It’s like being a tree... but not actually, because trees can be replanted... it’s a shock. However, if the community is strong, then maybe they can rebuild with this strength. But honestly, we think of the present. We want to help *now*. We want to build, and know each other. So we do that.”

“What was it like when you first came?” I pointed to her balcony, with its fabulous vista overlooking Ramallah. “How did that view and proximity make you feel?”

“I wasn’t scared when I first came. The media portrays a picture that does not reflect the way it is here. Unfortunately, even in Tel Aviv, they also get a wrong picture of what’s going on here. It’s strange. When I lived out of the *shtahim*, I got a great picture of what was happening here – great schools, great communities, the best air. So you live next to Arabs?! So what! Before they built the fence, people in Nofharim bought their *challah* [specific bread for the Sabbath; reported to have been ordered-in to Ramallah every week in the early days of Nofharim], and residents of Nofharim had their cars fixed in Ramallah! We also know they are good people... they build the land too. We shop with them in Sha’ar Binyanim [the nearby strip mall]. I can give my baby to a lady from Ramallah to hold while I get something. We shop together! We sit and eat pizza together! We trust the Arabs more than the people who live in Tel Aviv! They think it’s like a zoo, with different cages, so that we don’t see each other ever. I don’t think we need to *study* together – we have different languages, different culture, but we do live here in the same place!”

"Do you know anyone who lives in Ramallah?"

"I don't know anyone because they built the wall. The wall is very primitive. They build such a thing in the 21st century?! You can go above it and under it! People drive their cars and take others... people can get through. It's very, very primitive. That wall won't stop people! I don't know people in Ramallah because I can't shop and drive there anymore... Well, maybe I can, but I won't come out alive." She thought for a moment, unsure. "Well, maybe I can't. I don't know if we're allowed. Maybe because it's not safe. But I didn't try. The last two people who tried got killed."

"Does it bother you that Arabs are there?"

"There's a fence, so they don't come here. Is it ideal for them to go away? No. Jews live all over the world with non-Jews around, so the opposite can exist here. I don't care if there is an Arab community next door. It doesn't change anything!"

"Going back to the grocery store at Sha'ar Binyamin, do you ever wonder if you are standing beside the wife of a terrorist? Or, even handing your baby over for a moment to the mother of a terrorist?"

"I believe that most of the Arabs don't want to kill. I think some even want to live in a Jewish state, with all the benefits. Some even say it. Look at the example of the Arab communities up north. The Jews give them rights, the state protects them. You see the other countries around us – their governments can just kill parts of the population. From what I've heard, some Arabs enjoy living with a Jewish government. But I don't know how many. I'm sure that for many, the dream is also to have a state. But maybe they can enjoy living here? When the Jews left Gush Katif [the Jewish area in the Gaza

strip], many Arabs lost their jobs and lost money. One Arab sued a Jewish farmer for leaving!" Shira laughed at this last anecdote.

"Do you have any stories from your experiences of shopping with people from Ramallah?"

"Me? Not really. But there's a story that has happened a few times. Someone from Nofharim took his car to the big grocery store and went shopping. He got back to his car, turned on gas, and then put the groceries in trunk. He closed the car... and then the car drove itself away! An Arab had jumped in and stole the car with all the groceries! You have to be very careful."

"Would this type of incident happen in the rest of Israel?"

"Yes, there are car robbers everywhere. But here it's easier for them. We're stuck in a traffic jam – Jewish car, Arab car, Jewish car, Arab car. It happened once that an Arab came to a Jewish women and told her to get out, and he just took her car!"

"Any positive incidents from shopping together?"

"There are only little stories from shopping together. Nothing big. But you know, I hear everything that happens in Ramallah, right from here in my house. I hear their principals shouting at the kids at the school. It's in Arabic, but of course I hear the *muezzin* [the individual at mosques who makes the call-to-prayer]."

"How do you feel when you hear the *muezzin*?"

"I ignore it. It doesn't bother me. I'm used to it. Honestly, I feel happy that I'm here, that I can live here. I feel happy that we can live beside the *muezzin*. The fireworks [a very frequent occurrence in Ramallah] sometimes do disturb us. Sometimes they wake up the kids. They don't have rules like we have, that after ten or eleven at night one

can't make noise. They throw their garbage on the mountains here and it's making problems in the water now. They make a lot of noise."

"You are really working hard to build the community here in Nofharim... Have you ever thought about trying to do something with the people, maybe the women, in Ramallah?"

"Women from Talmon [another settlement] wrote a book about their attempt to meet Palestinian women. In the end it didn't work. But it was an interesting situation. The women on both sides suffer from the same environmental problem from the water. They had something in common. But I think people here wouldn't want it. I'm not even sure if it's possible. We can't enter each other's towns. I don't think there is a will or need for it. I can't imagine it – and it's not like I like them... Though most of them, I'm sure, do not want to be violent." Shira added the last phrase as she realized the negative valence that her answer was taking on.

She grew a bit more quiet. A few moments later she continued, struggling with the tension, between a compassionate, idealized attitude towards this Other, and her feelings of animosity towards the unknown Arab people who cause terror. "Last week they killed a three year old child from Beit El [a settlement not far away]. They drive like crazy. They cause a lot of accidents. Some of them are terrorists. When people from the other side kill babies, it's hard to want to meet them. I'm sure it's not everyone, but after the Fogel story [the family that was recently murdered in their home in Itamar], they gave candies to the children in the streets and there were celebrations in Ramallah. Their head of state – he says he wants peace, but he names streets after terrorists who kill Jews. Maybe I could be friends with someone there on a personal level. I'm sure

many of them are great people. But something stops us and says that we can't see them as friends. Maybe if we change and leave Israel, they will love us, but I'm not sure. Maybe if they stop terror. Even if they establish a state, things could change, but they *cannot* continue using terror. They cannot celebrate murder."

The passion in Shira's voice was increasing, and she carried on, "Even at the splitting of the sea, when all the Egyptian soldiers died, God didn't sing or celebrate. And when Moses sang, it wasn't during the actual event, and he sung to thank God for saving the Jewish people, and less to thank God for killing the Egyptians. We're not happy when people die, even if it's our enemy." Shira was speaking faster and faster, "Maybe if they realize we have a right to one tiny area in the globe? But it won't happen. I allude myself that tomorrow they will recognize our country. But maybe if they act differently? More diplomatically?" It was as though Shira was pleading with fate.

"Arabs who live in the West Bank are also angry and frustrated because life isn't easy for many of them. Many can't even get permits to travel beyond the boundaries of the West Bank area, for example..." I probed.

"It's true that it is hard for them. True. I don't know why it is like that. I didn't make the rules. They can check people [at the checkpoints]. Why can't they [Arab residents in the West Bank] move outside [beyond the West Bank area]? I can guess they made it happen because the government saw that some of them want to bomb restaurants, so now none can go to Jerusalem." Shira reflected about it a bit more, "I don't why they can't go everywhere. I'm sure it's really hard for them. I know they [the Israeli government] don't want them to vote because then maybe we won't have a Jewish majority... Yes, it's a problem and I don't have a solution."

I asked Shira about the nature of her claim to this land and why she believes Jews have a right to govern this area.

"Our claim is religious, yes. And theirs is also religious, you know! But Jerusalem is mentioned 636 times in the Tanakh and it's not even mentioned once in the Koran!" She took out a concordance from one of the bookshelves on the other side of the room, to check the documented number of Biblical sources. "It's more than 660... You know it doesn't even matter. It's many times. Here, in this area, is where many of the stories of the bible took place. Here the world was created. This place is sacred to Jews. Later, it became sacred to Christians... right? I have to remember my history... Then after many hundreds of years it became important to the Muslims. Was there a story about Mohammed here? I don't think it is even mentioned in the Koran. If it is one of the main holy places for them, then they should come and pray here!"

Our claim is also national. If I wasn't religious, I would still feel connected because of the history of the nation. Historically, 1948 was a miracle. Jews from all over the world came here, to survive as Jews. If you see that, you must believe in something! Even if you are not religious, you have strong roots here. Even if your claim is historical. Now the Arabs are here, but many of them came in the early 20th century."

Shira turned to me with some excitement. "Did you know that many of the Palestinians are in fact Jewish? Some even say it today. There is a movie that tells how many of the Palestinians, from the ones who were here for many generations, are originally Jewish. Because of the changes in ruling powers, when the area was under Ottoman control, they adopted Islam. Ancient Jews who lived here took-on the Arab way of life. Their great grandmothers are Jewish! But that's another story..."

There are ancient Jewish villages here, but no ancient Palestinian village anywhere in Israel! It's kind of a proof of who has rights, rights based on history. Our claim is also humanitarian. After the holocaust, the world had to give us a state. And a big one, that can be protected. And you cannot protect Israel without Yehudah Ve'Shomron.

It's not just about Nofharim. My father made *aliyah* [move to Israel] from L.A. It's very exciting that Jews come from the diaspora. Israel is like a magnet. Something about it makes people leave those beautiful houses and places. Today my grandmother's house [in the U.S.] is a hotel! People who left Morocco, they left homes that were really hotels and they couldn't take anything with them. It's really a miracle. I have to continue what my parents did: not to be afraid, to give everything I can to be able to live here, to build physically (roads, gardens) and also spiritually (education). I taught in America and here – it is so different! Here, the kids know Hebrew. But also, they know so much more. You cannot compare. Because they know the language, they know the sources. They live where our forefather Abraham lived. You really feel that you are connected to the Tanakh, in life – in the *shul* [synagogue], through religious life, through prayer. All sorts of programs are created to help educate kids, so they can learn about this place. They bring soldiers from the major wars to tell stories, to give kids the feeling that they must also give, that we too have to continue to give and live here and fulfill the dream."

"How do you feel about living here?"

"It's comfortable – there is no crime, excellent air, great community. But, it's also not comfortable because of the security. It's hard, and we're not sure about the future." Shira laughed, "Both of these make me live here! I am doing something that helps the

Jews settle the land of the Tanakh! It makes me feel good about where I live. But," Shira made sure to remind me, "It's also important to be in Be'er Sheva [a city in the south of Israel] because Bedouin will go everywhere!"

"Do you have faith in the government and the army?"

"I trust the army here, but I don't agree with everything they do. I'm angry about what happened in Migron." I could hear the frustration rising in Shira's voice. "If the government gave money to build Nofharim, they can't figure out a way to make Migron legal? Have you heard the story of Assaf?" She proceeded to tell me of a woman from a settlement nearby. The woman's son was murdered by terrorists, and several months later, her husband also died in a car accident that reportedly was caused by an Arab. "That woman is so strong. She's still giving lectures, going around. They named a new community after her son, hence it's name Assaf. But in two months the army is going to destroy it. It's really *haval* [too bad]!"

"But isn't it illegal?"

"I think that's a decision of the government. Of course, all the Zionism in the beginning [before Israel was established] in the early 1900s was illegal. If we waited for the government to agree, nothing would be here!"

I noted that these laws also pertain to Palestinians in the West Bank, and that their illegal homes are also often destroyed. Shira shifted the direct subject, perhaps under the influence of her now palpable indignation about this topic. "Building houses is not the same as killing kids. You know what they built? A huge stadium! At the entrance to Nofharim, they built on Jewish land. It's about two meters from the fence of Nofharim. Really dangerous. During big games people get very excited. In no time they could be

here. The government knew they were building, but they did nothing! It happens all the time. There is one Jewish house that is not legal and no way that it can be made legal. Ok, but there are thousands of Arab and Bedouin houses that aren't legal, but they aren't destroyed like that. It's not the same thing. Give Bedouin *and* Migron [residents] permission! There's lots of space! Is it so important? Migron is in a very strategic place. And if a Bedouin needs to be near a river, let them build there! It's very sad that Givat Assaf is going to be destroyed now. We don't have a lot to do about it. Also Nofharim."

"But Nofharim was built legally. The founding families got permission."

"It started legally? If it had been a different political situation, with different politicians in office, it [Nofharim] could easily have been destroyed. We were just lucky. I think it's a real miracle that there are 500 000 Jews today in Yehuda Ve'Shomron. It's a real miracle because it was very hard. There are so many obstacles."

I asked Shira about her ambiguous attitude towards the Israeli government.

She responded, "I don't agree with everything. But what can I do? I'm not someone who will build a new place tomorrow morning with no permission, and live an illegal life for a few years and wait for someone to destroy my house. First of all, I hate to do illegal things. I don't want to do that! I know that building in Israel is a *mitzvah* [commandment from God] and not a crime, but I do it this way – I join a *yishuv* that is already built. I don't want to get into arguments and fights. Also we are eight people in the family."

Thank God we have many *yishuvim*, and we should expand the ones that we have. I don't completely support people who go out and start new things. But ones that are ten years old, with electricity and water, and approved... to destroy them doesn't

make sense. You know, Tel Aviv needs us because if we didn't exist, there would be soldiers around Tel Aviv! The Arabs would go closer and closer. If we are here, we keep the soldiers busy here, so they are not close to Tel Aviv. Like in Gaza. When Gush Katif [the former Jewish area in the Gaza strip] was there the Arabs focused on them. Now there are rockets into Sderot."

"So are you sacrificing yourself, in a way?"

"That is our fate. Like Rabbi Akivah. What's more important, the Torah and the Land of Israel, or my life? Of course the former. For me it's very clear. We think life is the goal, not like the Muslims. But we will also sacrifice ourselves if need be... I learned it even in pre-school. Are we sacrificing now? Yes. Sometimes when I drive along the roads here, and I see stones marking spots of terror attacks, I remember that it can happen to me. God forbid! My husband drives each day. Thank God it doesn't happen every day. Thank God. But seriously, a terrorist can come through the window. Ramallah is right here. There's no distance. I know it can happen, but I know it theoretically. Logically, I know that the chances are that it won't happen. And if it does, I'm willing. I won't regret. I know there is a risk living here.

But that is also the case with every kid in Israel. Most of them know this. They go to the army, and a situation could take their lives. Like Gilad Shalit. He knew he could be captured, even for his entire life. Even the very left-wing people go to the army, unless they don't want to support their state. If you're loyal to the state, you know that the state is more important than your life. Would we call him [a soldier in the army] radical? I think everyone, living everywhere, knows that he is living in a place that might take a price. Maybe here I have more of a risk, but that store-keeper was murdered in

Tel Aviv yesterday. They [people who live in Tel Aviv] also live in danger. For me, living in Tel Aviv is scary! The negative education for my kids, physical dangers, the smell of pollution... I don't think I'm more radical than other people. Maybe I am, but I don't feel it. I don't think I'm crazy. There is a possibility that I will have to give my life. Ok."

Shira sat back. "Maybe you convinced me. Maybe some people will see me as radical. But I feel sorry for them that they didn't grow up with an environment of ideology, Torah learning, Tanakh... I can just open it [the bible]. Someone asked me once, when there was problems in the Golan, 'Is the Golan in the Tanach?' I always have Tanakh in my bag – because I might need it, to teach something, to help me when I need a prayer, to learn the portion of the week... So I was able to open it up and right away to find [sources for] the Golan, and show him how it's here, and there.

You might find this interesting – I named my first daughter 'Nahala.' It means 'portion of the land,' but it also means 'connection' or 'part of the world,' with a connotation of belonging to me, or to God. In the bible, the people of Israel are the 'nahala' of God. The land of Israel and the Torah is the 'nahala' of the Jews." Shira pulled out her prayer-book. "Here... Psalm 135: 'And He (God) gave the land as a portion (nahala), as a portion (nahala) to Israel his nation.'" She continued skimming through the psalms. "There are many more examples... I named my daughter 'Nahala' because I feel a connection to the land of Israel, but also because the word means more than that."

We had been speaking for several hours, and the conversation was slowing down. Shira asked if I had visited the winery yet.

"The winery's visitor center is fabulous. There are three stations: one is about the Tanakh – it's more romantic, like Hollywood. Makes you fall in love with this place. More for the heart. Another station is a trivia station. It asks you questions about facts, about geography and history, about the settlements, and also political questions. For example, did you know that the Arabs wanted to establish statehood before 1967! Their desire for a state is not about the West Bank or the settlements! It was about Tel Aviv! They don't just want the West Bank - they want everything! The tourist center shows the importance of the settlements for the geographic security of the state... Though I actually hate those arguments – We have to be here because God, who created the world, told us to be here! We come here because it's holy, not because it has a lot of water, tall mountains, or because it's beautiful. It's good that we have these things too, but it's not the main thing. Thank God we've made it flourishing. But we didn't come here because it's safe or easy. We came because it's our home. Despite it showing the security rationales, the map at the tourist center does help you to understand what's going on here. It's meant to teach people, to open the eyes of people from all different political groups who don't really know what's going on here. Like you said, there's a lot of ignorance. People really don't know. And if they knew, maybe they'd change their minds [about the Jewish settlements in the West Bank]. They say 'We can't rule another nation. We'll die for the other side. We'll die not to take their land.' But it was never there's! But that's another matter."

Right before I left, Shira pulled a book off one of the shelves. "Did you read this? It's about Oslo. I think it's a must. There's so many, but this is the best."

I didn't have a chance to get a sense for what the book was trying to express, but, as I flipped through it quickly, I came to a large appendix at the end, listing the names of all the Jewish Israelis killed in terror attacks in the past few years. "We forget so fast," Shira commented sadly, returning the book to its place on the middle bookcase, amidst the numerous bulkier religious Jewish texts.

Racheli

Racheli told me to come over in the early evening, warning me, however, that all her five young children would be home. Her eldest daughter, about ten years old, persistently asked for us to switch to Hebrew so that she would be able to understand. Several times she also complained that she should be interviewed. The youngest, almost two, tried to play with her siblings, but again and again ended up crying and running back to her mother. Yet, despite all these interruptions, Racheli somehow kept on speaking with me as though nothing was going on. At one point she stopped mid-sentence to change a diaper, and then returned right back to the center of our conversation as though not a moment had passed.

These interruptions, in fact, gave me the opportunity to notice some of the titles on the tall, elegant wooden bookcases partially filling two walls of the salon where we sat. Unlike other homes in Nofharim, I saw two shelves of books on art – both in English and Hebrew. Beyond these, most of the other books were the usual range of Hebrew bible commentaries, volumes of Talmud, assorted publications on religious Jewish life, and children's books. Below the bookshelves, toys, crayons, papers, and all sorts of other entertaining bits and pieces were scattered over the clean floor and piled in corners. As the evening wore on, the smell of baking cake filled our nostrils. Towards the end of our conversation, before I left, I was presented with the source – a plate of piping hot date

cookies. I carefully explained that I am a bit of a health nut and generally don't eat such things, and Racheli, without batting an eyelash of disappointment, told me with admiration that her sister, too, is like me, and bakes with all sorts of healthier ingredients. "We try to at least use whole wheat flour," she said, smiling, "It's really important to be health conscious."

Racheli's tall stature, long neck, and thicker hips remind me of the female figures in Modigliani's paintings. The first time I visited her, Racheli was wearing a high-neck pinky-purple sweater, a long, a-line jean skirt, and pink socks with chunky maryjane shoes. Her dark hair was covered with an intricately-tied, pastel-colored band of cloth, the style of many younger, married, modern religious Jewish women in Israel. Racheli's face is oval-shaped, with an expression that is especially open and gentle. When she speaks, it is usually with a keen earnestness. She is very serious, and her devotion to her ideals is evident. She is one of those people who seems to have it all figured out, and her answers sometimes sounded like carefully packaged explanations, shared many times before.

One could perhaps classify Racheli as more zealous than her female neighbors. In addition to a particularly fervent approach to the settlement project, Racheli came to Nofharim from Migron, the disputed illegal settlement on a nearby hilltop. Her family's relocation and her description of their move shine light on the interpretive and tangible differences between illegal and legal settlements. For her, Nofharim, in contrast with Migron, is deemed more "normal" – the majority of families live in permanent homes, and their community does not stand in the glare of political attention. Racheli also raises a second comparison. Motivated by the Biblical emphasis on this geographic area, the

territory of the West Bank is more valued than the rest of Israel. This is where her ancient ancestors lived and walked, and according to Racheli, settlements today have a special quality. As Nofharim's main tour-guide, she actively promotes the beauty and excellent living conditions and features enjoyed by Nofharim families. Though Racheli's main occupation is teaching art at a college in Jerusalem and studying at one of the leading Israeli universities, her side goal is to promote the goodness and normalness of places like Nofharim to those who may have other images.

When I explained the reason for my project, Racheli proudly told me that she was ahead of me, that she was just finishing her M.A. degree in art history. Her research is on a contemporary Israeli artist who became religious several years ago; he is also her boss at the art department of one of the religious women's colleges where she teaches part-time. Racheli hopes to continue and do a doctorate.

"How do you do it?" I asked, rather incredulous. "How do you juggle school, work, and taking care of your family?"

"I actually spend a lot of time with my kids," she replied, seriously and proudly. "It's important for me to be with them a LOT," she added with emphasis. "Everything just takes longer. Instead of finishing my degree quickly, I'm doing it in a longer span of time. I also work part-time instead of working full-time. My husband is independent. He has a private company, to do with patents... entrepreneurship. His main office is here, but he has meetings out of town and around the country all the time."

Racheli was a bit embarrassed and changed the subject. "Because of your research topic, I think you'd be interested in a movie... We lived for six years in Migron and there was a film made on our community. It wasn't shown in the end because they

decided to show it on the Sabbath evening, so we vetoed it. We asked a rabbi, and you just can't [show a movie on Shabbat]."

"How did you get to Migron, and then Nofharim?"

"My family made *aliyah* [migration to Israel, with a connotation of moving upwards] from the U.S. and went to Jerusalem. My parents later moved to Alon Shvut [a settlement area on the southern side of Jerusalem]. A few years after we got married we moved to Migron. There were plans there for buildings. Personally, we didn't know anything was illegal about it. We weren't aware. My husband grew up in the Negev [south of Israel], in a *moshav* [semi-communal village]. For raising kids, we were looking for a really nice place, to live among good people, to have a nice community, with friends... to celebrate the holidays together, and also with a beautiful view. We were looking for a new community, not necessarily in the *shtahim*, when we found out about Migron."

"Would you have moved to a community on the other side of the 'Green Line'?" I made bunny-ears with my fingers, knowing that Racheli probably didn't approve of this expression, yet failing to think of a better way to reference the boundary.

"The Green Line is not what's going to cut the country. Politically, people say that the state conquered, but we like to say it 'freed Jerusalem.' We didn't conquer, the area was taken over. We *freed* it back from the Jordanians. *Lo kavashnu*. [We didn't conquer, or rule over, or subdue.] *Shihrarnu*. [We set free, or released.] It's important to make that distinction. I'm always the spokesperson for all the foreign people who come here. You know, a few weeks ago they were thinking about a Palestinian state? So I volunteered to be the spokesperson, for the media."

"What types of things do you explain and show these guests?"

"That we are normal, that there is no difference here. The heart of Israel is this area! Tel Aviv is on the coast. That's not the heart, that's not where all the bible stories took place – Abraham, Isaac... The core – geographically, historically, religiously – is here."

Our conversation shifted back to Migron, and Racheli continued, "We liked the people in Migron, the style. We felt good there. I think there is a special connection between people and land. People here are more down to earth. There is something special about the people who live in these areas. Do I feel a certain difference? I don't think it's major. My sister was just at a *Bar Mitzvah* [coming of age celebration and service, for boys] in Ra'anana [a small city north of Tel Aviv, populated with many modern religious Jews who have come from English-speaking countries]. She's from Efrat [a Jewish city in the West Bank, south of Jerusalem], but she felt a difference. So I think it's the style of living. I don't think it's a difference in morals. There's something in the people... they're very down to earth. More modest. None of our kids have cellphones and iphones. We think it's not necessary at such a young age." Shira struggled to voice the difference in her mind. "I'm not sure if this difference is true. If we were somewhere else, close to Jerusalem... It's a mix of a lot of things together. We like the idea of building something new. Immediately after we got married we checked out the Golan [the far north]. There's something special about the people there too. We were looking for something *ereh mussaf* [with added value]. Do you know what that is? Look it up, it's important."

"Were you scared to go to Migron?"

"I really didn't know the area. Yes, we were rather adventurous. We lived in a caravan. In the bathroom it was so cold that I once measured eight degrees. I mean, you could put heaters, but not like here." She turned around on the couch to glance at the proper, built-in heaters behind her. "It was freezing cold, and the winds were horrible. Also here. But we were in a caravan for six years, and the winds were so strong you couldn't hear someone on the phone. That's not normal! When I look at it now... for a short time, fine. There weren't a lot of kids. But for a long time? It's not normal! But we believed that we could build. It didn't work out because we didn't get permits. We didn't even know about permits. The tractors were already starting. Finally we gave up, before they built the houses. We aren't connected to the houses that were built and the terrible thing that happened a few weeks ago [the demolition of several houses]."

"And why did you then choose Nofharim?"

"Here it is very normal. Compared to Migron... it wasn't normal to live like that. It's normal to begin in a caravan, but then to build [a house]. We came here because it's a great community. We like the people. Similar socio-economic level, but also people of all different kinds – academic, professional. Serious people. They volunteer and care about each other. They take life seriously. Our kids went to school here the whole time, so we knew it here. A lot of our kids' friends are here. That was part of it. It was also convenient. We really knew the *yishuv*. There's a staff of people here that welcome you when you first come. They brought us a really nice gift – a whole *havdalah* [ritual marking the end of the Sabbath] set and a nice greeting. And then they give you a booklet about everything in Nofharim. There's a little gift store... Do you know about it?

And a pretty good food stand... You should go sometime! You're adopted by a family and they invite you for meals and they connect you to people. We didn't need it so much because we knew people from being in Migron. Then people start inviting you for Sabbath meals, and a lot people brought cakes. I was pregnant when we came, and for the two weeks after I gave birth... there's a separate staff that bake and cook and take care of women who have babies, and God forbid *shiva*. They send teenagers to baby-sit the kids... We came to a *house*, with walls and central heating! We're renting, but I felt really, really good. Here, also, there's a whole range of ages. We really like that. I have women friends and neighbors of all ages. That's also..." She searched for the right word. "Talking about normal!"

Racheli added, "And there's good education for our children. It's at a high level, and that is very important for us. They also teach good morals."

"Are you ever scared living here?"
"The only time was just now. I was worried that the shooting would begin again. You know where Shoshana lives? There was shooting in 2000 and they were getting bullets. I'm more scared though because I'm involved here. I knew what people were thinking might happen. I'm more careful about letting my kids out, but most people aren't." She added smiling, "I'm not a good example! Everyone thought all was normal, and I was a bit worried. Because that's my personality, and I was involved as part of the staff who were preparing for certain scenarios."

"What do you like about living here?"
"We love the view... and the sky. It's 360 degrees. When you walk you see the whole sky. I am an amateur photographer. I studied with a well-known photographer

who himself studied with Ansel Adams at one point. So I love the sky. I have a whole series of the sky from all different times of the day. When we first came here, in the morning, when I saw the light coming through the windowsill and hitting my closet... it was 5am. It was so beautiful. I knew it was the sunrise so I ran out to take pictures. I also take pictures of the sunsets here. When we lived in Migron, sunrise was in our backyard, but here it's in Ramallah. And sometimes you can see Yam Hamelekh [the Dead Sea] from here." Her tone shifted, "Something you have to get used to is the *muezzin*. It's just loud. It's not pleasant. It bothers one of my kids because it's scary for him. And we don't know what they're saying. We know they're our enemies. Our neighbors next door know Arabic – they teach linguistics. I've never spoke to them about it... but I'm sure they know. And there's Media Watch [an Israeli institute that monitors media from the Palestinian Authority] who watches what they're saying. People are aware of it, but me, personally, I don't understand."

"Wait. You just referred to the Palestinians as your enemies. Do you see them that way?"

"Enemies? Yeah. But I always laugh – we're the ones who live in coexistence! We drive the same roads, buy the same pizza... Sometimes I speak to the [Arab] men who do the meat [at the grocery store]. I asked them 'What's happening?' They said 'Nothing.' 'Are you getting prepared for the Palestinian state?' I asked, and they said nothing. They live in the villages! They are far from all the excitement in Ramallah. It's not one hundred percent, but we live in coexistence."

"Do you ever think of yourself as one who is sacrificing, making compromises in order to live here?"

"No. Actually, in Jerusalem it's just as dangerous. Really, the whole south is in danger from rockets. The north is in danger from missiles from Lebanon. Tel Aviv is in danger from with terror attacks. I can't find somewhere [where there isn't danger], seriously. Going downtown worries me so much more. *Chas ve'halila* [God forbid] there could be a terror attack. We were just there a week ago and there was a *hefetz hashud* [mysterious object] and it was the first time my eldest daughter was really scared."

"Were you scared?"

"I stayed calm. I don't get scared fast. Truthfully and statistically, I don't think there's a difference. If my kids went downtown or on a bus, I'd be ten times more scared."

"What do people say when you tell them you live in this area?"

"No reaction. With my husband, most people don't know. It's not that he doesn't say. It's that they don't ask. When people come, they see it's such a nice place, and that does the job. What's scary?!"

"Are you worried about what might happen in the future?"

"We don't think about it. It's far away. People always ask, but it's so far fetched. So far away. Everything is so far. Nothing is happening. Anything could happen." Shira laughed, "This is not a place to invest in financially, but it is a place to live in!"

"And how do your religious beliefs play into your life here?"

"It makes life meaningful knowing that you're continuing generations of the Jewish nation – reliving the bible. The Ai... Everything you look at... it's incredible. It's part of the redemption of *Am Israel* [the people of Israel]. This is real here! We're leading really

meaningful lives. We don't feel it all the time, but the kids learn Torah in the space where it all happened. It's here – all the stories!"

We chatted more informally and personally for a few minutes while Racheli took care of a barrage of whines and complaints. I noticed how she addressed each child directly, with endless patience.

"You're a superwoman," I commented. "Really, how do you do it? How do you make time for your own research, for your photography, for your job – all while taking care of this large family?"

She smiled, appreciating my compliment of a characteristic she clearly values.

"A lot of women here are like that. We have no help. We do it all ourselves. I don't even have someone to clean or anything. Each night I always make sure the kids get a hot meal, and I always make it myself. It's really important to me. The kids help, and my husband helps to clean..."

We speculated together for a few moments with amusement about the possible reasons for this phenomenon. The air? The open skies and grand views? The sense of community? The quiet, rural feeling? "Do you have a secret, additional five hours in your day?" I finally asked, laughing. Racheli laughed too. She shrugged her shoulders with the tinge of a sense of pride. The traits of a superwoman seem to be a desired – or expected – quality, at least for the women themselves.

Batia

I visited Batia one evening during the weekday. Her large kitchen table was strewn with colored pencils and pens, small stacks of notes, and thick folders of papers and notebooks. Her laptop was piled on top of it all in the middle. There was something

vibrant about this surface, indicating the regular presence of activity and creative pursuits.

In contrast to the energy of her table, Batia greeted me with a shy, friendly smile. She is of medium height, stocky, with short dark hair. The day we met she was wearing a simple black shirt and a long beige skirt. Unlike most other middle-age women in Nofharim, Batia is not married. She lives in a first-floor apartment in the center of Nofharim, beneath a larger family home. Her apartment is simply furnished and does not give the feeling that she has lived there for that long. Like all other homes in Nofharim, Batia also has a wall of brim-filled, wooden bookshelves.

An awkwardness hung heavy over the entryway when I first came into her apartment, as she shoved aside some notebooks to make room for my laptop. I could tell that Batia wasn't exactly sure about my research and its intentions, and she clearly had a lot of work to do that night. She also doesn't speak English (and the transcriptions are therefore my own translations). But as soon as I explained my project, the tension began to fall away. As our conversation proceeded, Batia elaborated more and more. Some of the topics discussed therefore repeat (more than in the conversations with other women), each time expressed with further honesty and candor.

Batia brings a fresh perspective for two reasons. First, she is single, and this fact throws into relief the extent to which the family is a central intellectual tenet and practical unit in communities like Nofharim. At the same time, Batia also describes being warmly embraced, for many years, by various families. Though she is single, she is simply pulled in as an auxiliary family member. One gets the feeling that even those on the social periphery are not left alone in such collectives. Batia also describes the quiet

beauty of this rather rural location, as well as the powerful biblical verses that she teaches her students, rooting Jewish habitation on this topography. In these senses, Nofharim is portrayed as a normal, caring, pleasant community in the present, with the reverberations of past and future divine sanctification.

Secondly, beyond her personal position, Batia is also a member of a unique group which brings together secular, left-wing women from the Galilee and religious, right-wing settlers. Her experiences with the group highlight the possible distinctiveness of female-only dialogue, as well as the broad political, social, and religious tensions between the left and right sides of the Israeli political spectrum and the respective ideologically-polarized populations. Despite the fact that Batia is keenly involved with such a singular organization, however, a parallel association with Arab women is absolutely not an option for her.

“How did you come to Nofharim?”

“I’ve been here for nineteen years,” Batia responded, smiling, knowing it would surprise me. “I worked in the municipality office in Nofharim for several years, when I was younger and doing my first degree. Afterwards I got a second degree in Hebrew literature and I went into education – which I love.” Batia beamed as she made this last comment. “After I finished my studies, I looked for an apartment to rent in Nofharim because I was still working here. Then later, I was working in Ofrah which is close-by, so I just stayed. I really love it here. I grew up in Jerusalem, in a home where we were taught the importance of the settlements... Yehudah Ve’Shomron. I always had the idea that I would live in a *yishuv*. My parents even worked in one, and today all six of us kids live in *yishuvim*. It was obvious to us. *This is Israel.*”

“Why do you love it here?”

“Amazing people. The community, the *avira* [environment] – both social and religious. It’s important to be here.” Batia paused for a moment and clarified, “It’s important to be everywhere, and there’s something to do in every place. But everyone has to choose what is important to them and what works for them. This worked for me. And in terms of bringing up children, there is something nicer, more supportive about living here. But ultimately, it’s what works for you. There are people for whom it’s better to do other things. It’s very personal.”

The ambience in Batia’s apartment had already become warm and friendly, so I asked her how she feels living as a single woman in a community that is primarily inhabited by and geared towards families.

Batia responded briefly and sincerely, “When you live in a community, it’s warmer and nicer than living in a city where you are alone. In the city it is colder.”

She looked at me and elaborated, “I also want to live here because of the importance of the place as part of *Eretz Yisrael* [the land of Israel]. There are people who do not think this way, but according to what I think, it’s important. Also,” Batia returned to the theme of quality of life, “there isn’t peacefulness in the city. I grew up in Jerusalem and there are great things in cities, but there is something more calm and peaceful here. We’re closer and more connected to the land. We hear the birds. Once I called Bezeq [a large Israeli telephone company] and the woman on the other side of the line asked if I live in a *moshav* [semi-communal, often rural town] because she could hear the birds so loudly. You can just go out and go into a garden.” Batia seemed not to want me to get the wrong idea. “I’m very connected to Jerusalem. But here, I’m close

too. I can always go there. If I would move, I would probably go to Jerusalem. In terms of personality, they are very similar. Here the life is just more simple... but of course it also depends on the *yishuv*. All of *Eretz Yisrael* [the land of Israel] is holy."

"What is the reaction you get when you tell others you are from this area?"

"Some people really appreciate it – mostly right-wing people, but not necessarily religious. Sometimes people are even jealous. Some people are also scared."

"Are you ever scared to live here?"

"Usually I'm not scared. The confrontation in the city is a lot harder. It's more scary on the bus in the cities."

As a way to respond to my previous questions, Batia began to tell me about an unusual group in which she takes an active part. "I am a member in a forum for women: left-wing women in the Galilee, and us, right-wing and religious women. We meet together four times throughout the year, usually in a geographic middle spot. They were here once – some were scared and some had a hard time coming here for ideological reasons. Soon we're going to have a two-day meeting, and it will be the first time they're going to sleep here. It's very hard for some of them. Last time they were here for several hours and they had a big disagreement about whether or not to come. One of the women asked an older leader in their kibbutz, and he said that if it's for a good reason, they should go. They said 'We're against the settlements, but we'll come.' The organization was established eight years ago, to bridge the ideological gulf. It started after Rabin [former Israeli Prime Minister who was assassinated]. Someone had connections through work to the municipality there up north. It began as forums, mostly for youth. They all fell apart, but this one kept itself. It's so important to us. Each woman

makes so much effort! I saw it advertised in our municipal office and I joined. I've been in the group for four years. I write the notes for the meetings now." She smiled proudly and explained further, "There are fifteen women on each side. Of course it does something, but it's a process that takes time. The friendships we have built are very strong. That itself is powerful. When you meet someone face to face, you feel something else. When you know people personally, it makes it totally different. We [religious and non-religious Jews, left and right-wing] have to learn to live together. Every time they meet us, their friends ask questions, they criticize. It's very hard for them. People there are very against it. Now it's more established. But still people ask 'Why do you do this? They're fanatics! There's nothing to talk about!' I read their newspaper. It's very anti. So strong. For us, it's easier. People here [in the settlements] understand the need for this kind of connection. No one asks why we are meeting. These meetings make connections. They make people see people not as fanatics, but as normal people. We see that we actually have lots of similarities: families, we all go to the army, we raise children..." I noticed how Batia's discourse referred repeatedly to the family, despite the fact that she herself is not married and does not have children. Even for her, the idea of the family is absolutely central.

"Do you see women changing their views through their involvement with the group?"

"Absolutely. One of them said it outright 'I moved.' She understands."

"Have you ever thought about the possibility of a similar group, but with women from the Jewish settlements and Arab women who live in the West Bank?"

"With women from Ramallah? *Mamash lo!* [Absolutely not!] I don't believe in coexistence with them. I don't think they want peace. They want us under the earth or in the sea. According to the Torah, a *ger* [stranger, a cultural other] is someone who doesn't live in their own place. A *ger* can take on the conditions and benefits of living in *Eretz Yisrael* [the land of Israel]. But they [the Arabs] don't want that. They want to govern here. They don't want Jews here, in any way. They have a different language and a different ideology." Batia was speaking with passion, trying to explain her sense of this unbridgeable, unreconcilable gulf. "The mentality in the Arab world is so different from ours. They don't understand our language of peace. For them, it's us or them. They have said that clearly. They have twenty-one countries. We have one and it's ours. If they don't want to accept a Jewish government, then they don't have a place here. They're our enemies. They don't want to live here peacefully. They are not embarrassed to say that we're enemies."

"And what about the gulf between you and the women in the Galilee?"

"I read an article about the communities in the Galilee. Foreign workers are accepted, no problem. But religious people are not at all. A son of a kibbutz member became *da'ati* [modern religious]. He couldn't continue to live there. There was a fight within the community, but they didn't accept him for several reasons. They tried to say that it maybe was not because he is *da'ati*... It's fear. I understand that. People like that [people who become religious] can be very proselytizing. But it's a problem." She sighed. "They also have forum with Arab women – women who have lost sons at the hands of the sons of the other. [Jewish Israeli women who have lost sons in terrorist attacks or in the military, and Arab women whose sons have been killed by the Israeli

army.] It's crazy. It's so weird. That's one of the things that is so different between us. I don't understand that at all. How can you meet with a women who's son is trying to kill Israelis?!"

"Do you think it's necessary that such a group comprise only women?"

"It couldn't succeed if it was co-ed. There's something about a women's character that makes it easier. More *nagish* [accessible]. The question of why they should come here [the practical attitude] – that is a men's perspective I think. There is something very *mehil* [receptive, able to embrace new ideas] about women. There is potential for something very close... When they came, they saw that we are not scared to live here. It's like living in Tel Aviv – there's no difference, except that there it's gross. It was moving and exciting to watch them see how beautiful it is here, how nice it is here. It broke a big wall. It warmed my heart. It was very emotional."

"What are you most proud of here in Nofharim?"

"The good people. And they [the women from the Galilee] see that just in the meetings with individuals when they came here. They see houses, kids, families... It's normal! Kids go to school, nursery, activities, youth groups... Also, the east side of Israel is more populated in the bible... everyone was *here*. Abraham... etc. There is a very strong connection to biblical sources. It's very meaningful. There is a sense of connection to the land everywhere in *Eretz Yisrael* [the land of Israel] but here it's special."

Batia illustrated her point, "I'm a teacher of the bible and it's fantastic to teach here. We do *tiyuim* [excursions outside]. One thing I also do is to connect the biblical passages to current issues. Every chapter can teach you something about how to live

today. This morning I taught literature – the *piyut* [poem, hymn] from Rabbi Abraham Eben Ezra, expressing the concept of the importance of the Sabbath – to dress, walk, eat, etc. all in a special way. He took these ideas from a sentence in Isaiah that discusses the way to create the Sabbath. We talked about the way we understand these ideas and do them today. For example, we speak more deliberately, more relaxed on the Sabbath. It was very special to read that sentence from Isaiah that was written 3000 years ago and see how it's still relevant right here and now... In terms of making the Sabbath special, it's more about community than specific land. There's a different *avira* [atmosphere, energy] in different places. I don't feel it [the atmosphere of the Sabbath] as much in the city." She paused for breath. "I also teach about Jeremiah – and he walked here in this field!" Batia pointed out towards the windows behind me. "Abraham our forefather wandered around on this land. The biblical passages speak to us in every place still today. It's important to be here. We're not giving up because others think it's not right. Our job is to hold the land. According to the Arabs, Nofharim and Tel Aviv are the same thing. The lefties don't understand. First it's Nofharim, then it's Tel Aviv. There's more consensus about the importance of holding Tel Aviv, but it's the same thing. It's about ideology and a sense of connection to the land. There are lots of people who are right-wing and *hiloni* [secular] who believe this too... *Tzionut hiloni* [secular Zionism] is dying, without faith and Torah, you can't have a connection to this land. So you have that stereotype of the religious right-wing and the secular left-wing. But in *Eretz Yisrael* [the land of Israel] there are lots of people who are secular but also right-wing... because they're Jews. It's part of them. They're connected to their Jewish identity, and therefore to this land. For example, during the period of the second Intifada

in October 2000, it was very meaningful. It was very hard here because there was shooting on our *yishuv*. But it was very emotional to see the way we received support from the whole country."

Batia was amused as she recounted the following examples. "There was a basketball game between two big Israeli teams, and one of the teams sent free invitations to everyone in Nofharim. You know, so we could have something fun to go to. A winery in the Golan sent wine. People called to ask if they could help... The support is still there, I think because the majority in this country is right-wing. The media is left-wing and that's what represents us. They're not big in size, but they're big in noise. They repeat things on the radio and people begin to believe it. I don't listen to the news, or other programs on the radio. Music? Yes. But I don't even read the news because it's not real. The important things you hear through friends and community, and it's hard to escape it when you're on the internet. But the commentary from journalists is a world of lies. I'm more relaxed because I don't listen to it all."

The conversation shifted towards the role of the government. I could see the tension in Batia's face and hear the frustration in her voice.

"Delegitimization..." Though we both laughed over the challenge of pronouncing that word (the same in English and Hebrew), the tone immediately reverted back to a serious mood. "They don't give us the right to be." I'm not exactly sure if Batia's "they" refers to the media or the government, or a blurring of both.

She continued, "Gush Katif [the former Jewish area in the Gaza strip], Migron.... In the morning they ask themselves 'Who will we hate and bother today?' All the story of Migron – it was legally fine! The issue was *sinna* [hate]. They're using *keylim* [modes,

tools] of legality. In the end, though, people are just building homes and living their lives. It's ridiculous. We feel betrayed by the state, by the leaders, by the heads of justice and security. We feel betrayed even by the army."

"But the army also protects you and protects Nofharim. The army makes it possible for you to live here."

"I think a lot of soldiers don't disagree with what they're told. They can't say no because they will go to jail. The army can come here, but they should not destroy. Soldiers are not enlisted to destroy Jewish houses with our money! It's crazy! Everyone pays taxes, including the people who live in Migron. But the country destroys their homes!" This was a subject that clearly angered Batia.

"Nothing is sure here. We're always worried. I can't agree – but I understand that people think it [the expulsion of Jews from the West Bank] will bring peace. But the problem is that it's filled with so much violence. It's hatred that fuels it. Peace won't come this way. Look at Gush katif [the disengagement and relocation of Jewish communities in the Gaza strip]! They [the government] didn't help them [after the relocation]. I understand that it's not real ideology, but instead issues of honor, power, and hatred. It's not real [ideology]. It's very painful. Gush katif – in that period [of disengagement]... It hurt too much. And it's still awful. For them it has been traumatic. It's been publicized that the army spent heaps of money on psychological treatment before the disengagement to influence and teach the soldiers how to be cruel."

While relating these matters, Batia's frustration peaked and she turned towards larger questions. Yet, even her faith couldn't calm her feelings. "I believe there is someone who watches and judges the world. There is someone above us. But it doesn't

even make it easier. For what is all the violence [of the disengagement and of destroying illegal settlements like Migron]? For a Jew to live in *Eretz Yisrael* [the land of Israel]?"

"How have the left-wing women in your group – the ones from the Galilee – responded to these issues?"

"Because of meeting, they understand the situation differently. During the last meeting in the summer we stood in a circle at the end. One woman expressed how obvious it is to her that the connection within the group is the most strong, that in the end, we are here for each other. Something moved her. Even across differences of political and religious views. That's the purpose of our group – to make something stronger than the political. After the murder in Itamar, they called. They have friends nearby, half an hour away. Because of the group, it was much more significant for them... I have friends in the group with whom I speak every week. Every Rosh Hodesh [new moon] I send SMS's and they reply."

Batia pulled out her cell-phone and opened some of the messages that she's saved. They are clearly very important to her. She perused through several texts, reading them to me. "One wrote, 'It's great that someone reminded me! What would I do each month without your blessing for Rosh Hodesh?' Another wrote, 'You're my path to return to the meaning and simplicity of life.'"

"And any stories about your relationships here in Nofharim?"

"Well... Today, the family who live right across had a fire on the top floor. You immediately hear how everyone runs to help to move things, to take care of kids." Batia spoke in the present tense. The scenario she described was not something that only

happened earlier today, but rather something that continues to happen all the time. “People are always inviting me for the Sabbath. After nineteen years people still invite me! Not everyone, obviously, but there are many families... Really, I can’t give you a story because it’s just life. It’s every day. That’s the way life is here! Each and every day! I moved several years ago. For several people, it was obvious to them that they would help me move everything. But again, it’s like that every day. If we need something, we just knock or whatever. It’s just so obvious. There are committees for each area of the community. In each one there are women who take charge when a woman gives birth. They make sure someone cooks, that there are people to take care of the other children... and if there is a *shiva* [bereavement], they take care of everything.”

“How are you involved?”

“Because I’m single, I’m a bit on the outside, and I volunteer less. There are families everywhere, all around. And yes, it can be painful and difficult. But it’s better than living in the city alone. I don’t like all those singles meetings. I prefer being with families. But, yes, it can be hard. It’s very personal too. A friend of mine who lives in the city doesn’t understand my attitude at all!” Batia laughed. “There aren’t a lot of single people here. There are a lot of activities that Shira organizes, but I don’t participate a lot. I’m busy. And also, a lot of the activities are geared for families or for kids. I prefer to just spend time with friends, drink tea in the evening. I have several families that I go to all the time, at least half the nights of the week. I bring my computer and just sit and work in their salon! That’s the best! People don’t feel that they have to host me.

Sometimes I'll wash dishes and fold laundry... or I sit there and knit. (I make a lot of *kippot* [Jewish skullcaps].) Sometimes we'll chat over tea, sometimes not."

It was getting late, but Batia suddenly suggested that she read to me some of the articles she's written about the women's group. In addition to the summaries that she writes on their meetings, the municipality in the Galilee also asked her to write periodically on Judaism, something small about the holidays. Past the paper-strewn table, beside the wall, there are higher piles of notebooks and folders – on chairs and even on the unused oven. She pulled out a thick file.

"There is more that is similar than different between us. After the meeting when they were here, I wrote this piece. I called it *shirat hayam* [the song of the sea, traditionally the song that was sung during the biblical splitting of the sea] because our meeting was like the splitting of the sea. Ideologically, women who never had crossed the green line came here. There was a lot of deliberation about coming here. In the end, the sense of friendship was more important. We met at a *yishuv* nearby. We went to the winery near Nofharim, saw the movie there, had a reception, ate lunch. In the end, after this 'splitting of the sea', there was a feeling of gratitude and goodwill for how enjoyable it all was. I'm not sure if women in Tel Aviv could connect with us so easily. There's a strong connection between the kibbutz (now privatized, and more like a small town) in the Galilee, and Nofharim. They are similar places. In both, the people live in the periphery of the country. People live there because they have an ideology... so there are lots of similarities between us and them. Today, for example, there was a meeting between the head of the municipal office here and head of the office from the Galilee. They had a tour, and they are trying to learn from each other about how to build their

communities... They're jealous that we're always opening new children's nurseries, that we have a new generation. They're trying to open the kibbutz, and people like living there, but it's far from the center. The quality life is excellent, so they *can* make it happen. For me, to live in Nofharim the Galilee is the same thing, the same importance according to the religious view."

"So why are you living here and not in the Galilee, or somewhere on the other side of the Green Line?"

"There's no green line. For me, it's all *Eretz Yisrael* [the land of Israel]. In all areas, we have to build and live."

"And what about the Arabs who live here?"

"It's best if they don't live here. If they'll recognize Israel and the Israeli government, then hypothetically – if such a thing would happen – then I could accept that. But they don't have a place here. They have twenty-one countries! I think that's enough. If they don't want to be there, that's their problem. *Eretz Yisrael* is *Am Yisrael* [the Jewish nation]. People outside of the *Am Yisrael* have to understand that they have to accept the government. They lived here for six generations? The bible was predates that. There's nothing stronger than the bible. This whole world is God's, and we had a temporary leaving from this place, but God gave us this land. It's established. There's no other place."

Batia returned to her upbringing, to the roots of her political and religious attitudes, and to her family background.

"Both my parents made *aliyah* [moved to Israel] by themselves. My mother came from the US, my father from Switzerland. My grandparents are all from Poland. My

mother's parents said that if she came here, they wouldn't support her at all, but she came anyway. I don't know *tzionut* [Zionism] stronger than my parents. It's in their blood and flesh. Their faith is so strong. They're very connected to *Eretz Yisrael* [the land of Israel] and they truly believe in it. For example, when we were kids, we went to activities of Gush Emunim [the movement to establish Jewish settlement in the West Bank area]. There's a funny story about my father. Soldiers that get certificates of excellence have to go to the president to accept the honor and they have to shake hands with the head of the army. But there was one soldier who didn't agree to shake hands with the head of the army because it was just after the deportation from Gush Katif. It was such a scandal! In the end, the soldier's lawyer succeeded and he received the certificate. My father took this soldier's picture, put it on the wall, and explained, 'He's a hero of Israel!' My father also likes singing the North African and Middle Eastern Jewish songs and poems at the Sabbath table. The Jews from those areas knew the Arabs and what they're about. Their songs they express a lot of patriotism and pride for being Jewish, and he sings them with a lot of energy."

I looked down at Batia's table, this rather large desk of sorts in the middle of her typically Israeli, open-concept salon that includes an eat-in kitchen as well as a living room area with couches and bookshelves. The organized disorder of the table seemed to reflect Batia's views – consistently religious and stereotypically right-wing in some cases, yet surprisingly open and sensitive in other situations. And, unlike the first moments of our encounter, as she flipped through more piles and pulled out more articles, Batia herself looked more like she belonged to this space.

Miriam

Miriam is an older woman who lives alone now in Nofharim. Unlike the younger women I had met thus far, Miriam has the mental space that times allows to reflect on the past and re-verbalize memories. Miriam's move to Nofharim also occurred later in her life, and the difficulties that she suffered speak to her determined spirit and strong convictions in the settlement project. Yet, Miriam does not express audacious, aggressive, or zealous passion about the subject. It seems that her late husband was the one who ardently pushed the couple in the direction of fervent action, but Miriam held them back, insisting on a balance between ideology and practicality. For Miriam, coming to Nofharim was the culmination of a long path, originating in pre-WWII Europe. Israel was a refuge for her family, who escaped Germany moments before it would have been too late. She remembers the challenges of living in Israel when it was under British rule. Persecution is something she personally experienced, over and over, and the independence of Israel in 1948 signified true freedom, once and for all. To maintain this great gift, Jewish territory must therefore be actively brought about and nurtured.

Like other women, Miriam describes genuinely pleasant social relations and the virtues of life in Nofharim, even for seniors. The rural, outdoorsy atmosphere is especially valuable to her. Beyond the fence, in comparison, lies a large question mark, stretching abstractly into the future. Miriam is another woman who oscillates quickly between a hopeful faith in the possibilities of Arab-Jewish coexistence, and a vague contrasting wish for the Arabs to leave. Ultimately, she stands on the sidelines, not wanting to be directly involved, praying that the government to handle this highly complex problem wisely.

Miriam's face is warm, wrinkled, and especially round. Her posture is stooped, and somewhat plump. Miriam's appearance is that of a typical grandmother. One of the days we met she was wearing a long black skirt, a wooly black sweater, and a purple, knitted cap on her short, gray hair.

Her home also has an older, grandmotherly atmosphere. The walls are crowded with old photographs of her late husband and newer pictures of her four children and their many children. In contrast with other homes I have visited in Nofharim, her thick, heavy furniture was more the kind that was fashionable twenty years ago.

Miriam speaks quite softly, and often with a big smile. She recounted many heavy, difficult stories about her life, yet she remained positive throughout, constantly reminding me about the better side of the hard times. Miriam speaks Hebrew and our conversation was conducted exclusively in Hebrew. The translation below is my own.

Right at the very beginning of our conversation, Miriam informed me: "I am happy to speak to you, but I don't like talking politics." A few moments later, as I was describing my project, she told me: "I don't like the word *shtachim*. There is a negative connotation. We are in Israel which is one whole." She added with a laugh, "I told you I don't want to talk politics, but that is foundational ideology."

"Which word do you prefer?" I asked.

"*Yishuvim*."

"But that could be anywhere in Israel."

"You're right. That could be anywhere in the country."

We agreed on using the term Yehuda Ve'Shomron.

I asked Miriam about how she came to Nofharim.

"We came twenty-four years ago. We thought it was important to live in every part of Israel. We were somewhere near Ashkelon, in an educational area with lots of schools and *yeshivot*. Everything was great there. It was a beautiful place and there was a great community. We had a beautiful house. We both worked. But we wanted to do something else in our lives that would be important not just for us. We tried once to move here, and it didn't really work, but then a little later we did come. It was ideologically important to be here." Miriam paused for a moment and smiled with humor, "It's also important to be in Tel Aviv... But we didn't want to go there. It's important to build *yishuvim* here. Finally, when we came we were fifty-one years old! There was a celebration in our souls. And there was so much enthusiasm when we arrived." Miriam reflected on the memory of the event. "We came in a truck with all our stuff in the evening. Our apartment was in the first block of houses, where each one is close to the other. Our apartment was on the second floor. But the truck couldn't come too close to the apartment because the road didn't continue there. There was *ma'ariv* [evening prayers] and right after they prayers, they made an announcement that there was a new family and that everyone had to help out. So many people came to help! They made a line of people, passing things from one to the other, right up to the second floor, until all was moved. That was the men. And women brought fruit and drinks for us. Someone who doesn't live in the *yishuv* can't understand this. Someone who lives in the city can't imagine it. And after the move, they invited us to meals... even still today. You know, women who have babies – people cook for them and take care of their families. That's how normal life is here."

"Are you ever scared?"

"I'm scared of a lot of things – darkness, dogs... but I've never been scared here because I think it's important. If we don't live here, it will go back to the Arabs. Our merit is to live in *all* of *Eretz Yisrael* [the land of Israel] – it's from God. He gave us the land, and it's written in all the places in the bible." Miriam repeated, "If we don't live here, the Arabs will live here."

I asked Miriam about life in Nofharim.

"My husband was a sports and health teacher. A year after we came he was in an accident in Jerusalem. For one year he was in the hospital and in rehabilitation. In the beginning, he lay in bed. He couldn't move at all. But he had a lot of will and worked very hard until finally he could leave. I traveled every day to Jerusalem to visit with him. I worked in the community center. I worked and I did rotations with others. When he left the hospital, we had just built the house here. But he was in a wheelchair, and there was no road yet. Friends told us to return to Ashkelon, but David said that he finally had the merit to live here, so we weren't leaving. It was technically really hard."

Miriam looked at me and clarified these terms, "Hard is not impossible! In fact, they're very different. For everyone who comes, it's hard in the beginning. But then after you see the quality of life quality, after a while everything becomes so easy. I have no car or license. I *tramp*. I'm used to it. Before David died, he was in the hospital in Jerusalem for four years. And I traveled every day, summer and winter – with *tramping*."

Miriam related these events to me without complaint, as though it was all perfectly normal. Is her spirit that resilient, or has time erased the difficulties of this experience? Miriam must have noticed my surprised facial expressions because she responded to my thoughts.

"There wasn't a choice. We have so few buses. You couldn't rely and make a schedule based on them. Afterwards, there were rotations for people who work in Jerusalem who would pick me up and take me home. They had to go in a circle, but they were already there in Jerusalem, and it made it so much easier for me."

Miriam went on to describe to me the support she received during those challenging years. Like many of the other women with whom I have spoken, she described the committees that organize food for women who give birth, childcare for parents who have to deal with sudden situations, and a whole slew of other forms of volunteered assistance. I asked Miriam if she takes part today in the activities of these committees.

"When David was living, I was working, and I also had to help him. I had no time to help others. But now, I am on pension and I volunteer. There's a club for older people three times per week. It's really nice! I come once a week and I make breakfast. I really like doing it and I really like them. I feel like I am doing something important."

"Older people of what age?" I asked, impressed that Miriam, at her age, is a volunteer for such a group.

"Sixty to ninety-nine! There's one woman who is in her late nineties. She understands everything. She comes every week and she walks well. There are also younger people who are older in their character, but younger in years. They come too. There's also a group for people who are middle-aged. They meet in Ofrah [a settlement right nearby]. They have lectures and *tiyulim* [trips] on history, geography, and other topics that are relevant to them. It's really interesting. I help – each participant pays, and

so I do the administrative part by collecting the fees, etc. That was what I did for work for many years so I know how to do that."

Miriam thought for a moment and added, "And there's one more small thing I do. There's a woman who died four years ago. I help them with fixing clothes – sowing, stitching, whenever they need it. I am really happy to help them."

At that moment, two teenage boys came out of the room next to where we sat, in Miriam's salon. They had been fixing shutters that had broken on one of her windows. Miriam chatted with them briefly, and asked how much they charge for the job. They quickly responded with a sum that seemed rather arbitrary and not thought-out. Miriam fished-out the corresponding bills from her wallet, passed them the money, and wished them well as they walked out the front door.

"They are the sons of the rabbi here," she explained. "They are on holiday until Sunday. Everyone here in the community does something that they know how to do. It helps us, it helps them, it helps everyone!"

Returning to my question, she continued, "Those are the set things I do. But in each area there's a *hessed* [charity, kindness] committee for women who give birth, for people who are sick. They help not just to bring food, but also to do dishes, to clean. So whatever I can, I also do. But that isn't every day."

The conversation shifted and I asked Miriam what she likes most about Nofharim. "The air. It's so clean. Summer is luxurious, though in winter it's hard - cold, strong winds. But summer is much longer, and summer is unbelievable! Where we used to live it was so hot and humid." Miriam made a face at this last statement, but it disappeared under her wide smile as she carried on. "And, the life in the *yishuv* is really nice. So

many friends. It's not like in the city where everyone lives in their own home. We also have classes for women and men. And I really like the synagogue. Have you seen the *aron kodesh* [holy ark]? Next you go, look carefully. There's a story." Miriam's tone became more serious. "Twenty-six years ago, we wanted to live here. We weren't here yet though, and there wasn't yet a synagogue. When constructing a new building, there's a ceremony to put the first stone. They [the residents in Nofharim] invited us to the ceremony because they knew we wanted to live here. My husband thought that if we wanted to live here, we should give a donation to the synagogue of an *aron kodesh*, in memory of his parents."

Miriam stood up and walked around the small table where we were sitting. She reached up and pulled from the wall a framed collage of four photographs. The middle photograph showed a simple, elegant, wooden *aron kodesh*. The photographs on the side were close-up shots of two cloth Torah mantles with embroidered Hebrew verses.

Pointing to the middle photograph, Miriam continued, "On top there is small line in memory of his parents. All the ideas and design were from David's head." She was clearly still impressed. "He thought so much about it. He went all over the country to see and compare other *arons*. It's not his profession, but he had a lot of ideas about it. Afterwards he wrote a small book on the whole experience. And, you know, he couldn't even hold a pen in his hand in the beginning! Afterwards he worked on the computer and did all the designs, without training, and gave it straight to the carpenter! Everyone who sees it says that it's really, really special. It obviously makes me feel very connected to the *yishuv*. There's a *minhag* [custom] to write a Torah when someone dies. We did the opposite. We had a Torah written for David's health when he was sick."

Miriam pointed to the other photographs. "There are two mantles. A white one for holidays, and the verse for this one is about making God king. The second one is dark blue, with an embroidered tree. Its verse says 'you choose life in order that you and your children will live forever,' like the olive tree which is very strong and stays for many years."

"What did David do during the time he lived in Nofharim?"

Miriam's voice softened with love and admiration. "For fourteen years he walked with walker or wheelchair. Yet he wrote articles to Clinton, and the Prime Minister, and he learnt Torah. He was very busy, all the time! Sometimes I didn't even talk to him a whole day not to bother him because he was so busy. He wrote letters to the rabbi... he was so busy with everything!"

"Can you tell me more about your connection to this place, to this land?"

"I wasn't born here. I came at age three, at a very historic moment - Sept 1st 1939!" Miriam is proud of this fact. "That's the day WWII began. I came from Germany, with my parents and sister. We lived almost the entire time in Jerusalem. But from age seventeen, I wasn't in the city anymore. I was always in a *kfar* [village]. I first left for my studies, to be a nursery teacher. After we got married we were in a *moshav* in the Negev – agricultural people established it and the children of other *moshavim*, and we lived there for five years. After there was a problem with the school for my daughter, and we left. Also when we lived near Ashkelon it was outside of the city. I've always had a connection and sentimentality to the *adamah* [ground, earth]. We have garden outside, with trees, and I take care of it a bit. For me, a house of stone is amazing. It was my dream before. And thank God, I have it now! But also, the houses are like that

in Ramallah too. You have to have them built that way here because of the cold winter... Basically, my connection to the land is most expressed through my decision to come and live here. I can't understand how kids grow up in the city today. Jerusalem is not the same now as it was. Jerusalem was smaller, with a totally different social environment."

I was interested in Miriam's personal history and was wondering how her experiences of fleeing Europe during the eve of WWII had an effect on her sense of belonging in a Jewish homeland. I asked her why her parents left Germany in 1939.

"They wanted to leave earlier actually, but my father was the director of something and it was hard for our family to leave. At Christalnacht, he was arrested and imprisoned. And as soon as he was let out, we immediately left. It seems like everything was already ready. We left for Denmark, to be with my father's sister. We were there for ten months, and then we received a certificate to make *aliyah*."

"So you remember 1948 [when Israel was established]!"

"I remember before! The British made so many problems! There was a story. We lived on the second floor of building in the center of the city, beside the big market. The people who lived beside us sold watermelons. Every evening at seven there was curfew. But, the British allowed one person to guard the watermelons. One night there was knocking. My father got and went to the door. The British soldiers said, 'Why did you go to the balcony?' My father said, 'I wasn't there! I was in bed, in my pajamas!' They asked, 'Why did you speak with people?' He said to them, 'I didn't speak to anyone!' All the time they would make scandals like that. Later, we went to Netanya for my father's. That was during 1948. Before the independence war the British would

make such a *balagan* [chaos, mess]. In the middle of the night they would come into the house and look at things. They had sticks, and they would just hit things. We were three young girls. We were scared. I don't remember the hard things during the war because we weren't in Jerusalem. There it was really hard. No food or water. But in Netanya we barely felt it. We were with our parents. Later we returned to Jerusalem."

"And how did you become involved and interested in the settlements?"

"It started with Yamit [the Israeli town established in the Sinai Peninsula and evacuated in 1982 by Israeli forces when the area was returned to Egypt as part of the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty]. They also sent the people out like in Gush Katif. It was awful. It was about thirty years ago. Many people went out to help them. We too wanted to go, but we couldn't because my mother was sick. We didn't want to be so far from her. Then there was Gush Emunim – the started the movement to bring people here. We gave them money. A little, but not a lot. Every body gave a bit. David always went to help when he had time. We always wanted to go. Our son got married and he moved to a *yishuv* near Shiloh, not far from here. During Sukkot he came to us to visit, and there was a fight between him and my husband. David was always angry that American Jews would send money but not actually come and help. And so my son said, 'What are you doing? You also give money and don't go!' That was Shabbat. In Tel Aviv there was a fair, and people came to learn about the different, new *yishuvim* in this area – the ones that were already established. It was 1985. We went there. We went from table to table. We knew many of the names, but we wanted to know more details. That was in Sukkot. Throughout the winter we went to different *yishuvim* to see them. In the end, we decided we wanted to live in Nofharim."

Miriam thought a bit about what she had just said and corrected herself, "Actually, David didn't want it. He wanted to live near Shiloh, where everything was very far. But I said, 'We are old, everything is very far, if we want things, we will have to travel far.' Nofharim, however, is really much closer to Jerusalem and therefore easier. We also knew that I wanted to work, yet I didn't want to work somewhere to where I had to travel, and in Nofharim there is office work at regional council office... David said, 'What? Nofharim is like a suburb of Jerusalem! So we won't have done anything if we go there!' He wanted to do something harder. Later, we saw how lucky it was that we chose here and not somewhere further. He knew I didn't like traveling so we chose here."

"Bu in the end, you had to travel every day for years?"

"You're right. I did. I got used to it. That's the way we *do* get used to things."

"Can you tell me more about why it was important for you to come and live here?"

"God gave us the land, from north to south, from east to west. We came to Nofharim when it was six years old – not the beginning, but almost. We thought it was really important to come to build. We have the merit to have *Eretz Yisrael* – so we have to *do*, we can't just talk. My ideology is very religious. If my parents were alive I think they would be very proud that we are here."

"Would they be scared, do you think?"

"They might be also scared, like everyone who doesn't live here. People are scared because they don't really see how life is inside the *yishuv*, and they don't see how it is beautiful. They just think about the Arabs beside us. In the beginning of the Intifada, *miliuim* [soldiers on reserve duty] were in Nofharim. On Shabbat they were

invited to eat at different families for the main meals. They noticed that these people don't have horns, that you can talk to them – that they build, they have homes, they are intelligent... Very normal. And there are all sorts of people here. It was very important for the *miluim* to see this. Many of them kept the connections with the families who hosted them, even the *miluim* who are *chilonim* [secular]. It's very important that people see how we live here."

"What do you hope will happen? What is that image for you?"

"I hope that one day it will be filed with Jews. When we came, we traveled through other roads... we weren't scared. People went to doctors and car garages – all in Ramallah. When we came, the Intifada had already begun, so it wasn't good to do that. I think it is possible to have a good connection and to live in peace... there were years when it was like that, when we were neighbors and friends. Also in the Galilee it is like that. Thank God I'm not in the government and I don't have to decide. I think it is possible to live together."

"So you have hope?"

"Yes. But, it would be better that they go because it's our land. But, if they stay, if the government... I don't know. I think there could be a better situation where we could get along. Obviously not everyone loves everyone. I pray that God will give *sehel* [intellect] to the government to do the right thing. The problem is that in the Tanakh it is written that there will be a day when the whole world will come to Israel at the time of the Messiah. It will happen at some point, but the problem is that we don't know when. Artists draw pictures, and there are images in the prophecies of the prophets. But, I don't have enough imagination to draw this in my head. I mostly hope. If not us, then

maybe it will happen for our children or grandchildren. People say ‘It will be ok in the future.’ But I say ‘No! It will be *better!*’ Because right now it’s good! There are a lot of good things nowadays. When my husband was in such a bad situation, people asked how I could see good, but I told them, ‘The sky is blue. There are birds. I can breathe through my nose. Thank God, I have children, grandchildren, and friends!’ I try to see the good. I can’t always see it when I’m alone without David. During the holidays it’s really hard. I just can’t stay here alone, even with the children. It’s really hard. But I continue. I watch the news once a day.” Miriam said this as though it was a bad vice. “But not more than that! My daughter says she doesn’t want to hear the news. But I say, ‘You can’t live in this world and ignore it!’”

I chatted with Miriam for a little longer and took pictures with her. Just as I was leaving, she added: “If you had spoken with David, if you had spoken with him about politics... he was like fire about these issues.” I tried to imagine what it would have been like to speak with Miriam while David sat on the couch beside us. From Miriam’s descriptions, I presume that David would have interjected often and passionately, as Dror did in my second conversation with Shoshana. He may have declared in a louder voice the strong ideologies that are part of the foundational structure of their lives in Nofharim, and he may have expressed more aggressive sentiments towards those who disagree with these religious and political ideals. I wondered to what extent Miriam’s softness is an attribute of her femininity, or, if perhaps she is more gentle than her late husband because she was simply the more sensitive one in her marriage.

Nurit

Nurit is different from the other women because she did not choose to join the community. Rather, she married into it, in a way, by marrying a widower who is one of

the founding members. She maintains one foot outside Nofharim's social sphere, and her more distant perspectives are therefore enlightening. Her insider-outsider balancing act is reflected in the way Nurit continuously weaves back and forth between close and sympathetic thoughts, and an external, critical view of Nofharim's community. While she feels comfortable to a certain degree, she also repeatedly returns to the topic of her unease, describing the physical, religious, and cultural ways in which she feels that she doesn't fully fit in. Nurit is thus more perceptive of Nofharim's messier, less perfect features. She has fewer stakes in maintaining an imagination of tranquility and harmony. Her hectic routines are geographically located well beyond Nofharim's borders, and therefore, negatively charged events do not have to be smoothed under a carpet of intentionally disregarded memories. As opposed to busy mothers who are implicated in multiple chapters and sections of Nofharim's community life, Nurit's packed schedule won't be emotionally or even practically affected by the presence of tainted social energies.

At first, Nofharim was a small, satellite locale in Nurit's eyes. Unlike others, she mentions the claustrophobia of the fence. (And even for Nurit, a sense of space beyond this physical enclosure is outside her imagination.) With time, however, Nurit began to discern the thick web of connections between Nofharim and the larger Israeli modern orthodox world. In this regard, she progressively charts Nofharim as standard and ordinary, as a social suburb of Jerusalem, and thus as normal.

At the same time, Nurit also describes the growing generational gap between religious Israelis her age, and the young couples and families that are flowing into settlements such as Nofharim. Across the modern religious world, she says, people are

becoming more rigid in their religious practices, and more narrow in their acceptance of authority and opinion. Her narrative about a social crisis amongst Nofharim's residents demonstrates this increase in religious strictness, and also places Nofharim as just one more community with its dramas, conflicts, and eccentric personalities.

It's 8am when we meet to talk. Nurit sits across from me at her kitchen table, dressed in a long, thick purple dressing gown. The strong morning sun is pushing its light through the half-open shutters. Both of us hold hot mugs of fresh coffee in our hands and the aroma swirls up into our nostrils.

Nurit is in her sixties. Her dark eyes are full of life, and though she is quite short, her energy is boundless. Her cropped gray hair is styled and her clothes are always prim and fashionable – more formal and business-like than other women in Nofharim. She speaks English well, though at certain points in our conversation, especially where she became excited, she used Hebrew terms. I have translated some of them, and others I have left because the translation does not carry the full meaning.

Nurit works as a mediator, and is now doing her MA part-time in conflict management. She is also taking courses in law, which, she says, are very helpful for her mediation practice. If that wasn't enough, she is also the manager of marketing at a museum in Jerusalem. Her parents were holocaust survivors, and she was born in Cyprus on their way to Israel as refugees after the war.

"When did you first come to Nofharim?"

"About ten and a half years ago. I married Yehudah, who established this place. We started coming here about ten years ago, but we didn't live here all the time." When

they met, Nurit lived in Jerusalem and Yehudah lived in Nofharim, and so when they got married, they constantly traveled back and forth.

“Do you remember the first time you visited?”

Nurit dug deep into her memories, but responded promptly, lingering over the recollections, “Yes, it was at night. We were driving along the road and he showed me the light on top of the hill. It seemed like something far and vague because you don’t see all the *yishuv*. It seemed to be a small place. I was curious. It was at night and it was dark when we came that first time, so I didn’t really see the place. That was before we got married. Then, the first Shabbat I was here, I went around to see the place and I was surprised how small it is, how limited I was inside the fence. Wherever I went, there was a fence. But after a while, I also got a different perspective. On Shabbat, when I went to *shul*, I was surprised to see people I knew from Jerusalem. ‘What are you doing here?’ I asked. ‘I have a daughter, a son...’ they said. I was surprised to see that people from other social circles, including my circles in Jerusalem, come here, often because they have children who have moved here. I realized that Nofharim is not so isolated, but rather connected to the world.”

Nurit summarized, “In the beginning it was surprising to me, and challenging. When I came it was a small place. I’m an open person, and I’m not used to living in small places. But suddenly, the fact that Nofharim is not isolated, and that people come here – people from my milieu... For me, this connected Nofharim to the world. A little later, I found a couple of friends who were living here, and we became really close.”

Again, returned to her initial experiences, “I didn’t like living here because it was very difficult for me. I felt like I was torn from the city. My milieu is so different. First of

all, they're not young people. Many of my friends are in their sixties. Here, most people are younger. There are not a lot of people here my age. People here also dress differently. Even though I hold right-wing opinions, and the way I think about politics is not that different, I didn't feel myself belonging to this community. I think it's really important to be here. But they think and dress differently. I didn't feel that I belonged socially. But then suddenly, it was surprising to see people from Jerusalem."

Nurit gestured through these reflective responses. I watched as she tried to articulate her rather complex feelings about living in Nofharim. On the one hand, it was clearly challenging for her socially because it was *not* an urban center, and because she has a rich social life in Jerusalem. But on the other hand, each time she expressed these negative sentiments, she again came back to her surprising discovery that Nofharim is not as socially isolated as she had thought.

She continued: "It was surprising to see people from Jerusalem for two reasons. First, I was surprised because of the distance. I thought of Nofharim as something 'there,' apart and distant. Second, I also thought that Nofharim would be a closed group. I was therefore surprised to find out that people who live in town, who are not extremists in their opinions, also have connections here. Meeting them blurred my image of Nofharim. It brought it closer to me." Nurit paused for a breath, but quickly added, "A third point is that there are a lot of people from the academic world who live in Nofharim. That too blurred the extremist stereotype."

She thought for another moment, yet not for long. Once again, she returned to the challenging aspects of her experiences: "But still, I felt then [at the beginning], and for a long time after, that I dress differently. Everyone here dresses in a certain way. They all

wear long skirts, they all buy in the same stores, they're all with small hats... When I used to come to *shul*, dressed differently (which I would define as classical European style and with large hats), they would always look, or even say something. There is a woman who would often comment on my hats. 'Ah, very interesting to look at your hats!' she would say to me. She didn't mean it to be negative, but to say that it was different. But it sharpened the feeling that we dress differently, and also later, that we think differently. For example, I think differently about religious issues, about the place of women in Judaism, about feminism. The women here are more..." Nurit couldn't describe it. "You see, I am a member of Kolech [an influential Orthodox feminist organization in Israel], and here, they are not. They distance themselves from that. Another example – almost all the women here cover their hair, and I don't. Most of the women here, they don't wear pants. With regards to women's issues, they wouldn't allow women to read the Torah [in the synagogue service], and they don't like the ideas of Kolech, that Kolech is fighting for women's right in Judaism and religion. There are women here who study Talmud. There is one woman who studies at Matan [a religious women's institution in Jerusalem where women are trained in Jewish texts that are traditionally exclusive to male learning]. She has been studying Gemara for a few years already. She wanted to join a Gemara *shiur* [class] here in Nofharim for men. She was allowed to sit on the side, but just to listen and not participate." Nurit's voice rose a pitch, "In Jerusalem I *participate* in the Gemara *shiur* that I'm part of! Other things? Sometimes people here express very extreme political opinions and it was difficult for me to hear it in the beginning. It was also very difficult for me to get used to the distance

from town, because you don't have services here. They're very limited. For everything, you have to go to town. People learn how to live with it, but for me, it was very difficult."

I glanced out the window for a moment and noticed a beautiful bird that I hadn't seen before. I pointed to it. "Yeah," Nurit responded with an appreciative smile, "It's really nice to live on a low floor. You see things like that."

Nurit turned back to me and continued her attempt to pinpoint the essence of both the positive and negative parts of her life in Nofharim – a potpourri of issues, involving social, religious, political, and geographic differences and similarities.

"There are other religious differences. For example, it's very difficult for me in the *shul*. Not only are women sitting on the second floor, separated, with a different entrance, high up (which already makes it hard to see and hear), but they also cover the railings with a curtain, and they don't like the idea of lifting the curtain either. It is so rigid."

Nurit returned to the subject of her social challenges, and elaborated further: "When I came, I felt that in the *yishuv* they also looked at me as someone who came from the outside and doesn't belong. I felt that there was a feeling of togetherness... the way it happens in a kibbutz and other places where people live together. I got this feeling that they view themselves very positively, they think well about themselves. You know how on Shabbat, if someone needs a place for guests, they ask and people give their empty apartments. In the beginning, I gave my apartment for Shabbat to a family I didn't even know. And a woman said to me, '*Kol hakavod* [good job]!' 'Why *kol hakavod*?' I asked her. What's so special? And she said 'You know here, people are so open. It's not like in the city.' And I said to her that I was surprised. Do they think of

themselves as superior?! Better? Excuse me!” Nurit’s voice rose again. “I made three Bar Mitzvahs in city, and I have no one but friends in Jerusalem, and how do you think I hosted all my family for Shabbat? People in the city don’t have apartments to give! *They give rooms in their apartments! Ma’aseh gadol yoter* [an even bigger deed]!”

“Do you think people in Nofharim deserve to think well about themselves?”

“Yes. There is a lot of *g’milut hassadim* [acts of kindness] and mutual help. Yes. I never – almost never – heard gossiping... though you know what, I’m also not so in...” Nurit reflected again on my question. “Really, in general, among religious people, it’s like that. In town it’s this way too.”

“Are there aspects of Nofharim that you do admire?”

“I appreciate very much the children and the youth. They are full life, full of values, *ezra hadadit* [collective responsibility], values about the importance of *eretz yisrael*... very nice values. But...” Again, there was a flip side. “I was shocked to see how closed they are in the way they think about religious authority, or in other such things. There was a family here that divorced, and everyone took a side – they all blamed the woman because she wants to divorce, while the man became a *tzaddik* [righteous person]. But that wasn’t the only thing in the story. There were other circumstances too. It was very difficult for people to accept the divorce, and later, there was a fight because they thought a man (who was connected to the whole story) didn’t respect the *rav* [rabbi]. The community fought this man terribly – the whole *yishuv*. Most went out of their way to fight for the *rav*. It was crazy. Certain ideas that are current in the religious society, *hardali* [strict religious, literally from the root of the Hebrew word for mustard] society, are especially strong in the settlements, more than in the city. Many are fundamentalists

in the way they think about *rabbanim* [rabbis]. For them, one can't say anything against the *rav*. And there's no proportion. This whole story gave me a feeling that I really don't belong here. I think what happens here is because they belong to the *hardali* group, it is felt stronger in *yishuvim*. And also, because of the age – they are younger. People who are sixty-plus are much more moderate. And especially in town, where there is more pluralism, acceptance of other ways of thinking, where you find all kinds of attitudes. For example, in the city, if you don't like one way, you can always choose another synagogue, and you can switch sides. While here, it's one way."

She reflected, "I'm not sure this is typical of Nofharim. It's typical of closed places, also kibbutzim. The religious aspect adds a lot to it, but it's very typical to small locations. And it's also the age. We come from a different era. Yehudah and I, we are not as extreme. People our age don't accept *rabbanim* as holy authority. For us, one can hold a different opinion. Here, it's a young generation. For them, the *rav* is the last authority before God!" Nurit uttered this last statement with frustrated enthusiasm. "It's also hard for Yehudah. Very hard," she said sadly.

"Do you feel that you belong to the community in terms of your political views?"

"I heard very extreme opinions, and these I didn't like. Not all think that way, but there are some. Overall, though, people's political views here don't disturb me."

"And how do you feel about the Arabs?"

"People aren't what they are thought to be, that they'll do crazy things. It's not true. They're not violent. I don't hate them, and I'm not afraid. Just the opposite – sometimes we gave them a ride. Though now we're afraid. It all depends on the circumstances. When I'm not alone in the car, for example, I might... Also, with Yehudah, they had very

good relations. It stopped in the past few years because of the Intifada. I think Israel, a long time earlier, should have made a law that they belong here, that they be citizens. They should have taken over the whole Yehuda Ve'Shomron. The state doesn't have the courage to do what should be done."

"Were you ever afraid to live here?"

"I'm never afraid. Not at all." Nurit thought about this a little more. "There was, in the beginning... there was one Shabbat that they said someone might have entered the *yishuv* and that everyone should lock their doors and darken their houses. I felt a little scared. But, just to compare to how I feel in town: when I walk home from the center of town, to my neighborhood, I have to pass through Gan Hapalmon. There I'm very much afraid. It's full of Arabs and it happened twice that an Arab tried to stab a Jew, and stones have been thrown... And this is in the middle of the city! I'm not afraid here. I know that the dangers are in the middle of the city, and here there is more separation between Jews and Arabs. Here, it's closed all the way around and defended, while in the city they [Arabs] are all around." Again, though, there was the other side of the coin. "But here I feel so claustrophobic. I stopped walking here. I see a fence everywhere." She gestured towards herself with her hands, physically expressing her feeling of being closed-in. She added, "In the city I feel open."

"So do you like the rural aspects of living here at all? The large views and fresh air?"

"I don't know if I can use the term 'like.' It's nice to live in open space, with the trees, the quiet. But there isn't anything I like that I can't give up. There is nothing here that would be difficult for me to give up. I have a few friends, but the close friends we

had left. Their children and friends wouldn't come to visit because they were scared, and it was far. They also work in Jerusalem so that was inconvenient for them. And so they left. This family was one of the five families that established Nofharim. While their children were here, they were very attached, but the moment the children left, they felt that they don't have what to do here. I have good relations with people here, but none became very, very close to me in a way that I would feel it would be difficult to leave. I want to add that maybe we should take into account the stage in life. People here have their families; their married children live around – even if they live outside the *yishuv*, when they come for Shabbat, the families are together. And so, there isn't much time for others."

Nurit explained the challenges of creating a social space for herself in such a family-oriented environment. "In town, you can invite someone for a meal, but here, you have to invite them for the whole Shabbat. I tried a few times to invite couples for Shabbat, but most wouldn't come – some because they didn't want to be here for a whole Shabbat, and others for many reasons."

She breathed deeply and summarized the entire situation, "I am here because of Yehudah, and only because of Yehudah."

"But you also think it's important to live for political and ideological reasons, right?"
"Politically, I do feel that it's important to be here, but there are a lot of people who want to be here. I think it's also important to go to live in French Hill, and even Bakka [neighborhoods in Jerusalem]. It is very important to be here according to my political opinions, but since there are other aspects of life, like children and friends, and studies,

and filling my life with other things – since there are others who want to be here, I feel that I can be quiet and go back to the city.”

“If this was forty years ago, and you were at a very different stage in your life, would you have considered coming here?”

“Yes. After ‘67 a lot of my friends went to new places to build... and if I had had a partner who had been interested in such an endeavor... yes, that was a time I would have done such a thing. It’s different if you come with a family, to raise children. You feel you belong. But, I don’t feel I belong...”

Again, Nurit couldn’t speak about the social aspects without also explaining the religious issues.

“The religious aspect is too pressing here as well. In Jerusalem, we *daven* [pray, in Yiddish] in a congregation where men and women sit on the same level. The separation is sitting sections, and there is a curtain – not heavy, but one that you can see through. And also, women give *drashot* [sermons]. You understand the difference? What bothers me here is that I don’t feel that I belong, and from two perspectives: religious, and social. The religious – I told you. The social – for example, I go to *shul*. I try to go every Shabbat. In Jerusalem, I would never skip. Why? Because people gather in a *shul* in the city, and you feel like you belong to the congregation. It’s a group of friends. You choose your *shul* according to who you feel good with. Here, there is one *shul*. It is the central *shul* of the *yishuv* and almost everyone goes there, except for the Sephardim and Teimanim [Yemenite Jews]. When I go, everybody is there, but I don’t meet friends. It’s not a group of friends. There are a lot of people I don’t know... you know what I mean? In the city, when I go to *shul*, it also has the social aspect. I love to meet my

friends. But here, I meet everybody. It's only acquaintances. This mix has is connected to the intellectual level as well. Here in the *shul*, you meet all types of people. In Jerusalem, all our friends are in the same intellectual circles."

Nurit commented that I had probably not heard such criticism about the *yishuv*. Most people, she thinks, are careful to maintain a good appearance and present Nofharim as a successful, happy place. I reflected, and recognized that she was right to some degree, but I also noted that many women are in fact quite happy here. Nurit's situation and story are dramatically different from those of most women in the *yishuv*.

Nurit agreed, but asked, "Nobody talked about how *mishige* [crazy, in Yiddish] the community became about the couple who divorced?"

"No."

"You need to speak with Yoheved [another resident of Nofharim who is now in her sixties]. She and her husband are idealists, and they came here out of a strong ideological will. They want to live here, but they were so frustrated with the whole story that went on about the divorce."

Nurit did not want me to record more about the divorce episode. Apparently it is a source of many negative emotions in the community. To change the subject, I asked her to elaborate on the contrast between fashion styles in the city and in Nofharim.

"In the beginning, when I came to the *shul* here, I came with hats that I used to wear in the city. I have to say that I didn't change my style even later – but at that time, the [urban] style was very formal – classical, suits, elegant hats. But here people would *look!*" Nurit chuckled as she repeated the story. This was clearly an encounter that was significant for her since she was defined by another person as different from the other

women in the community. “So one woman says to me ‘You’re hats, they’re always extravagant! Crazy hats you’ve got!’ Today they tell me that I dress in a very ‘unique way.’ They don’t say anything negative to me though. In groups like this, they all the dress the same. Here, everyone has these pieces of material, one over the other... everyone in the same style. Now they have this new fashion with lace over the shirt, or short sleeves on top of long sleeves. Some women – they go into a store and look for things that their friend has. I’m the opposite! People who come from *da’ati leumi* [national religious] communities, from other places – they dress in ways that are similar to the way I do. In university, women are dressed modern, and you wouldn’t know if a woman is religious or not. She doesn’t cover her hair, but she doesn’t wear plants. She wears skirts up to here.” Nurit stood up and pointed to her knee. “What I’m trying to say is that all my friends are with skirts up to the knee. I walk around Bar Ilan University, and with the girls, sometimes I’m shocked that they’re religious, while some you can tell immediately, even from a distance. Here, however, there is a lot of talk about *tzniut* [modesty]. Today, people start a new fashion because they want to dress more modestly, but later, they don’t ask themselves questions. It becomes a sign of identification. Why does everyone look the same? You can be more creative! You can be modest and dress totally different! It’s a sociological effect. In groups, in kibbutzim – it’s always the same. I don’t want to be part of a group in such a way. I belong to the *da’ati leumi* [national religious] movement, but not in a way that is narrow, as I feel here.”

Yehudah walked into the kitchen and cut-in: “When I was in university, religious and non-religious women dressed the same way. So religious girls – they used to sit

and knit *kippot* [skullcaps] so that the boys knew that they were religious. That was their sign that they were religious!" He laughed. "Religious boys went with *kippot*, and religious girls knitted *kippot!*"

Nurit ignored his interjection and carried on, "This is what happens to groups who have to strengthen themselves. A few years ago, someone wrote a book – a young journalist who's father was a well-known *rav* from the *daati leumi* [national religious] movement. He studied in *yeshivot*. He wrote a book about some of the negative aspects of being in a dorm. People in the religious world were so much against it! 'How could he?' they asked. I was very curious to read the book, and also my friends in the city wanted to read it. But when someone here borrowed the book from me, he took it in a way that people wouldn't see." She feigned his actions, slipping an imaginary book under a large imaginary coat. "He read it, but in hiding. Why?! Because people were angry. There are a few people in Nofharim who are more open. When I came to the university and I held this book – actually, another book that this same journalist wrote – a guy who studies with me from another *yishuv* saw the book. He's wearing *tzitzit bahutz* [fringes outside of his pants, often associated with more religious opinions and lifestyles], and he sees himself as very open minded, and not rigid. So he sees the book and he says 'Ichs!' This is such narrow-minded thinking! We can't criticize ourselves? This is what happened with the couple who divorced."

Nurit decided to tell me the story: "It was five years ago. The couple lived here for a long time. They had eleven children. A few years before, the father went bankrupt. The economic situation for the family was bad, but to add to this, one day he collapsed in the *shul* because he had a stroke. He was saved, but in the hospital for a long time..."

People had to help. He had a friend with whom he used to study, and this friend also made his living from counseling people.” Yehudah interjected with a critical comment about this counselor-friend. Nurit continued, “The moment this all happened, he got in to help. He approached the *rav* and said ‘Let’s work something out to help him’. Through time, the wife told him about difficulties between her and her husband. So he started to give her counseling, to be assertive. One Friday night, they say, she invited the police. She claimed there was violence – not physical but emotional violence, something about the way he spoke to her. One day she decided to leave and file for divorce. So the whole *yishuv* was a boiling soup. ‘How could she do such a thing?! He’s sick! Who is she to do this? It’s all because of the counselor! We must throw him out of the *yishuv*!’ They told him not to counsel people who live in the *yishuv*, but after she left, she continued to call him. He claimed that she’s no longer in the *yishuv*, but they said that she does belong to the *yishuv*. It was a big argument. They told people not to be in touch with him, not to pray with him, etc. He didn’t want to leave, so he sued the *rav*. He claimed, ‘The *rav* is breaking my living. He doesn’t let me take clients here. They talk about me, and drive people away from me. The *rav* doesn’t let me join the *minyan*, so I have to go to another *yishuv* nearby. This is all costing me...’ He sued the *rav* for a one million shekel! WOW!!” Nurit imitated the reaction amongst the residents of the *yishuv*. “How could he? To the *rav*!” They sent letter and more letters, but he’s really stubborn so he wouldn’t leave. And the community couldn’t forgive him, so for two years they fought him, but in such a way! Someone burned his car. They excluded the family. They directed people not to talk to his family or to give them a ride. They threw the kids out of Bnai Akiva [the youth movement]. They fought anyone who was in touch with him. They

put signs up that he is not respecting a *talmid haham* [literally ‘wise student’ but used to refer to a great scholar]. One night, there was a general assembly in the *shul*. The *rav* spoke and everyone came, and he said to everyone, that we will not touch him because he had gone to the police, but instead to surround him and shout. And so, from 9:30 to 10pm they should yell. A lot of people went, but a lot didn’t feel good with it so they couldn’t do it. Every night for months they used to stand there beneath his house, and they would dance and blow the *shofarot* [ram horns], and bang pots, and create *balagan* [disorder]. Some people sat beside his door and said *tehilim* [psalms]. They threw eggs. It went on for at least a year. They were stubborn and wouldn’t give up. In the end, he left. Ultimately, they felt that this man was a threat because he was responsible for ‘breaking’ a family. But the way I see it, those who went to him were already broken families.”

It was clear that Nurit agreed with neither side, but disagreed with the way the whole situation was handled.

“People are so caught up in keeping a nice image. It’s all about the *image!* They see divorce as the breaking of a family, and that is threatening because they want everyone to be whole here. You need to speak to others. There are also people who were so angry about the whole thing.”

Again Nurit returned to the other side of the coin, referring to the younger members of the *yishuv*. “But there is a lot of idealism, and I also think it’s partially a generational matter.”

Shlomit

Shlomit and her family moved to Nofharim several decades ago, in the early years, right after the community was first established. Nofharim offered her multiple conditions

that she desired, but to which she did not have access in Jerusalem, or in other towns in Israel during that period. In Nofharim, she could live amongst a religious community, as she dreamed, and she had the quiet, peaceful, rural life she valued. She could raise her kids in a middle-class neighborhood, where they were accepted despite their dark skin. In Jerusalem, she and her husband would have had to stay in a lower class, non-religious area, where neighbors repaired their cars on Shabbat, and where values and behaviors of which she did not approve were modeled daily.

Times have changed since Shlomit left Jerusalem, and today racial and class discrimination is barely felt. But when she and her husband Avraham looked for a better environment for their growing family, they could not afford or were not permitted to purchase apartments in more religious, Ashkenazi, middle class areas in Jerusalem, or even in the suburbs. Only a new, blooming community on the geographic and psychic fringe of Israeli development, like Nofharim, offered them the opportunities they sought despite their lower economic status and Yemenite-Spanish origins.

Like some of the other women in Nofharim with whom I spoke, Shlomit's relocation to this community is imagined as part of the continuation of her family's hasty escape from Yemen in the early 1950s. For centuries, her ancestors in Yemen yearned to dwell in this land; for Shlomit, it is the historic, spiritual, and therefore natural home of Jewish people. Furthermore, persecution is something Shlomit learned intimately from her mother's milk. Here, in the God-given land of Israel, she is finally secure. She feels that she has nowhere else to go in the world, and therefore those who oppose her residence threaten her very sense of personal, familial, cultural, and religious safety.

Shlomit is another woman who represents contrasting emotions towards the Arab population. On a large scale, Shlomit is angry with those who engage in acts of terror. She is frustrated with the Arabs who fight against her claim to this geography. These are people she doesn't know, whose actions are seen as unpredictable and destructive. However, on a personal level, Shlomit doesn't hate nor want a continuation of such conflict. In fact, she dreams of establishing a medical center of coexistence, where she could treat Arab patients from Ramallah and teach Arab practitioners, sharing her knowledge and skills.

The funny thing about Shlomit is that though she moved to Nofharim for the community, she keeps herself at an arm's length distance. As she says, she struggles to balance her professional role as an alternative health care practitioner and massage therapist, with intimate social relations, so she simply withdraws from the possibilities of close relationships. She is vivacious, gregarious, and boasts a large lipsticked mouth that is usually upturned in a smile, yet Shlomit doesn't seek social intimacy amongst the other women in Nofharim. Though one could speculate otherwise, I think that the social distancing is reflective of her distinctive character, and not the result of racial difference or exclusion. Shlomit's daughter, for example, who lives downstairs with her own Yemenite husband and new family, doesn't seem to demonstrate her mother's social remoteness. A Tunisian woman with whom I spoke is also closely involved in her active circle of Nofharim friends.

It was challenging to find a time to speak with Shlomit at length since she is so preoccupied with a steady stream of patients. One evening, finally, she told me to come

right on over. In five minutes, she'd be available. "Would that work?" she asked distractedly.

Like previous, shorter visits, I entered Shlomit's home and found her bustling in multiple directions. Shlomit's round-faced, cheerful, retired husband, in direct contrast to his wife, sat relaxed in a comfy chair across from the kitchen area, a dish-towel in hand. The strong scent of cumin permeated the entire first floor of their cozy house, adorned with Middle Eastern styled hangings and trimmings.

"What's cooking?" I asked.

Shlomit pointed to her husband, "He's the chef around here." I had heard that Avraham made *hilbeh*, a Yemenite dip-like dish from fenugreek seeds, and I inquired.

"You know about *hilbeh*!?" Avraham beamed with delighted surprise.

"I love it."

"Give her a container!" Shlomit ordered Avraham, who was already in the act. While Avraham prepared me a take-home package, we talked about the fact that he makes Yemenite *hilbeh*, despite his Spanish Jewish origins. Then he asked about what I was doing in Nofharim.

"It's really interesting that you're doing research here. You say that people outside of Israel don't know what it's like here, but I'll tell you, *Israelis* have no clue! All our cousins, who live south of Tel Aviv, and up north – they have no idea! When we first built this house, my cousin came to help for a day, and he asked me, 'How much is the country paying you?' 'Paying me?!" I asked, confused. 'Yes, isn't the country paying you to live here?' Paying me to live here?!" Avraham exclaimed loudly. "They think it's wild

and war out here. They won't come, even for *simhas* [celebrations]. They think we live in tents, and that there's constant shooting." Avraham was shaking his head in dismay.

Meanwhile, Shlomit had disappeared somewhere, and now came hurrying back into the kitchen to make herself some tea. She offered me tea as well, explaining that just cinnamon and honey makes for a very healthy drink. And the cinnamon, she further added, makes you digest the honey in a way that you won't gain the calories.

On our way towards her office, carefully holding our hot, brimming mugs, Shlomit stopped to point out a large portrait high up on the wall. In the center was a tiny female face, and all around it was a confusing profusion of yellow, red, pink, and gold adornments. To me, it looked like a bride in India. "This is my daughter at her wedding, in the traditional Yeminite headdress," Shlomit said proudly, knowing full well that I was gaping in astonishment.

Finally, after all the gastronomically-related interruptions, we seated ourselves quietly in Shlomit's office, between two massage tables, two glass cabinets filled with ointments, and numerous certificates, diplomas, and anatomy charts. The uncommon dark wood ceiling and the thick stone walls added to the sense that we had gone somewhere outside Shlomit's home.

"So how did you first come to Nofharim?" I asked, laughing a bit that we had finally succeeded in getting down to the subject. Shlomit was in good spirits too.

"I came to Nofharim because I want religious education for my children, and I knew that in the city there are things that are not good, and that my children would see bad things. It's better to live in a *yishuv*. I grew up in a *moshav*, with a garden, and close to my school. So we looked for a *yishuv* close to Jerusalem, especially since my parents

had a house in Jerusalem. It was hard in the beginning. We weren't used to the climate, to the colder winter. That was really hard. There was snow, even, and the houses weren't suitable for this weather. It was a hard period. We didn't have water all the time, or electricity. The Arabs gave us electricity and water, but there were often breaks. It was so cold. No insulation. Did you know, they brought the houses from Yamit [the Israeli settlement in the Sinai peninsula that was evacuated and handed over to Egypt as part of the 1979 peace treaty]? The houses were appropriate to the climate *there*!"

I asked about their experiences as one of the first non-Ashkenazi families.

"Was it hard that we weren't Ashkenazi? No. We have different customs, more sensitivity, more of a sense of social connection... not so cold. It didn't bother me that people around me were cold. That's their problem. I'm not going to change the world. And we were in a relatively good society."

"Is it different now, here in Nofharim?"

"I wouldn't say so. There are a lot more people, but I'm more busy!" Shlomit smiled. "I used to go with the kids to the school. We brought up our children with the same mentality, Ashkenazim and Sephardim. I'm always friends with everyone, but also, I like to keep my boundaries. People here, they walk right into each other's houses, eat at each other's tables... But I don't let people just enter my soul. It can be dangerous! Because I'm a therapist, we have to maintain discretion in the profession, so we can't just sit with people like that. I study and work. I have no time. I have maybe two friends in the *yishuv*. I don't go to sit, to chat. No. I've always been more private. Also my daughter, she's like that. I don't like a *shuk* [marketplace]. It's a small place, so you

don't need to do striptease your emotions in the middle of things. You need to protect your privacy."

I hadn't expected such private inclinations from such a busy, talkative, outgoing woman. "Have you always felt this way?" I asked.

"I've always been like this. People come to me with medical problems, even psychological issues, and I do all kinds of treatment, but outside, I don't speak to them. People come to me from all over the country. When people come for medical issues, I don't talk to them in the street. Only when people come into this room do I engage with them. It's not hard. It's about trust. When I see them on the street, in that setting, I forget the entire connection."

Our conversation shifted back to their first few years in Nofharim.

Shlomit's face brightened as she dug into her memories, "We would buy things, like vegetable and even shoes, in Ramallah. It was fun because we are somewhat far from Jerusalem, but there were stores even cheaper than Jerusalem! We could just go down, shop, walk around, go to the medical clinic..."

Suddenly, the rapture disappeared and Shlomit became serious, "But today, they're very dangerous. Once, they had fear of us, that Israelis could do something bad to them. But as soon as they realized that we're good and liberal, the fear left. 'You have a gun?' they would ask my husband, and he would say, 'I don't have a gun.' They wouldn't believe him that we didn't. It's really a pity. We used to buy pita there... It could have been... we bought from them and they would have continued to have an income. As soon as Jews started buying, stores would get bigger and grow."

For Shlomit, the nostalgia was for the lost sense of adventure. Shopping in Ramallah had been fun, something different, and also convenient. She related the following story, with much amusement:

“Once I went to a town right nearby, and I drove through a suburb of Ramallah. At that time, I always went around with a *kefiye* [a traditional Arab headscarf]. I liked it. It used to be that *mitpahot* [Jewish women’s headscarves] fell off a lot, because of the way they used to be sown, so I preferred the *kefiye*. I went to a parent’s night meeting, and I was driving back in the middle of the night, through this suburb.” Shlomit stressed the danger of the situation, the unusualness of her behavior and character, and her spunk. “There was a military checkpoint. An Israeli soldier stopped me and spoke to me in Arabic. He was shocked! His jaw just dropped! There I was with this *kefiye* and speaking in Arabic, yet going to Nofharim! And you know, because of my brown skin, I could be mistaken for Arab. ‘I would never believe that a woman would travel through this suburb, without a weapon... a woman, alone!’ he said to me. He was shocked by my courage, and also so confused because I spoke Arabic.” At this point, Shlomit’s smile widened across her face and her eyes twinkled with humor. “He didn’t know what to do with himself! He probably came from Tel Aviv or something. The shock on his face!”

She sat back in the memory and added sadly, “Today it’s so different. I would never do that. I would never take that road.”

“Were there other occasions where you were mistaken for being Arab?”

“People always thought I was Arabic! Many Jewish women live with Arabic men in Arab villages... I could have been one of them. But that *kefiye* wasn’t like the ones that

Arabs wear. I remember it... it was red with big black spots. It was big and I could tie it. But all those [Jewish religious] women today with those constructions on their heads! You have to get up at 6am to do such a thing! This was easier, and I liked it... But someone borrowed it once, and never returned it."

Shlomit prides herself on being different from the women around her. I wondered if this attitude led to her become socially separate, or, alternatively, if she stressed her individualism and independence in order to sustain her detached deportment in the community.

I asked Shlomit for more stories from those early years.

"Oh, I remember something! In '84 or '85 there was a prime minister who came. Right before, there was a woman from Nofharim who had a stone thrown in her eye. We gave the prime minister the stone, with the date of the incident written on it. Shamir [the prime minister] was ok. He was a real Zionist, and he was a real leader. Today, there are just politicians, not leaders."

This last tale led to the telling of another event. "Once there was another government member who came to Nofharim. He wanted to visit a home here, one with many young children. He wanted to see how they live in those little apartments that are so cramped. I ran over to prepare food and drinks for his visit. He came, and he promised to do things here. But the next day, he died! The residents in Nofharim were so shocked, but it can happen. You can't trust generous and benevolent people, because they themselves may need help. You can't ask anyone for help. I never asked anyone for anything. In *tehilim* [psalms] of David it says not to place your trust even in noble individuals, because they ultimately have no power to deliver [Psalms 146:3]."

The phone rang and Shlomit answered it quickly. After hanging up, we returned to my initial question.

"The ideological reason why we came to Nofharim was for the education of my children... And also to build *eretz yisrael*. It wasn't a situation where people didn't want to come. Coming here was positive. It's wasn't a project of Gush Emunim, like a hilltop settlement. It wasn't just a random group of people. Here, it was the government who built it. The government gave permission for construction, and they gave mortgages to people, like everywhere else. I wanted my kids to see Shabbat. What is Shabbat? My son – he would see people heading out to go to the sea on Saturdays. He would see people washing their cars. He didn't know what Shabbat was. We lived in a suburb of Jerusalem [a specific area that was built in the 1950s to house Jewish immigrants from Arab countries] with very few religiously observant families, and we couldn't afford to move to the more religious areas. The model here, in contrast, is people who observe and respect the Shabbat. Everyone goes to synagogue. There are religious activities. They censure things, and they are careful about what is presented. The performances and lectures are appropriate. It didn't bother me that we lived in the city, but I wanted to raise my children in a certain environment. What do the Jews do in Brooklyn? The same thing! They live in their own areas. I sold my house in Jerusalem to come here. I lost in terms of business. Today, I don't have that much to do here."

Shlomit explained to me the sacrifice she made, a sacrifice primarily for the sake of her children's religious education.

"I want to leave for a year, to study alternative medicine for Down's Syndrome. I was even asked to come to Switzerland! My husband used to be a teacher in a town nearby, and now he's retired, but at this point he doesn't want to go."

"Before you came to Nofharim, did you consider moving to any other places?"

"We thought to go to Mevasseret [a suburb of Jerusalem], but there were a lot of criteria to move there. We could have perhaps afforded a house in an ultra orthodox neighborhood in Jerusalem, but because we have brown skin, we couldn't buy there. We looked in several places, but they didn't sell to Sephardim. It's like that in a lot of places, sometimes even today. My parents are from Yemen, and they came by foot. It took them ten months to travel to Israel. They arrived in Aden [a seaport city in Yemen] and crossed the Suez Canal by boat. Then they took a train, I think... they left everything and came here because it's our country."

As Shlomit continued, her voice grew bolder and louder. "All Jews should come here. Anti-semitism is the broom that brought the Jews here. They [the Arabs] don't understand that. The absurd thing is that the Jew comes from Yemen, after having been for more than two thousand years in *galut* [exile], but when he comes, he knows Hebrew. How did he know? If an Ashkenazi man sits with a Jew from Yemen and they talk about the weekly portion of the Bible, the twenty-five hundred years didn't break their Judaism and connection to this land. I come along such a string. It's just like that with the Yeminite Jews. Because of the history, they were like ambassadors, maintaining the language. They still spoke Hebrew. Today, I can speak with a Jew who came from Yemen two months ago! Did you hear about the two boys who ran away through the mountains? They spoke ancient Hebrew. That's my connection to the land. *Eretz yisrael*

is everything. It doesn't matter if it's Beer Sheva or Shiloh. It's all the same. The politicians and the Arabs say that it's not ours. But we know that Israel and Jerusalem do not appear in the Koran. It's just politics. They don't want us. It's written, 'Yishmael will hate.' *Hate!* The Jews have to understand that their place is here. If I know that I'm helping [build and settle the land], I feel even better. But it's all of *eretz yisrael* that is important. Are the Bedouins not stealing government land? The government makes trouble for a few [Jewish] houses nearby, but in Ramallah?! They're building hundreds of homes and villas!"

Shlomit sat back to calm down for a moment, but quickly resumed, "Everywhere the Jews come, they bring *priha* [prosperity, development], and so the Arabs want it too. But they hate us. To be a citizen, one must accept the existence of the country. Wherever they have lived, the Jews helped the governments of their countries. They contributed to the culture. Here, the Jews give the Arabs money and work. I grew up in an old *moshava*. I knew an old woman whose husband worked in the field and had an Arab worker. He lived there with them and ate there. One day they couldn't find the husband. It seemed that he had gone to check the water, but when he got there, the Arab killed him and another man. They [the Arabs] put on the clothes of being intelligent and nice, but there's something cruel inside. I remember that woman telling us this, and telling us not to trust them."

She carried on with emotion and emphasis, while shaking her head. "The way people look at us [settlers]... I came here [the West Bank area] simply because it's *eretz yisrael*, because I want a religious education for my children, and because I grew up in a place that was anti-religious and I didn't want this for my children. Where I grew up,

you couldn't keep the customs or anything. The customs that were taught were socialism! When I meet people outside of the *Yehudah Ve'Shomron*, some say 'Kol hakavod [good for you]!' and some get upset. But they don't understand that because we're here, they don't have a *katyusha* [rockets] on their heads! This place is strategic, and the politicians can't give up this land."

Shlomit leaned forward, "But that shouldn't be the reason anyway! The reason should be because it's *eretz yisrael*! It is written – it is promised to Avraham. Their [Arab] certificate of land title says that the villa is theirs since four hundred years ago, and so the government gives it to them. Why can't I do the same thing [in Yemen]? If they want to live here, they can stay – just don't make problems! They're not like Jews in *chu'l* [outside of Israel]. They ruin everything they can."

Sitting back again, Shlomit tried to be more sympathetic, however her frustrations caught up with her again after one sentence. "I'm sure there are many that want to work quietly... But they teach and learn that if they just wait, the Jews will be driven into the sea! Years ago, in the '90s I think, I was driving through a suburb of Ramallah. I saw a little girl going like this to me." Shlomit put up two fingers, like a peace sign. I smiled naively, but apparently this body language means something utterly different in this part of the world. "That sign means 'We're going to succeed in driving you out!' Where did that little girl learn that from?!"

Twenty minutes before, Shlomit had been expressing nostalgia for the days when she could shop in Ramallah at Arab stores, when there were positive relations, and when there was not even a fence. Those earlier sentiments did not, in any way, foreshadow the anger and frustration that then followed. And yet, both these sets of

emotions existed passionately in Shlomit's heart. As we moved to the topic of her work, Shlomit again expressed her desire for peace and coexistence, as though suddenly all the mistrust and indignation had disappeared.

She is a physical therapist, specializing in treatment for children with Down's Syndrome. She entered this field after the birth of her own Down's Syndrome child, and since then has developed an approach of mental and physical exercises that is proving to bring remarkable results. "When I see the progress these children make – that's the greatest happiness. Kids can stand, or walk... It's unbelievable." She has been invited to speak about and teach her unique and exciting approach.

Shlomit emphasized that since her practice is based here, all these miracles happen here in Nofharim. Then she told me about one of her ultimate dreams. "I've taught Arabs from the north of Israel. I wanted to establish a treatment center for kids with Down's Syndrome from the neighboring Arab villages, in coalition with the Abraham Fund. I really wanted to do it. However, it can't happen here. It must be a neutral space..." Frustrated, she added, "Down's Syndrome doesn't have politics! I know that I can help people. I want to give my knowledge and experience... I hope one day there will be an opportunity."

Michal

Michal, unlike the other women I met with for this project, does not live in Nofharim. She grew up there, but left in her 20s and now resides with her boyfriend in a neighborhood in Jerusalem. She is no longer part of a religious society, though she is still connected to aspects of the religious way of life in which she was brought-up. As she told me, she can still believe certain things, yet feels that she doesn't have to accept all the daily strictures.

Michal is currently doing her MA in philosophy, and she teaches philosophy and Hebrew language. She is short with chin-length reddish brown hair. She is serious, patient, and highly self-reflective. Her smile is shy, but it stretches across and her round, freckled face. Her pants and wooly sweater were in warm, earthy tones the morning we met at her apartment. She also has a cat that periodically tried to join our conversation.

I wanted to speak to Michal about her perspectives on Nofharim, with her particular geographic and emotional distance. She visits about once a month, since her mother still lives there, but she is otherwise disconnected from that world. Interestingly, in her conversation with me, she went back and forth between references to Nofharim residents as “us” and then “them,” thus, at intervals, including or excluding herself from the community in Nofharim, and settlers in general. On the one hand, they are familiar family friends who are nice, generous, and welcoming. They are just normal people. But on the other hand, their political and ideological views could not be further from her own. Michal thoughtfully traces the challenging contours of this personal, inner tension.

Michal also highlights the theme of perception, and lack of perception. For her, the simple absence of education and awareness of Arab others is a critical issue in the growing political conflict. Her childhood memories poignantly reveal the complexity of the situation, and illustrate the inadequacy of polarized, black and white representations.

“I actually wasn’t born in Nofharim,” she clarified, “but in the Golan. We moved when I was about four and I lived there until the age of twenty-three or twenty-four. In the middle, I left for a year of *sheirut leumi* [national service] and then *midrasha* [intensive religious study], but it was my home base even through those years. When

we went, Nofharim was about six years old. I have a bit of memory about the place then. They hadn't yet built up on the top, so most of the *yishuv* was on the lower part of the hill. We played with our neighbors a lot – from school or nursery. I remember that being in grade two was really fun because it was the last year girls and boys were together in the same classes. We also did fun activities all the time. From grade three and on, I went each day to Ofrah [a settlement nearby]. I remember taking the bus. Until the Intifada, we drove through Ramallah, and that was *such* an experience. We would drive past the mosque and watch all the people sitting outside playing sheshbesh [Middle Eastern version of backgammon]. There was this one family with albinism that lived in Ramallah, and us kids would look out to see if we could spot one of them."

Michal laughed at the memory, "Through the bus windows, we would look for people with red hair... something unusual. Sometimes we would make faces. I was never scared. We were taught that there was tension, but we also had a feeling of connection. After the Intifada began, they built the new road, and that was it. Then there was true separation."

"And afterwards?"

"I remember the growth of the *yishuv*. Whenever a new family arrived, we would invite them over or bring them cake. The dynamics, at least in the beginning, were that everyone knew the other and were concerned about the other. It was recognized that anyone new who came would be welcomed. There was a lot of hospitality – almost every Shabbat – for soldiers, or new families... For us kids, it was fun and interesting. 'Wow! A soldier!' we thought. The years when we were young, it was fun. But later, when I was older, I realized how much effort and energy was involved – to worry about

this and that, this woman that was sick, or that man... My mother was really busy with it all. For me, it took too much energy and diminished our privacy. When I was older, I recognized that it was meaningful for my mother, but I also felt that it was too much. In our family, my father was sick for a long time, and people really helped us. We received a lot. I don't feel connected to Nofharim today, but I feel a lot of gratitude. I feel that I owe a lot to people there. If we hadn't lived in Nofharim, we wouldn't have been able to manage. I can't ignore that, but there was still sometimes the feeling that it was over the top. You don't have to do *that* much for others!"

I asked Michal to elaborate on this tension – her sense of gratitude to the community that helped her family through her father's illness, and her frustration that her mother was always occupied with hosting and assisting others.

"There are different kinds of people: my parents were very involved, but I wasn't like that. There are kids who are so involved in the youth groups, but I wasn't that kind of kid. I was quite introverted, in my own world. For me, my involvement was more through my parents. Kids in my age group – they would recount how they helped with all sorts of things in the *yishuv*... my family was like that. And with Bnai Akivah [a religious youth movement], there are people for whom it's still important to them, as adults. But again, I wasn't so involved. I basically disconnected myself, into my own world, so I didn't feel any tension. Or, maybe it's just my character. I kept a distance. All the communal activity bothered me sometimes – for Shabbat to prepare this or that, to host people. It wasn't always nice, but it wasn't traumatic or anything either. It just wasn't me."

"Why did your parents move to Nofharim?"

"Ideologically, to settle the land. And also my father learned in the *kollel* [full-time program of Jewish legal and textual study, normally for men]. There were two parallel national religious *kollels* – one in the Golan, in Hispin, because this is also an ideologically important place, and one in Nofharim. The one in the Golan closed, so we went to Nofharim. As kids, they instilled in us the importance of being there, that this was part of the reason to move there. We felt that. Ideologically, we felt that we were helping all of *Eretz Yisrael* because we were beside Ramallah, because we were a presence for the army base. We were taught that our living there was important for the whole country. Our education stressed the political and ideological messages. All the discussions about Oslo and the demonstrations against it were an important part of what we learned."

"Did you learn about the Arab Palestinians?"

Michal looked me straight in the eye, with disappointment. "We didn't learn anything. Today I see it from afar. It was less that they said bad things – they didn't really. It was just as though the Arabs didn't exist. Day to day, we saw them, traveled through their towns, but it was as though they didn't exist. We knew that there was conflict, and that there were two sides, but there wasn't attention to individual people or what it means to be Arab. Today I think that it's unbelievable. Even to say negative things at least is a form of recognition. But there was a total lack of recognition, a blindness, just not seeing that they're there. On the one hand, we saw them, but on the other hand, we simply didn't see them. There is no concrete consideration about them, or what's going on there. I think it's from there that the issue began. I have a huge problem with that system of education – how they just don't see the situation, that the

Arabs also have needs. They just don't see it. There's only a theoretical sense, outside of day-to-day reality. That's the core of the issue. Before you believe things about the other. You must experience reality to actually understand. There's that song of Naomi Shemer that expresses how we're not even thinking that we're better, we're just not seeing them. There were also negative thoughts about the Arabs... But in my eyes, the issue is that we were taught to just see ourselves, our land, that we're right, and that's it. It of course depends on the family. There are people who are very extreme in their views towards the Arabs, but in our house, we just didn't see it that way. In our education in Ofrah, it was also relatively more liberal than other places. Arabs weren't presented as bad, but they just didn't teach anything about the situation in terms of history, or what's happening. There was such a lack of awareness. When I was older, we couldn't go to Ramallah anymore. I never really met Arabs. Maybe when I was little, when we bought from them... but we were never friends with them. We were taught to respect individuals, but also to be careful and keep a distance."

Michal told me a story. "There was this one time that we drove through Ramallah on the school bus, and there was snow. The bus had to stop, and we had to get on another bus. When we got off the first bus, all sorts of Palestinian kids came and started to throw snowballs. I remember that incident really well because it was one of the only times that there was a real connection between us. We would drive through each day – we would see them, but we also didn't see them. This time, however, was a concrete connection. Kids threw snow at each other, without glass windows separating us."

Michal smiled at the irony of the situation. "It is strange, to live within, and yet not see," she added.

She continued, “In my experience, when I’m in Jerusalem, I hear a lot more hate towards the Palestinians. In Nofharim, many are not radically against the Palestinians, they just don’t see that they’re there. There are also different groups within the *yishuv* and you see and hear different perspectives. Mostly, they say that it’s important that they’re there, and that *eretz yisrael* is *ours*. They ask rhetorically, ‘What would happen if we weren’t here?!’ I remember hearing this at school, at Bnai Akivah (of course!), and also at the Shabbat table. They were always stating the importance of being there. That was a main theme. On Yom Ha’atzmaut [independence day] there was a ceremony where they lit a big torch, and there was always a discussion about *eretz yisrael*. After Gush Katif, they spoke about Gush Katif, and *hitnahaluyot* [settlement, usually in the context of the West Bank and Gaza]. But they didn’t speak about *medinat yisrael* [the State of Israel]. They only would talk about how what they’re doing holds up the country, how important it is... ‘By why are you always speaking about yourselves?’ I wondered. ‘You don’t have to speak about the Arabs, but there are also *moshavim* and *kibbutzim* that do a lot for the country! Yet you always speak as though you’re the only ones who are giving to the country. You are supporting the country, but you’re not the only ones!’ Some *kibbutzim* are also like that. They see themselves as the most important in the establishment and development of the *eretz yisrael*.”

“Do you think it’s different today from when you lived there?”

“There are all sorts of people in the *yishuv*, but yes, there is a phenomenon of process, of becoming more radical. I *think* – I’m not sure, but I do think that today it’s more fanatic. The families that came when I was younger were educated, really nice, not too religious... I mean, everyone was religious, but no one was crazy. My family was

a bit different and more religious because my father learned in the *kollel*, so in Bnai Akivah I was the most religious kid. But with time, people have become a lot more religious and also more ideological. For example, there is a woman we know who was like family. She was religious, but not extreme at all. Yet, through the years, she has become quite extreme."

"Why do you think this is happening?"

"I think that, in general, it's happening all across *eretz yisrael*." Michal chuckled, "It's a big question!" She reflected for a few moments and continued, "The struggle between us and the Palestinians means that people have to explain and define themselves, and they become more politically radical as well as more religious. To be against something makes you become more extreme, and it makes you define yourself as separate. In political arena, with the right and left, and also with regards to the religious and secular, everything seems more extreme today. For example, in Nofharim, there are women who have started to wear head coverings. Women who used to not cover their hair now put something on. There also used to be women who wore pants. I see families who I knew becoming more religious, in terms of their strictness to *halakha* [Jewish religious law] and codes of clothing. That is my feeling, though I don't live there anymore..." Michal shrugged.

Before a moment passed, she launched with fervor into another example. "Suddenly women are saying *tehilim* [psalms] all the time! And they have these meals together where they perform many blessings. They try to bring more and more religious acts into their daily lives. The increase in political ideology is also not specific to Nofharim. The signs along the road to Nofharim, about Meir Kahana [a militant Israeli

political figure], about demonstrations, about support for Migron [the illegal settlement near Nofharim]... It was always like that, but I do feel that there is more. When we're in *trampim*, I hear discussions about needing to be like this or that. There always was such ideology, but it was softer before. Now it's more in your face. I feel that when I read the newspapers or hear the radio..." Michal paused and added a caveat, "But maybe it seems stronger because I'm older and I notice more now... I don't know. Before, extreme ideas were directed against the Arabs, but now there are also such ideas against the government. There is this notion that the government is pursuing or chasing the settlers. During the disengagement, they talked about that a lot. You see, before, when soldiers used to come, we always felt that we were on the same side. But after the disengagement, there began this impression that the settlement movement is not only in opposition to the Arabs, but also working against the army and the police. Now there's this conspiracy among settlers that a general in the army is against them. The disengagement was an important turning point. There was always a feeling that everyone was against us, that the media and the press were against us, but it wasn't so extreme. And people never spoke in such a way against the government!"

"Were you ever scared to live in Nofharim?"

"In the second Intifada, when they shot on Nofharim – that was stressful. That was an experience of real fear. There was also a period when people [Arabs] would come into the *yishuvim* at night, break into a home, and kill a family. There was a period when it happened a lot. Many people were also shot as they were driving along the roads, and some died." Michal was speaking very seriously. "But there was nothing to do. I couldn't go anywhere. When I left to do *sheirut* [national service], I was scared about returning

home, and worried about my family. But there was no chance they would have left. People get used to things. And people there were a lot less scared than people outside. They are so connected to the place! Moving them would have been like planting something, taking it out, and putting somewhere else where it can't re-grow. My mother is so connected to Nofharim. If there would be an eviction, she wouldn't be able to live somewhere else. There's no chance. Economically, her work is there. She wasn't trained in any profession, so she probably couldn't get a job elsewhere. And socially, all her friends are there, and she's so connected to the community. She has given and received help for so many years. I can't imagine her living in a city. And being there is connected to my father because he's buried there. Also personally, she's not the type of person who can open a new life for herself. My mother lives alone, but very much in the community. She's so busy and involved. Organizing things for others is her life. My brother studies at Otniel [a *yeshiva* in the West Bank]. One of my sisters also lives in a settlement, and she's religious, but she's not crazy. Another sister lives in Jerusalem. My parents were more *dossim* [slang, religious]."

"What does that mean, practically?"

"In terms of the way of dress... mostly in the way they see themselves, and also the idea of the importance of *mitzvoth* [commandments]. I grew up in an environment with separation between women and men. It is also a question about how much one is exposed to or knowledgeable about the outside world. It's also about how people present themselves. For example, my mother *wants* people to see her as religious."

"What is it like to go back and visit each month?"

"It's fun, because it's also home, and family. But it's also hard because it's another world. Politically, it's so different, and also religiously. I'm not in that place today. To travel there, to see all those signs along the road, the experience (and challenges!) of finding *trampim*... It's a different life. Also the way they think – not just what people believe, but the way they think – is very different. And the place itself is different, too. It's a place of debate. Even if I were in Jerusalem with the same type of people, I wouldn't be in a space that is politically problematic. For me, politically, it's hard to go there. In a sense, it's like going backwards in time for me. Today, I'm aware of a lot. But when I go back, it's like returning to a setting where I'm not aware of all the issues. When I do become aware, I feel estranged. I feel more about the situation – sadness, and a frustration that it doesn't have to be this way. In terms of my relationship to the people, I feel more alienated. I know them, and I don't know them. I'm so different, personally and politically. It's uncomfortable. In a narrow sense, in terms of my personal life, I feel at home; but in the wider sense, intellectually and politically, it is not my home. There's a tension between these two very opposing perspectives. On the one hand, I don't want the country to evacuate Nofharim, but, on the other hand, I also don't think that Nofharim should exist! It's obvious that if there is an agreement, if there were to be two countries, that Nofharim might stay. I want such an agreement. But it's complicated because of the geographic map."

Another story: "I have a neighbor – the man is kind of crazy. He's radical, far more extreme than most people who live in Nofharim. Even my mother thinks he's crazy. They live downstairs from my mother. Once, they wanted me to come get something. He requested that I sit. He's scary, and rather violent. He started to tell me all his crazy

ideas: to shoot on soldiers if they come to evacuate the area... extreme ideas." The fright from the event was palpable in Michal's telling. "I didn't know what to do, so I just nodded until he let me leave. But it's a paradox! These neighbors are so nice, they have helped our family so much. Yet, their ideas are so extreme. On the personal level, in relations with the person themselves, I can feel connected and close to them. But then there's the broader level, where there's no connection between our worlds at all. These neighbors really highlight such a situation. Last Shabbat, they came to my mom's for a meal, and I felt that I owed them so much because of all the help and support they have given us. I can take a bottle of oil down to them, chat in the stairwell... there's something really warm and friendly about them. The man isn't monstrous or anything... But on the level of ideas, there's no connection at all."

"Do you have this kind of tension with your mother as well?"

"It's hard with her ideas. It happens so many times that I'll hear people's ideas here in Jerusalem and think, 'Wow! They're so extreme!' But then I'll come to Nofharim, and I *know* people with such ideas and opinions. It's a strange feeling." Michal repeated her words, as though she was actually speaking to herself, trying to comprehend and articulate the contradiction. "I have these close connections with these extreme people, and I can talk to them... But on the other hand, I can't understand them at all, and I wonder how I can have any connection at all! There's such a gap between us. It's hard. When I'm distant, I feel so far; but when I'm up close, I feel so connected! There's a tension between getting close and hearing their stories, versus viewing from a distance, looking critically, and noting the bad. And a lot of the time, there is such a conflict within individuals themselves. People don't exist in single places. They may move to Nofharim,

but they still may teach in the university, or engage in secular professional work, etc. They speak the language of the majority, yet they also have a language within their smaller group that is not understood by the larger majority. It's like that in a lot of places."

Michal summed up all she had said, about the Israeli-Palestinian issue in the West Bank, as well as the religious-secular and political conflicts within Israel itself: "There's a lack of knowledge on all sides, from every side." As a teacher, it is all about education for Michal. Yet, there is something so very true about her assessment, rooted in the honesty of her individual experiences and sincerity of her personal tensions.

CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS

“Settlers”

Much of the ethnographic literature on Jewish communities in the West Bank portrays an image of fundamentalist groups and their unusual, extremist lifestyles. Until recently, most of this literature was represented in *The Fundamentalism Project*, published in a series of five volumes in 1991. Each article in these volumes, that aims to cover the topic of fundamentalism in Jewish society, discusses Gush Emunim, a political movement in the 1970s that aspired to establish settlements in the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights. Most of these examinations of Gush Emunim portray the members as radical religious extremists, and with the assumption that the organization represents all settlers. Recent representations – in academia as well as public discourse – continue to reproduce this view, and only a minimal number of scholars have begun to interrogate these stereotypes. From my own ethnographic research, the socio-political group of Gush Emunim fell apart more than two decades ago, and those who live in the settlements today do not affiliate with any such organization nor feel represented by one. Perpetuating conventional descriptors reinforces a vague, generalized perception of “settlers” – as radical and extreme, as an “other” to the modernist project, and with terms that cannot contain the heterogeneity and complexity of this diverse, dynamic population.

Definitions and Categories

Israeli anthropologist Gideon Aran begins his article, in the first volume of *The Fundamentalist Project*, with the following introductory sentences:

During the mid-1970s, public attention in Israel turned to a band of skullcapped and bearded young men, assault rifles on their shoulders and rabbinic texts in their hands. They spent their nights in the territories conquered and administered by the Israeli Defense Forces since the 1967 war. There they skillfully outmaneuvered or aggressively attacked soldiers and then compelled them to join in an ecstatic Hasidic dance. Joined by their wives and numerous babies, they pitched tents as they repeated the sermons of an aging rabbi... (265)

Other articles, in further volumes of *The Fundamentalist Project*, present the Gush Emunim side-by-side with the ultra-Orthodox *hassidim*, as the two active “forms” of Jewish fundamentalism in the 20th Century. Again and again, the Gush Emunim fundamentalists are painted as religiously-motivated eccentrics, charismatic messianists, without sign of moderation, and willing to engage in violence for the sake of ultranationalism.

“Fundamentalisms,” writes Jewish-American sociologist Samuel Heilman in Volume Four, “embrace tradition and appear to eschew even relatively limited changes in that tradition... They assert that they alone comprehend the meaning of history, understand the significance of the present moment, and see how past and future are connected” (173). As active fundamentalists, Gush Emunim members have, he says, “taken the battle out of the institution and into both the political arena and mass culture of contemporary Jewish life... to wrest control of Zionism from secularism, to ground it in sacred texts, to steer it by rabbinic and religious motives” (187). Nevertheless, Heilman does admit that Gush Emunim activists “are no longer the vanguard,” and that in the 1990s, in contrast to the previous two decades of aggressive endeavors, their actions more often take the form of defense or protest (190).

Israeli political scientist, Eliezer Don-Yehiya, also writing in Volume Four, describes a distinctively nuanced perspective, different from the other contributors:

The settlers in the occupied territories are an increasingly heterogeneous group from an intellectual and even a religious point of view. Many settled in the Territories not for ideological reasons but because homes were cheaper and the quality of the ex-urban or suburban life was deemed superior. Most of the residents are not religiously observant much less religious fundamentalists, especially in the larger settlements. In the smaller settlements [in contrast], especially those deepest in the occupied territories and closest to dense Arab populations, most of the settlers are religious Jews, many of them graduates of the nationalist *yeshivot* (286).

“Religious fundamentalism,” he continues,

is generally characterized by intolerance toward outside society. Sometimes such an attitude generates a politically revolutionary radicalism that hopes to destroy the sinful society and its regime by use of force and replace it with a religiously pure state. The passive approach of the Jewish tradition forecloses so radical a solution (295).

Many of the founders of the Gush Emunim project, Don-Yehiya explains, combine “uncompromising fidelity to Jewish law with a basically positive attitude toward the existing national state and society... They viewed their major role as uncovering the spiritual light *within* Zionism and transforming it into a force shaping Jewish society and the State of Israel.” Because they view Jewish national state-building as a spiritual activity, the founders of Gush Emunim could not assume radical revolutionary activities used by other zealous religious groups, and they rejected the violent enterprises of the Temple Mount group and Meir Kahane’s movement (295).

The authors in *The Fundamentalism Project* rely upon a defined category of the fundamentalist other, conceptualized as distant and even exotic. Responding to these chapters, Israeli scholar Shlomo Fischer argues:

the picture that emerges from these descriptions is that of a group which is wholly Other to that of enlightened, rational empirical modern thought that proceeds by subjecting ideas to rational criticism and empirical testing and that is quite ready to alter its views and notions according to the outcomes of such procedures... In contrast to that, fundamentalism is presented as irrational (apocalyptic, mythological, subject to charismatic authority),

absolutist and totalistic (not to say totalitarian) and hence rigid and not subject to change or even negotiation (2007: 11).

Fischer suggests, therefore, to shift the way we think about modernity, and recognize that its basic cultural and institutional characteristics

do not necessarily lead to a liberal, benign or emancipatory social order. *They can lead to such an order but there can be and have been other outcomes as well.* If we think about modernity in this fashion, then ‘fundamentalism’ is not its ‘other’ and then we can be open to exploring to what extent resurgent and political religious movements and regimes share characteristics with modern regimes and even to what extent they bear the cultural and institutional characteristics of modernity (17).

Provocatively, Fischer further argues that

The ‘Orientalization’ of the settlers as irrational, rigid, absolutist, or ecstatic, fervent and swayed by charisma can only strengthen the endeavor on the part of the Israeli secular mainstream (which to one degree or another most Israeli academics belong to) to establish a clear distance between themselves and their history and that of the settlers” (34).

Fischer’s ethnography in the West Bank, unlike the articles in *The Fundamentalism Project*, focuses on the modern theme of self-expression amongst what he terms, radical religious Zionism in Israel. To do this, he looks at the relationship between radical religious Zionist thought and the realms of emotion, individualism, and personal creativity (42). He further shows how predictions in the 1990s among social scientists, that radical religious Zionism would only become more extreme, have not transpired (44). As an example, he presents the case of Gush Katif, where the majority of rabbis and leaders in fact prohibited violence, and continuously committed themselves to democratic parliamentary rule, even if they disagreed with its decisions (50).

What Fischer does not include, however, is that not all “settlers” are radical religious Zionists, as he describes this category. By concentrating rigorously on the

writings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (which deeply influenced the settlement movement), further religious Zionist philosophies that have since emerged, and the male-attended *yeshivot* where these ideas are read and studied, Fischer paints a picture where *all* settlers are profoundly affected by the mystical and spiritual writings that inspire the settlement movement. I do not disagree that these philosophies and ideas have been significantly influential to the establishment of settlement communities, however, at the individual level, they may not play as dramatic a role as Fischer portrays. In Nofharim, the women with whom I spoke never mentioned Rabbi A. I. Kook, nor any of his followers. Most are certainly familiar with the main ideologies, but as women, they never studied at the religious Zionist *yeshivot* to which Fischer frequently refers. Secondly, on a practical level, most of these mothers of relatively large families simply do not have the time to spend reading and discussing such intricate political and religious ideas. Thirdly, the population of Nofharim, like the population of most established settlements in the West Bank, is not made up of the same type of people as the small *yeshiva* towns and illegal hilltops. The latter, the ones that Fischer cites, are often inhabited by politically and religiously engaged rabbis, students, and other ideologically motivated individuals. Some of these small groups believe in extreme ideologies that have no room for compromise or contradictory Arab narratives, and it is these people who sometimes take violent measures to maintain or even extend their grasp on land. Unfortunately, the ugly aggression of their actions and convictions is often loud, and this “form” of violent settler tends to represent *all* settlers.

Yes, there are radical extremists in the West Bank, people who perpetrate violence against Palestinians, and even left-wing Israelis who do not value the spiritual

significance of their biblical land. However, I would like to argue that those who engage in such brutality, and those who believe such hateful ideologies, are not the majority, even in the West Bank. Unfortunately, ethnography – like the media – has too commonly depicted the vociferous behaviors of these zealous characters on the fringe, to the exclusion of anyone else.

Ironically, the literature on the fundamentalism of settlers was meant to deconstruct the divisions between east and west, between religious and secular. Yet, argue Joyce Dalsheim and Assaf Harel (2009), binary formulations are ultimately reproduced, pitting the religious settler against the secular liberal Israeli (220). Like Fischer, Dalsheim and Harel assert that

representations of settlers not only portray religious settlers as categorically different from ‘ordinary’ or ‘mainstream’ Israelis, they also project a sense of moral legitimacy for those writing against the settlers. They reaffirm a moral high ground for Israelis by inscribing a deep division between Israel inside its internationally recognized borders and its settlements in the post-1967 occupied territories (219).

However, Dalsheim and Harel are unique to point out that Gush Emunim began to lose strength right at the time when scholars began to write about it. Thus, “Gush Emunim survived discursively as a trope that subsumes all religiously motivated settlers” (225), and these outdated representations fail to take account of the diversity within the religious settler population, as well as the similarities between Jewish settlement on both sides of the Green Line. Dalsheim and Harel have both lived in Israeli left-wing, liberal communities, and both are now working as anthropologists in the U.S.A. The conclusion of their article proposes a pertinent point of view, especially considering their personal backgrounds:

If we find historical connections and continuities between the left and right, secular and religious practices of Zionism, and we find one set of practices

morally problematic, does that result in undermining the moral legitimacy of the entire Zionist project? ... While this might provide an explanation for the intense virulence expressed toward religiously motivated right-wing settlers by members of the academy who identify with the secular or liberal left, the problem of living together with significant differences remains. It may be this moment of discomfort that maintains these depictions, but such representations do little to enhance our understanding or to open new spaces in which to imagine possible futures. Perhaps more than anything else, the challenge remains to come to know those others many of us love to hate, to know them in their full humanity and come to face to face with the dilemmas and contradictions inherent in such knowledge (233).

Dalsheim (2011), more recently, further develops these points. Hegemonic discourse surrounding the conflict, she argues, marginalizes nuances, presents a polarized perspective, and creates a situation of mutual “othering.” Her ethnography looks at Israelis on both sides of the political spectrum during the disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005. “[T]he intense antagonism expressed between these groups is located less in their differences than in a *desire to differentiate*” (5) she suggests.

The appearance of incommensurable discourses in conflict conceals continuities and commonalities among these Israelis who are all part of the settler project in Palestine and who are all subject to the disciplining processes of state rationality. The appearance of deep differences and conflict enables settler-colonial practices to continue throughout Israel and the occupied territories while maintaining a sense of moral legitimacy for the Zionist project as a whole through denouncing and delegitimizing religious settlers (5-6),

labeling them as dangerous and threatening (7). Dalsheim’s explanation is that “it is precisely this foundational commonality that produces a particular anxiety and actually fuels the antagonism between these groups in conflict... This desire to differentiate can be understood as a kind of Freudian narcissism of minor differences” (20), especially among the Israeli left who are driven by an anxiety of losing their right to a sovereign state. Provocatively, Dalsheim questions secular liberal humanism among left-wing Israelis as well as those abroad, asking why such exerted efforts are made to

understand and defend radical Muslims and their acts of violence, yet no such endeavor is attempted for the case of settlers (26; Chapter 9).

Through ethnographic analysis, Dalsheim interrogates the stereotypical image of the settler. She comments on the absence of non-Ashkenazi settlers from popular and academic representations, despite their statistically significant number (94). Similarly, she draws attention to those who come “not for ideological reasons” (98), those who are attracted to economic opportunity yet, at the same time, do not see any moral problem with their new locale of residence (104). Settlers, she also suggests, may be not as ideologically certain as they are assumed to be. Demonstrating with discrete examples, she shows how settler ideologies can also involve patience, compromise (106), and areas that cannot be known or controlled (114); more boldly, she writes that incomprehension of religious belief on the part of the secular anthropologist could potentially reflect “the end of the space of secular, modern logic” (versus an example of the settler’s primitive reasoning). Ultimately, opinions that do not fit comfortably into neat, pre-assumed categories are most often not heard and dismissed (138), Dalsheim says, and she therefore calls for scholars to pay heed to marginalized voices, especially “those ‘others’ we have grown accustomed to hating” (149).

Dalsheim’s arguments are courageous, and especially relevant to my research in Nofharim. In contrast with common representations, the women I spoke with do not fit stereotypical notions of the “settler.” Rather, as Dalsheim contends, they embody a mix of cultural backgrounds, a range of religious and political outlooks, and a multiplicity of reasons for making Nofharim their home community.

Hadas Weiss is a third anthropologist who has assessed the Jewish settlements with a more nuanced outlook. Like Dalsheim, she argues that some people become settlers for reasons other than the mere political, and that it is because of the forces of normalization that they become implicated in political projects (2011a: 113). Tracing the history of changing values and growing capital regulation, Weiss describes settlement establishment as a form of state and private investment, initially aimed to ease the population pressures in the main centers of Israel (39),

affording would-be settlers the possibility of ascending to a comfortable middle-class life, combining improved prospects (better schools, private homes, prescreened like-minded neighbors, local sources of income) with easy dismissal of ostentatious display. Release from the pressures of conspicuous consumption and minority status in secular society allowed religious nationalists to infuse their children with self-worth that was independent of their financial and social standing in Israel at large (37).

According to Weiss, the 2005 disengagement from Gaza, and events leading up to this moment, reflect a waning faith in the state's status and an increase in personal and community piety and asceticism (38). Yet, despite this sensitive analysis, Weiss still relies on the model of the settler as other, and, in addition, her economic framework seems to go a little too far. She outlines an impression of these subjects of "contemporary fundamentalisms," with diminishing agency over their lives, resorting to religious asceticism "in a kind of spiritualist adaptation to constraints, making religious virtue out of necessity" (39). And though she draws a line between the "numerous illegal settlements, outposts, and settlement extensions" and most settlement homes (2011a: 124, n11), she nevertheless blurs the values and ideals of these very different populations (2011b: 42).

At the time of writing, a heated discussion began over a liberal, religious Jewish listserve to which I subscribe. A day before, a church in Israel had been defaced by a

Jewish extremist group. The perpetrators are a group of radical Israelis who carry out the “price tag policy” – aggressive and often violent responses to settlement demolitions by Israeli security forces, or retaliations for Palestinian terror attacks. The victims can be Palestinians, left-wing Israelis and peace groups, or the Israeli police and military.

One member of the group, a high school teacher in the U.S., wrote an email expressing his disgust and sadness for such vandalism. The email's subject was “Radical settlers intimidate religious minorities and get away with it.” The following response was written by another member, a published Jewish scholar, also from the U.S.:

This is indeed very disturbing and unacceptable behavior, but I'm curious about the subject heading of your e-mail. You seem to assume that all such disgusting acts are perpetrated by "settlers." (Incidentally, I am beginning to wonder, in the aftermath of other e-mails on this list, whether "radical settlers" is meant *le'apuqeい* [to exclude] other "settlers" or whether the word "radical" is simply being used to describe "settlers" in general--I will read generously, though, and assume that you mean this term to limit the more general group of "settlers.") Unless you have more information about the actors in these cases than the article mentions, I can't imagine how you've come to that conclusion. In fact, in one case where the article mentions that a suspect was identified, that person is from Jerusalem (I'm assuming that you don't mean to characterize all residents of Jerusalem as "settlers")

I can only assume that everyone on this list is opposed to acts such as this, and I assume that just about everyone that I know, if not everyone that I know, on both sides of the Green Line is against this as well. We should certainly think how we might support the nurturing of a more civil society in Israel, but I am quite sure that blaming "settlers" for every woe that besets *Medinat Yisrael* [the State of Israel] is not the way to create a more civil society. It's certainly not the way to find and sustain partners in our holy work.¹

Following a stream of further emails on the subject by other members of the listserv, many in defense of the high school teacher, the scholar wrote again:

¹ Email to listserv. Feb. 23, 2012.

My intention was certainly not to distract from important questions but to raise what I believe is an additional important issue, important both on the ethical plane and on the strategic plane. That is, separate from the fact that it is wrong to caricature, stereotype, or marginalize a subset of our people (or anyone else, but in this case we are talking about our brothers and sisters), I believe that a lot of the discourse about "settlers" has the effect of driving a wedge between different groups who could well be partners in the work that many of us believe is important. It's not just liberal Jews who bring flowers to burnt places of worship; a little over a year ago, a group of leading rabbis from West Bank communities and *yeshivot* brought copies of the Koran to a torched mosque with words of peace and condemnation of the torching.

It is not defensive to point out the unfounded assumption in the subject-heading of your post, an assumption that I thought reflected a tendency that I have noted elsewhere on this list of stereotyping and of an us-versus-them way of seeing Jews who live on the other side of the Green Line. Unfortunately, there is enough prejudice and hatred to go around on both sides of that line. If we seek to be people who fight against prejudice and hatred, then we ought to be doubly careful about our own ways of using language and images so as not to increase hatred and prejudice and so as not to marginalize or alienate others who seek peace and justice.²

I quote this exchange because it shows one dialogic example of how settlers are perceived in the public arena, how the theoretical conversations about definitions and identities in the academic realm that I sketch above are talked about in the everyday. The scholar-respondent, who I have quoted at length, is also exceptionally reflective about this subject – a topic that emerges frequently, yet is rarely probed, in a wide variety of social, political, and religious settings.

As the scholar-respondent asks, is the writer of the first email referring to those settlers that are radical, or is he implying that all settlers are radical? From the context, I think that the answer is closer to the latter. Certainly, many argue that simply residing in the occupied territories is itself radical and represents a deeper, structural violence against Palestinians. However, this reasoning generally discounts the strong spiritual

² Email to listserv. Feb. 25, 2012.

motivations that drive many settlers to live on this land – motivations that do not exclude an acceptance of Arab residence on the same territory. Ultimately, as the second writer notes, painting *all* “settlers” as the few, radical extremists that do exist within their midst impedes efforts to develop dialogue and understanding. Usage of the term “radical” should be carefully considered, and perception of “settlers” should also be examined. Like any rigid categorization, labeling “settlers” too often entails a foreclosure of further dialogue and consideration.

Female Settlers

I would like to argue that most of the women in my study are not radical, extreme, or violent. Some may feel angry towards Arabs for allowing terrorists to flourish in their midst, but they do not hate them, nor would they engage in violence. Though I cannot quantify it, there isn’t a *feel* of zealousness or militancy. Perhaps part of it is that they all seem to be too busy getting on with their lives.

The scant literature on female settlers tells a different story. The descriptions are of women who organize their hours and motions with the foremost intention of settling this land. Brutality and stubborn determination constitute more than acceptable means in such a righteous pursuit. Tamara Neuman (2004), for example, writes about charismatic mothers in Hebron who use their maternal identities to subvert the political element of radical settlement activity, and replace it with the sentimental. But Neuman, an anthropologist, has chosen a famously extreme and dramatic site for her fieldwork. The women I spoke with in Nofharim are dramatically less involved in the settlement project, day to day, and I doubt they would participate in any of the dangerous and ostentatious events that Neuman lists.

Israeli anthropologists Gideon Aran and Tamar El-Or (1995) tell the story of Rachelim, a settlement established by protesting mothers in the memory of Rachel, a woman from the settlements who was killed with her three children in a terrorist attack. Aran and El-Or read this spontaneous and unusual event as an example of both feminist and fundamentalist actions. The women temporarily left husbands and multiple children at home, creating a new space for women's activity, and arguing that their non-violent demonstrations were more appropriate than male force and aggression (73). But they are fundamentalists, the authors assert, because:

The full realization of the experience of motherhood would mean evacuation of the territories, or at least an acknowledgement of the contradiction between the wish to ensure the safety of one's children and the national conflict. Other women in Israel face a similar problem. A mother in Tel Aviv can also be said to be undertaking unnecessary risks in the interest of realizing a given social goal – life in an independent Jewish state. If this mother does not believe in a totally national narrative, she may experience the contradiction between her two tasks and acknowledge the fact that her life in Israel poses a continuous threat to herself and her children, as well as a threat to the Palestinians. The women of Rachelim cannot live this incessant tension... they desired the impossible: to realize the totality of a messianic, religious, radical dream through feminist practice (74).

I think that most Israeli mothers avoid the tension Aran and El-Or describe... does that mean that they are fundamentalists? As Shira, from Nofharim, said, "Even the very left-wing people go to the army, unless they don't want to support their state. If you're loyal to the state, you know that the state is more important than your life. Would we call him [a soldier in the army] radical? I think everyone, living everywhere, knows that he is living in a place that might take a price." And where is the dividing line between risk-taking for a national state (allowing your son to fight in the army, as one example), and risk-taking in order to fulfill a life of spiritual meaning?

I wonder if the women in Nofharim who I met participated in the demonstrations for Rachelim. None ever mentioned it. Most of them, I think, would not have risked nights in the cold, away from their families. They do not believe in such sacrifices. At the same time, the murder of Rachel and her children was an event that lay too close to home for comfort, and I'm sure that they would have been largely sympathetic to the women who organized protests against such violence.

Aran and El-Or conclude that the demonstrations for Rachelim “which drew all its strength from an authentic feminine and maternal experience, could not be expressed, because it was held captive by a fundamentalist religious worldview in which peace is part of a utopian messianic discourse” (75). If I have understood the authors correctly, the difference between a fundamentalist religious worldview, and a “regular” religious worldview, is the acceptance of real risk; with the former, individuals will undertake uncertain and even dangerous chances in order to realize the path towards their notion of utopia. One could argue that the women who founded Rachelim were taking significant risks and engaging in extreme actions – but are all settlers such risk-takers? What if the women genuinely believe that the vigilant safety of their community outweighs the slim chances of terror attack, for example? Do they qualify as fundamentalists?

When I asked Racheli if she sees herself as sacrificing, to live in Nofharim, she told me, “No. Actually, in Jerusalem it’s just as dangerous. Really, the whole south is in danger from rockets. The north is in danger from missiles from Lebanon. Tel Aviv is in danger from with terror attacks. I can’t find somewhere [where there isn’t danger], seriously. Going downtown worries me so much more. *Has ve’halila* [God forbid] there

could be a terror attack. We were just there a week ago and there was a *hefetz hashud* [mysterious object] and it was the first time my eldest daughter was really scared."

Another woman who I had spoken to expressed thoughts along a similar line. When I asked her if she was afraid after two of her cousins died in terror attacks, she responded, "I tell myself that it could happen anywhere. Most terror attacks happen in Jerusalem, or even Tel Aviv. There are also too many car accidents. So why should I be scared here?"

A recent write-up in the online Jewish magazine, *Tablet*, presents a portrayal of female settlers that is right off the charts. Titled "Girls at War," the article provocatively reports on female students from a high school in a small hillside settlement. Text and an accompanying photo slide illustrate the young women as hippy-dressed political radicals who physically engage in the fight for settlement expansion. The photographs are both gorgeous and disturbing: attractive, nose-ringed, nail-polish sporting, high-boot wearing teenagers are seductively posed against the stunning natural beauty of the Judean Hills. It's all a bit ridiculous. Back in Nofharim, teenage girls nor their mothers resemble these descriptions. Values of modesty and humility are too robust, and more critically, people seem to be too preoccupied with the daily routines of their individual lives.

Though arguing a very different issue, "Language," Judith Butler writes, "assumes and alters its power to act upon the real locutionary acts, which, repeated, become entrenched practices and, ultimately, institutions" (2008: 158). Through abundantly repeated reference to a single image of "settlers," a uniform definition of the term, I think, has become a form of conceptual institution. Through this study, I try to interrogate and complicate this established perception.

Day-to-day Existence

The case of Nofharim is only one example, but I would like to argue that, in many respects, it can stand for most established settlements that abide by Israeli law.

If we take scissors and cut the map along the security fence surrounding Nofharim, removing the wider contexts of its geography, the space resembles any modern religious Jewish *moshav* [small communal-style town]. As the individual portraits show, day-to-day life involves regular routines, like in any suburban neighborhood. People wake up in the morning inside modern homes (Fig. 3-1, Fig. 3-2); they get ready for work, and take their kids to school (Fig. 3-3 to 3-6); in the afternoons they pick-up their kids, do groceries, and make dinner; some evenings they attend activities. During the time I spent in Nofharim, I rarely felt pressure from the tensions that exist, a few dozen meters off, beyond the barbed wire fence.

Life in Nofharim in fact contains multiple ideal features. Communality, generosity, and care are stressed. Residents live among others of similar religious and political backgrounds. Social activities support amiable relations, and all the necessary facilities and institutions are within walking distance. For mothers, accessible resources and dependable social networks make raising children much easier. The location is also beautiful.

Women state that they have chosen this community for a host of reasons, many non-political, with the assumption that life here is “normal.” This frame of perception supports a view of the settlement where practical qualities of the location are highlighted and underscored. However, a discourse of normalization also seems to be lurking beneath these viewpoints. “Normalization” actively reproduces walls of conceptual

separation, temporarily blocking out security worries, keeping fear under the carpet, and concealing critical questions about such a disputed landscape.

Normal Life

I took the bus to Nofharim one afternoon. Since it winds through a larger settlement first, it takes almost twice as long as driving in a private car, and generally even longer than if one waits at stops and *tramps*. But, it was early on in my research, and I wasn't yet comfortable with the gestures and etiquette of *tramping*.

Once the bus completed its tour of the larger settlement, and those passengers had all descended, I was the only person left. Excited by the rare opportunity and the wide windows, I pulled out my camera. I assume that this is not a common occurrence for the bus driver, and he asked me in Hebrew where I am from and what I am doing. I told him that I study in the United States and that I am doing a project on Nofharim. He looked quizzical. I explained that many people in North America talk about the West Bank, but many do not know what it is like there, and some even imagine constant war and everyday danger. I want to create an illustration of day-to-day life in a Jewish settlement, I added.

The bus driver seemed interested by my answer. He was a small, dark man, probably in his late 30s or early 40s. He wore a humble black knitted *kippa* on his head, which indicates that he probably identifies religiously as mainstream orthodox.

"*Here it is normal,*" he responded. "*In Tel Aviv, it's not normal.*"

"Why do you think it's normal here?" I asked.

"In Tel Aviv, if you get hit on the street or you fall, no one will notice. In Tel Aviv, there are homeless people lying on the street. Here, you don't have that. Everyone

helps everyone else. If something happens, you are surrounded by people in a moment. People care, they notice, they help. Everyone helps each other.”

I asked the bus driver if he was from this area.

“Yes,” he smiled brightly, “Not here exactly, but another settlement not far away.”

“And it is like here in Nofharim?

“Yes, it’s very nice,” he said proudly.

The bus driver in this episode, as well as many of the women with whom I spoke, described life in Nofharim as “normal.” Again and again, the term came up in conversations. Racheli, when giving tours of Nofharim, wants to show guests, above all else, that “we are normal, that there is no difference here.” Similarly, when the secular members of her women’s forum come to visit, Batia tells me that she is proud to show how Nofharim, contrary to their preconceptions, is made up of “good people... They see houses, kids, families... It’s normal!”

What is “normal?” The New Oxford American Dictionary defines this word as “conforming to a standard; usual, typical, or expected.” According to the women, life in Nofharim conforms to the usual and expected standards in any modern religious Israeli town, whatever its location on the map. Applying the word “normal,” I think, represents a quiet refutation of the danger, and thus problematics, inherent within their settlement activity. Leading a “normal” existence downplays the political controversy. By placing their unremarkable routines side-by-side with those of any other Israeli town, the women thus obscure the significance of the otherwise disputed line across which they have set their homes. Several women, for example, stated confidentially that Nofharim “is *not* Migron.” Migron is an illegally built settlement on a nearby hilltop, where the Israeli army

has recently conducted house demolitions. By invoking this comparison, and pitting their community as *not* Migron, the women underline the legality, and therefore “normalness” of Nofharim *versus* a place that is hindered by fear and distressing incidents. Migron is a place that is simply “not normal,” in the words of Racheli.

By looking beneath the term “normal,” we can also get a sense for the values and features that women deem ideal. The bus driver hints at this in his explanation, asserting that Nofharim is “normal” because of the communal, cooperative environment where each person cares and looks out for the other. Indeed, almost every single woman with whom I spoke mentioned the structurally organized communal practices where no one in distress or in need is ever left alone. There seems to be trust for one another, as well as remarkable generosity; kids can run around in the streets without constant supervision; women can depend on each other without feelings of guilt or debt. The genuine system of reciprocity is such that women do not worry about asking for help when they need it because they know that before long, they will have the opportunity to give right back and assist someone else. Influenced by Jewish beliefs and laws about conduct within society, this cooperative aspect of the community has tremendous value, and reflects the ideal moral behaviors with which people should relate to each other. For these women, this type of system is what constitutes “normal” life.

Along with the communal structure comes a ready-made social circle as well, broad enough to encompass an array of ages and personality types, making up multiple more intimate inner coteries. And as Shira delineated, there are a host of activities too, tailored to hectic schedules. Consequently, despite their heavy responsibilities, many

women in Nofharim enjoy vibrant social lives and habitual recreational events. I sketch the following event as one example:

Sunday evening.

Today was Rosh Hodesh, the beginning of the new Jewish month. Traditionally, this mini-holiday is considered a special day for women, based on biblical and spiritual explanations about the correspondence between the moon's monthly pattern and a women's menstrual cycle. In Nofharim, there is an evening event for women, schedule for 8:45PM, after women have put their children to bed.

I go with Shoshana, and the small, recently renovated community hall across from the synagogue is packed with rows and rows of seated women. We have to pull out extra chairs from the stack in the corner in order to sit too. A broad spectrum of women have come out. There are a handful of teenage girls sitting on a table beside one wall, several women in their 20s and 30s, and many middle-age women in their 40s, 50s, and even 60s (probably because their children are older and can thus be more easily left alone). I take note of the fact that, except for a few of the younger girls and women, everyone else's head is covered, and with attractive, stylish garb. There are many elaborately tied scarves and petite, elegant hats – all in a spectrum of colors, patterns, and fabric textures. Some of the women have wrapped-up their long hair, and some cover just their heads.

For tonight's occasion, Shira, the community event organizer, has brought in an actress to perform her one-woman play, an autobiographical narrative about a lifelong

struggle to see with both eyes, her positive attitude in the face of endless medical obstacles, and her persistent will to discern natural and spiritual light. The new month is Kislev, the month that contains the holiday of Chanukah. It is also winter and the days are short and cold. The theme of light, whether or not it was intentional, seems especially appropriate.

The audience is silent throughout the piece, and everyone appears to be completely captivated. The actress, a religious woman, performs well, though her presentation is excessively dramatic and somewhat self-conscious. Numerous times I think that she is reaching the peak of her story and about to conclude, yet she tells us of a further health problem and its complicated processes of cure and recovery. Towards the end, after she has related the happy story of her marriage, she describes in simple terms, the sudden eviction from her home in Gush Katif. She doesn't dwell on this detail, but continues on about the miraculous birth of more children and recent, successful surgery on her eyes. The land of Israel, in this context, is equated with the protagonist's body and soul. The eviction from Gush Katif is yet another moment of difficulty and pain, along a long string of analogous medical and emotional challenges.

The lengthy narrative is rather sad, but the actress's endlessly positive approach and happy denouement are inspiring. Looking around, I notice several women wipe away tears. After the play, I find out that the actress actually lived in Nofharim for several years, in the beginning of her marriage. "I knew a bit about her life, but certainly not all this!" I hear several audience members whisper to each other afterwards in awe, admiration, and a hint of discomfort. The vulnerability of the performance – the

unreserved disclosure of the actress's personal information – seems to leave a somewhat awkward aura that blends with poignant affect.

In mainstream modern orthodoxy, it is considered inappropriate for women to perform in front of men. And, the fact that this is a Rosh Hodesh event is a second reason why the evening is exclusive to women. Beyond the inspirational material of the event, the women seem to really enjoy the opportunity to shmooze and relax. For many of them, this is one of their main social milieus. For a while after the play is over, they linger and socialize. A table with cake and coffee at the back of the hall is mostly ignored. I recognize many of the women I've spoken with for this project, and they approach me, asking how I am doing and how my research is developing. At the entrance, there is a table of clothes sown by a Nofharim resident, on sale. Women try sweaters on in front of each other, making entertaining comments, joking, and laughing.

It's also getting late. However, one of the convenient aspects about living in such a community is that you can go out for the evening, hang out with all your friends, and afterwards, immediately return home. No bus ride or car drive is necessary. The longest any of these women has to travel is a five-minute walk.

Along with the communal and social aspects, multiple women commented on the advantages of their non-urban setting. Proximity is advantageous – children can walk themselves to school, and the grocery store, medical clinic, or synagogue is minutes away. The city, often symbolically represented by a reference to Tel Aviv, stands for noise, pollution, crime, stress, and anxiety. The fresh air, sweeping views, and tranquility of these rocky, mostly uninhabited hills is much preferred. Political danger is not something to be feared, but rather the pressures and filth of metropolitan human

congestion. Again, according to the women, a relaxed environment that is attuned to nature is much more “normal.”

Modern and Religious

The separation of gender roles in Nofharim, like in most mainstream religious Jewish communities, is quite established. Women tend to stay home more with their many children, or take part-time jobs, while their husbands earn the principle income. Women also do the majority of domestic work, though increasingly, husbands assist as well. Yet, as *modern* religious individuals, gender distinction does not encompass all aspects of time and space. In the religious arena, women are often still subordinated, pushed to curtained-off sections on the edge; however, in the social realm, women are, to an increasingly degree, full participants.

In addition, Nofharim, like many communities, reflects a heterogeneity of individuals and families, with a variety of beliefs across the “Jewish religious” spectrum. At one end, one finds those parents who insist, on the grounds of modesty, that their elementary school daughters perform their year-end play in front of women only; at the other end, one finds women like Nurit who are frustrated with this separation of the genders, and repulsed by the multiple forms of spatial partitioning in the synagogue.

I present the following two vignettes in order to represent both the difference between formal religious and informal social spheres, as well as the diversity among residences of Nofharim and the variety of happenings that can occur there in one typical day. It is also interesting to note that both vignettes, with minor exceptions, could easily have been written to describe moments in mainstream religious Jewish communities across the entire state of Israel, and even abroad. (The main deviation is reflected in the second vignette, where security fears prevented a handful of members of a social circle

from joining their friends at a monthly event, this time taking place in Nofharim – a settlement.)

Saturday morning.

I arrive at the main synagogue one hour after the services have begun. Decorating the walls along the stairs up to the women's gallery are, rather ironically, dramatic, naïve paintings of men in *talitot* [prayer shawls, traditionally worn by males]. At the top of the landing, the final image is of a *talit* and an Israeli flag, depicted in white and blue, wrapped together and enveloping the holy ark of the Biblical tabernacle – a powerful symbolic merging of the religious and the political.

In orthodox synagogues, women and men sit separately, and in many buildings, the women's area is built on a second level. Here in Nofharim, I feel especially high up, far away from the prayers and rituals below. The women's area is shaped like a U, hung over the men's section, facing the holy ark. However, even at the seats closest to the open area in the middle, I cannot see much of the service. In addition to the elevation, white curtains are draped along the length of the iron railing, forming a second barrier between the genders.

In the women's section, elegant seats at the bottom of the U, facing the ark, are made of blue cloth cushions on glossy wooden benches (like the seats for the men down below). Along the sides of the U are makeshift rows of white plastic chairs. Above, the stucco ceiling is a bit stained and dusty. The tall windows, reaching up to the

women's area, are mostly covered by a mosaic of colored bits of translucent tape, and only a few empty spots reveal the spectacular, distant views of the Judean hills.

Because of the architectural separations, the women's area feels like its own social world. When I enter, it is about halfway through the Sabbath morning services. The women's gallery is partially empty. Almost everyone is sitting quietly, listening to the reading from the book of prophets. A few women in the back greet each other animatedly and whisper their latest news.

Most of the women in synagogue this morning look old enough to have teenage children, or are even older women in their 60s and 70s. The reason why many of them choose to attend services is probably because they are not needed for childcare. A few unmarried women in their early-twenties have also come. Interestingly, the majority of women, especially those who are middle-aged, wear an attractive combination of black, white, gray, and red. I have observed this trend recently, but here the recurrence of color particularly stands out. Fashionable bulky skirts in blacks and grays, chic white blouses, loud red sweaters, square-toed platform shoes (that have been in style in Israel for many years), creative hats of all kinds... Each woman is dressed differently and in her own manner, some outfits more quiet and some more bold, but all with the same combination of shades and hues.

After prayers, the women make their way down the narrow stairs, past the paintings, and out onto the lawn. It is autumn, and the late morning air is still cold, though the sun shines strongly and the sky is a clear blue. The women mingle with the throngs of men, pouring out of the men's section, waiting for husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, and guests to walk home for hot Sabbath lunch.

Saturday night.

Dozens of women in Nofharim are at the community hall, across the path from the main synagogue. They're there to watch their young daughters perform in an evening for the youth group, Bnai Akivah. The air is filled with ebullience, wide smiles, excited chatter, and pride on the part of happy mothers.

Two streets to the south, in one of the older houses in the settlement, there is a social gathering for middle-aged adults. The hosts are a couple who live here in Nofharim, but most of their friends have driven from their homes in Jerusalem. The group is comprised mainly of modern orthodox, Israeli academics and literary types, and they meet once each month at a different house (generally in the southern area of Jerusalem, where most of them live). A handful of neighbors from Nofharim have also been invited to join.

Two hours before the event, the woman who is hosting realizes that she doesn't have enough crackers, milk, or paper bowls. After a quick phone-call, she sends me out to take needed items from her step-daughter who lives with her own large family on the other side of the synagogue. The step-daughter hands me three packages of crackers and a large bag of milk. She doesn't have the right kind of bowls, but she knows of another neighbor who does. As soon as I return, I am dispatched to this other neighbor, four doors up the road, to procure the final lacking ingredients for the evening's event. (The next day, I am sent to return surplus crackers and unused bowls to the respective contributors.)

After a couple hours of preparations, all is ready. Ceramic and glass dishes, filled with salted nuts and dried fruits occupy the small coffee tables in every corner of the

hosts' salon. Waiting in the kitchen are large platters of artisan crackers, local soft cheeses, vegetables, olives, cakes, and cookies. There is a stand of bottled drinks on the table, and a water heater surrounded by a coterie of bowls containing teas, coffee, sugar, and sucralose.

The speaker tonight is an acquaintance of the woman who has organized this month's meeting. The formidable guest is a women's legal advocate in the Jewish religious court, specializing on issues of *agunot* [women who are 'chained' to their marriage because their husband will not give them a religious divorce]. This evening she will be speaking about the research she conducted for her recently completed PhD. She is rather plump, with a flimsy black beret perched over her thin, graying brown hair, and a thick American accent beneath her Hebrew words.

Couples in their fifties and sixties arrive one after each other, most of them about forty-five minutes later than the set time for this evening's event. Several members of the group, I am told later, wouldn't come because they were scared to drive into the West Bank. The men are dressed business casual, and have knitted *kippas* [skullcaps] on their gray hair. The women are also dressed business casual, some in slacks and some in chic skirts and dresses, and the majority do not cover their short hair. They intermingle, sharing news and gossip, discussing family and current events.

Eventually, the social buzz subdues, people take their seats on chairs and sofas around the room, and the guest speaker, seated in the middle, begins her presentation. For over an hour, she talks dynamically about recent changes in Jewish law, with regards to issues of religious divorce. She hands out source sheets with Rabbinic commentaries from the medieval period, all the way up to the present. From a critical

angle, she explains fundamental problems in the process of contemporary Jewish law making, and she calls for change. She tells how she herself has initiated important developments in the religious court, and how she influenced the final results of challenging and disturbing cases. Despite the late hour, her audience is completely attentive. Throughout the presentation, individuals interrupt and asked questions, and the speaker only encourages this dialogue.

Eventually, the speaker concludes, and the audience applauds warmly. They head towards the food in the kitchen to eat and socialize, some to digest and discuss the speaker's topics. Most seem positively affected by the lecture, and several gather around the speaker to ask her further questions. Within half an hour, however, someone announces that the entrance gates to Nofharim are closing. This means that the guard on duty is leaving his post for the night, and that the only way to have the tall, heavy electronic gates open is to call-in and request. It's not a big deal, but certainly less convenient. The majority of the guests pour out of the house, thanking the hosts and snatching a last cookie on their way out the door. The air outside is cold, but filled with the positive energy of an entertaining and enjoyable evening.

Reasons for Choosing a Settlement

Many of the women told me that they chose to live in Nofharim for practical reasons, first and foremost. Certainly, they believe in the importance of Jewish inhabitance in this area, however, they are not militantly invested in the settlement project. They are politically right-wing and they value the land through a religious framework, but their actions and behaviors do not resemble those who unlawfully inhabit illegal outposts, or those who employ violent measures against Palestinians. For the most part, these women were attracted to Nofharim because of its proximity to

Jerusalem, the cheaper costs of land, the non-urban tranquility, the clean air, the views, the warm and intimate social environment, the good schools, and the modern religious society. For them, these are all components of a normal, fulfilling life.

Weiss (2011a), too, points to practical draws that motivated her immigrant informants to move to settlements. She argues that through the process of normalization, immigrants become implicated in the settler project, an enterprise that was not their goal:

Normalization is put into relief with respect to West Bank settlement; long considered a collective undertaking for the politically committed, it becomes a matter of rational choice for struggling or socially aspiring individuals, leveraging state policies correlated with market exigencies by guaranteeing ongoing acquiescence to them. Rather than settlement dynamics manifesting the rivaling powers of political agents, normalization spells a political course charted by global and local pressures that transcend individual deliberations. These, in turn, figure into politics indirectly through the pragmatism and calculation that normalization encourages (113).

Weiss traces the genealogy of capital value in the settlements:

The West Bank became a popular residential frontier for a growing metropolitan workforce, offering private homes in reasonable commute from Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv... Settlements were advertised in the same way as outlying towns in Israel proper; individuals relocated to them in pursuit of upward mobility, much like suburbanites anywhere (114-115).

These new towns emphasized normalcy as well as possibilities for capital development and enterprise. Weiss thus calls for further examination of the Middle East conflict in terms of neoliberal politics and the concealing processes of normalization (122).

Applying Weiss's concept of normalization raises further questions about the power inherent within this perspective. The settlers perceive their lives to be normal, but what messages are dictating this configuration of perception? To a large degree, normalization of the settlements reflects one side of the state's ambiguous relationship towards the West Bank. Political interests push a narrative of peaceful family life,

construction, and development, affordable to the Israeli middle class. From my experience, this hegemonic discourse is so powerful that it can obscure the magnitude of the steel and barbed wires security fences and the heavy military protection necessary to sustain a relatively safe Jewish inhabitance. My conversations with women in Nofharim, where none save one mentioned the structures of security that lie beneath their windows, emphasize this point. Once inside the patrolled borders of the community, it is all too easy to fall into a rhetoric of normalcy.

Fear

Almost every single woman stated that she was not normally afraid of living in Nofharim. To the contrary, many women cited the anxieties of urban spaces as being much more intimidating, and that in this light, Nofharim is a haven. Indeed, people go about their everyday business without worry, and daily life carries on. Nevertheless, I wonder if a deeper fear is in fact present, lurking below the surface of the women's conscious awareness, concealed by hegemonic discourses that normalize this type of lifestyle. Scholars have written about the normalization of a strong military presence across Israeli public space³ – is a parallel process happening here too? Though they obviously succeed in blocking it out of their active awareness, the women also know, deep down, that there are dangers beyond the fence, threats from which they can never be fully protected. Once they pause and reflect, references to murders and terror attacks begin to emerge.

Similarly, the women are cognizant of the hostile opposition, across large segments of the Israeli public, to their inhabitance in the West Bank region. Several

³ See, for example, Kimmerling's discussion of "civilian militarism" (2001: 209).

women recounted, with frustration and even anger, how these attitudes undermine the entire Israeli state. They questioned how anyone who believes in the importance of the Jewish nation could deny support to this most sacred portion of the land. They are wary of those who hold such opinions.

I include the following episode in order to illustrate the subtle anxieties that slip out from under the confident routines of the everyday.

Sunday morning.

The sun is shining strongly already at 8 am. I venture into the cold, late November air to capture the first hours of the first day of the working week. I hang my camera around my neck, dangling down, partially concealing its bulky shape with my blue gloves. I've tied a mauve kerchief over my hair, in the style of many other married religious women. But, without a young child holding my hand, or a brisk walk and briefcase indicating that I am racing off to work, I stand out on these awakening streets.

At this hour, the main population of Nofharim's roads are young children, and cars carefully heading in the direction of the main gate. I watch little girls, many with bright pink coats and small knapsacks, some walking in pairs. Young boys also pass in the direction of the elementary school, a good deal of them walking or riding their mini-size bicycles. Parents – this morning, mainly fathers – accompany younger children to one of the multiple nursery schools, many clasping one child with one hand and pushing a stroller with the other. There are also a few men running to the *tramping* stop at the entrance of the settlement to catch a lift to work, women and men getting into their vehicles and driving off, men walking home from synagogue with their *talit* [prayer

shawl] bag tucked under one arm, and ladies chatting with each other in front of the municipal offices.

I am usually especially discreet with my photo-taking and this morning I am taking extra precautions. However, despite my efforts, I apparently attract worrisome attention. Only ten minutes into my stroll along these streets, a man in his thirties pulls up in his car beside me. His first question is an anxiously articulated “Are you from here?” I answer that I’m not, but that I’m related to someone in Nofharim. I explain my connections, and that I am doing a small project on the community. He is relieved, but tells me that some women are concerned that I took a photograph of the nursery school. I explain that I did not take any photographs of the children, but only the side of the entrance with an endearing image of all the youngsters’ coats. I implore him to share this information with the troubled women, and pray that this will resolve any anxieties on the issue.

What surprises me is the level of community surveillance, how the slightest incident that is out of the ordinary draws such a degree of immediate and alarming concern. The camera, though somewhat concealed, was nevertheless noticed by perceptive passerby, and marked me as ‘outsider’ and unusual. In such a politically-contested area, with a constant threat of danger, an unknown individual doing strange things cannot be overlooked. What’s more, these worries are instantly communicated to others. I took the photograph of the nursery school entrance approximately one minute before the man pulled up beside me and inquired about my activities. Clearly, vigilance and alertness is a communal responsibility that is taken seriously.

Such measures of caution indicate the presence of underlying anxieties and unease. Yet, efforts seem to be exerted to override the fears, to maintain the flow of everyday routines. I think that in the face of most kinds of pressure, people try to create normalcy; and in this case, the state simply adds and stirs by driving-in further ideologies of normalization. Mothers who are the primary caregivers of large families stress, more than their husbands, the “normal” features of safety and routine, overlooking potential indicators of anxiety and stress, all in order to get on with the never-ending and unpredictable tasks of childcare. The degree of physical security is simply paid no attention. Thus, life within the boundaries of the settlement fence is perceived as normal and usual. The numerous positive aspects are emphasized, and indeed, they are abundant.

The seductive, almost-opaque discourse of normalization conceals both the conflict and the people who inhabit “the other side.” It thrusts forward a positive view of settlement life, offering economic, social, educational, and religious possibilities that are not necessarily available in other parts of Israel. But how can we productively criticize these discourses, and the individuals who reproduce them? Indeed, normalization discourses operate all around, swallowing us into their convincing rhetorics, and like viruses, reproducing through our own body’s performances. It has become normal to purchase clothes off the wrack at the GAP, without considering the fact that they may have been manufactured by the hands of a Chinese minor, working for pathetic wages. It has become normal to buy pears in February, when they had to be flown, using unnecessary quantities of fuel, all the way from South Africa. And, as I write this, the

U.S. is at war. On the news we often hear about thirty more victims in Baghdad, or twenty-five people killed in Kabul. This too has become normal.

Discourses of normalization thus mask deeper, often painful or challenging issues, pushed to the fringes of our psychic awareness. In the West Bank, numerous such messages circulate, and as their full shapes come into view, the contours of the conflict become all that much more confusing and complicated.

Am Yisrael Be'Eretz Yisrael [The People of Israel in the Land of Israel]

The religious dimension of the women's experience on this landscape is not necessarily the main inspiration, but all of them believe in its fundamental significance. At one end, there are those for whom it is the principle motivation. At the other end, for those women who stress the practical draws and benefits, the spiritual meaning of the topography is certainly a bonus. Either way, it is a critical theme to explore in the context of a study of a Jewish settlement.

Though not overt, many of the women's statements regarding their location stress a religious connection to this land which, I would like to argue, is stronger than political interests. They believe, like modern religious Jews across Israel, that this territory is sanctified (separated out) as *the* land of the Jewish people, as it is dictated by God countless times throughout the bible⁴. The two-thousand-year exile was a dark, difficult

⁴ In Genesis alone, there are countless cases of the promise of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as further references with regards to Joseph. Genesis 28: 10-15 presents a particularly illustrative example: "And Jacob departed from Beer Sheva and went to Haran. He encountered *hamakom* [the place; translated as a spatial area, as well as a reference to the name of God] and spent the night there because the sun had set... And behold God was standing over him, and He said, 'I am God, the God of Abraham your (fore)father and the God of Isaac. *Ha'aretz* [the land; the country; the ground] on which you are lying, to you I will give it and to your descendants... Behold, I am with you, and I will guard you in everywhere that you go, and I will return you to *ha'adamah* [the ground, the soil] *hazo't* [this specific one].'"

Three different terms are used to indicate space in this passage, and I would like to suggest that they are each used, with increasingly specificity, to make the message unambiguously clear. *Hamakom* first

pause, however the time has come for the reunification of a population and a geography that belong to one another. Metaphors of health and naturalness express this relationship. An older woman in Nofharim, for example, told me: "This is our natural place, for us. When each one is in their own place, they can grow and develop and flourish." This framework of perception sees the Jews as the indigenous people of Israel.

Furthermore, for several of the women, the land of Israel is imagined as a refuge. Whether they didn't feel that they belonged in, or whether they were exiled from their country of birth or origin, the land of Israel has become the only space wherein they feel that they are home. Again, metaphors of nature and naturalness express their claim to live on this narrow topography, which includes the West Bank at its core. Opposition to these rights therefore deeply threatens broad senses of familial and cultural safety.

Many of the women emphasize that the West Bank region is not *more* important than other areas in Israel; rather, living in a settlement can be spiritually fulfilling because this section of the sanctified territory is not being sufficiently engaged by Jewish inhabitance. Tel Aviv, they explain, in contrast, is being well looked after. At the

suggests a general sense of location, as well as the presence of the Divine; *Ha'aretz* then indicates a more delineated portion of expansive geography; *Ha'adamah* finally signifies the particulars of the ground, or even soil, itself, even perhaps insinuating a sense of vertical depth. Analogously, the place is first encountered (perhaps implying an arrival, from a distance); the second reference involves the immediate physicality of lying; the final phrase explicitly indicates that what is being discussed is *this* specific ground.

More recent examples are represented across the writings of Rabbi Abraham Yitzchak Hacohen Kook (1865-1935). His ideas, influenced by a variety of Jewish mystical texts and other commentaries, are fundamental to the ideologies of contemporary religious Zionists. The following passage is one example of his outlook: "Eretz Yisrael is not a peripheral matter, an external acquisition of the nation; it is not merely a means toward the goal of the general coalescing of the nation, nor of strengthening its material existence, nor even its spiritual. Eretz Yisrael is an independent unit, bound with a living attachment with the nation, bound with inner Segulot with the nation's existence" (translation from Samson and Fishman 1996:3). I first saw this quote painted by teenagers in Nofharim on a wall inside their youth movement activity building.

same time, often at a different point in our conversations, the women remind me that the West Bank – particularly the northern section in which Nofharim is centered – is the specific location of many of the most momentous biblical narratives. Living on these same hills invokes a powerful sense of meaning and connection, a daily performance of cultural heritage. The entire land of Israel is sacred, but *this* part has heightened value.

The territory of the West Bank is also cited by multiple women to be strategically significant in the militaristic defense of the entire state of Israel. Without the settlements' existence, women disquietly assert, Arabs will simply take-over the entire area and immediately begin their march towards Tel Aviv. Their presence, they believe, is "holding the line," safeguarding Jewish grasp on territory. This repeated concern can undeniably be read as support for the sovereign state, nevertheless, it is the *land* (both the West Bank area, as well as Tel Aviv as the symbolic center of secular, liberal Israel) that the women underscore as the object which must be held.

What I would like to argue is that the spiritual intimacy of personal inhabitance on this land is regarded with greater significance than broader political projects. In other words, the emphasis is on a vertical relationship between people and the ground beneath them, and not a horizontal jurisdiction of bounded, sovereign territory. In response to Dalsheim's analytic propositions⁵, I would agree that settler perceptions of the land move beyond modern conceptions of nation, state, and sovereign borders. With an indigenous approach, they stress a natural continuum between their ancestral past and the present, on this very same topographic domain.

⁵ See Chapter 7 in Dalsheim's *Unsettling Gaza: Secular Liberalism, Radical Religion, and the Israeli Settlement Project* (2011). Her main arguments on this issue are also discussed later in this section.

This narrative, however, is not explored in the abundant literature that compares the settlements to colonial projects in other parts of the world. The settler's spiritual claim to this particular land – their sense of indigeneity – is simply not considered⁶.

Spiritual Space, more than Political State

Sunday afternoon.

I visited the Nofharim winery, a ten-minute drive from the settlement. The original vineyard and winery are located in Nofharim proper, on the southern slope, however, a fancy, modern visitor's center was built in 2008 at the junction of the major highway that runs through the northern part of the West Bank. In its new, attractive location, the winery also pairs as a tourist center for the region, and apparently attracts dozens of people each week.

When I arrived, a large group of religious female teachers were having a fancy, catered lunch. As I left, a modern orthodox family from the U.S.A. had just entered. My tour-guide mentioned that a significant number of Evangelical Christians also come for tours.

I visited the winery because several of the women I spoke with in Nofharim mentioned it as a lovely place, with an engaging presentation of the religious Jewish connections to this land. I also visited for the sake of my supervisor, a wine maven.

⁶ This is not to deny that presenting the bible, a more than two thousand year old text, as legal evidence for land claims evinces a controversial issue. Recently, in fact, the Catholic Church weighed in on the topic, declaring in its Synod on the Middle East that scripture cannot be used for territorial claim (<http://m.thetablet.co.uk/article/15465>). At the same time, however, recent developments in Canadian and Australian courts have allowed indigenous peoples to present song, dance, or visual art as alternative, yet acceptable forms of evidence, indicating cultural knowledge of claimed territory, and therefore the right to ownership over specific geographic areas (Fenwick 2001; Gray 2000; Shea Murphy 2000). Where is the line between these new precedents in secular legal courts, and the international claim of religious Jews to the territorial area of biblical Israel?

The architecture of the new visitor's center acts on the tourist sensibilities of authenticity and escape from contemporary times and spaces. The stone walls, wooden furnishings, and iron ornamentation create an atmosphere of nostalgia for ancient history and simpler circumstances. Naturally, the entire building is redolent with the thick scent of wine casks.

The tour for small groups takes place in an elegant room where the coarseness of a huge, old-fashioned wooden table meets the formality of plush green chairs and heavy gray drapes. A plack beside the entrance indicates the generous support of the ministry of tourism. My guide first recounted the basic history of the winery, and immediately mentioned the many prizes that the wines have since won. As she spoke about the manufacture of the wine, she pressed a button and the drapes on one side of the room opened, revealing a huge cellar with enormous wine-making apparatuses. A few moments later, she pushed another button and the drapes on the side of the room folded back, disclosing another voluminous storage vault and hundreds of barrels of wine. For me, the performance was a bit kitchy and over-the-top.

After these rather dramatic introductions, there are two seven-minute films, the first about the area and the second about the manufacture of wine. The films are projected using sophisticated technology, on the glass windows through which the visitors see the huge storage room, and on the back wall of the storage room as well. Both films can be seen in English or Hebrew. I watched the first film in Hebrew, but later requested to see it again in English. All my quotes are directly from the English version of the film.

The first film recounts a historical narrative of the geographic area. Using verses from the bible and a map, the film shows how the biblical tribe of Benjamin lived in this area, and how already 3500 years ago these hills were “full of Jewish life.” Embellished with dramatic music, the film emphasizes to viewers that “*here*” lived the biblical forefathers, *here* in this area was the tabernacle, *here* was the spiritual and economic center of ancient Israel, and *here* the descendants of Benjamin farmed the land and made wine. The narrative pauses, the film explains, with the sudden destruction of the Temple. Two-thousand years of exile ensue. However, as the film immediately tells us, Jews began to return and resettle to the land already in the late 1800s. More and more settlements were established, on land that had been waiting to be developed. In 1948, the area fell, “but not for long” the film reminds us. In 1967, “in the same place as the prophets,” settlements are built or rebuilt. “First it was not easy,” but the people had “determination, action, devotion, bravery… Despite the hardships, growth is at a fast pace.” Today, the territorial area of Binyamin [the contemporary Israeli municipality encompassing all Jewish settlements in the northern part of the West Bank] has more than 150 000 residents. The film concludes with clips of individuals voicing their connections with and dreams for the land.

The film clearly sets out to demonstrate and validate to viewers the Jewish claim to this geographic space. Biblical verses and references are used as solid, undisputable historical evidence. There is no mention of any inhabitance after the Temple’s destruction, as though the region was cold, empty, and waiting until the Jewish return in the 1800s. The Jewish development of the area at the turn of the century is portrayed with sentimentality, a reunification of people and land after a very long separation.

According to the film, there doesn't seem to be anyone else who has ever lived here. The story is simple and linear, ending optimistically with the faces and voices of the ever-growing next generation. There is no mention of conflict, tension, or danger. The map at the end of the film, showing the steady increase of Jewish settlements across the territory, does not indicate any of the many Arab villages that are located here too.

After the first screening, the guide adds an anecdote about an ancient Jewish coin that was discovered in the location of one of the vineyards. Today, the image of that coin is the logo of the winery, stamped onto the top of each bottle's seal. Like the message of the film, the symbol of the coin represents historical Jewish inhabitance in this land, the main claim for Jewish inhabitance today.

It is interesting to note that in contrast to the film, the winery's website introduces its romantic location "on the peaks of the Benjamin region mountains, 900 meters above sea level, east of the city of Ramallah, overlooking the Wadi Kelt basin, the Jericho Valley, the Dead Sea and the Edomite Mountains." Only several lines later does the winery's description mention more direct biblical references. In this context, Arab places and names are cited and recognized.

It also should be mentioned that while the film tells a very narrow and specific narrative, the winery itself caters to a particularly Jewish, and sometimes Christian audience. Muslim individuals, living in villages in the surrounding area, do not – and cannot – come here. According to their religion, wine is forbidden.

After the film about the geographic area, and then the film about the production of wine, visitors are offered wine tastings. It costs approximately ten dollars to just taste the wines. Visitors can also pay more for accompanying cheese platters, or even a full

meal. I was personally impressed with the five wines that I tasted. The flavors were full, complex and with lingering aromas, somehow a perfect gastronomic reflection of the rugged rocky hills, rich soil, cold winds, and strong hot sun of the surrounding terrain.

I will discuss the absence of Arab presence further on. However, a second surprising theme in the film at the winery is the lack of mention of the political state. The biblical land is depicted at length and with passion, but where is the modern Israeli nation? Other than a single fleeting mention during the film, its presence seems to be absent-mindedly delegated to the easily overlooked ministry certificate on the way down the stairs. Once inside the presentation room, the bible and its teachings reign.

Before I exaggerate, I will postulate that there is surely an Israeli flag on the top of the winery-tourist center. Unfortunately, I did not notice when I was there. The authority of the Israeli state is certainly present – I am not saying that it is not – but I am trying to suggest that it is subordinated to the weighty significance of the biblical narrative. Likewise, the women with whom I spoke in Nofharim talked about the state of Israel, but only occasionally, and their references were not infrequently critical. More often than not, frustration and even anger emerged in their voices, brought on by the memory of the disengagement in Gaza, the house demolishins in Migron, or even the discriminatory treatment towards West Bank Arabs. What the women expressed over and over was their desire to just *be* on this land – this ground that God promised to their forefathers, the homeland for which they have prayed for centuries, the qualities and features of which they have studied, uttered, and imagined for generations. Metaphoric or not, I also noticed many uncared for Israeli flags in Nofharim, in less than proud

condition (Fig. 3-7), whereas bibles were abundant on multiple bookshelves in each home (Fig. 3-8).

Indigeneity, Autochthony, and Natural Belonging

Indigenous, adj., meaning “originating or occurring naturally in a particular place.”⁷

I would like to suggest that modern religious Jews in Israel consider themselves the indigenous people of this geographic territory. According to their beliefs, it is here that they originate, and it is in this place alone that they can naturally live, properly fulfilling the ritual commandments. Like Shoshana’s husband Dror critically commented, celebrating the holiday of Sukkot and building a *sukka* in any other part of the world seems inappropriate and out of place. It is only in Israel that the seasons, the weather, the topography, the spiritual sense of space and history, and the religious prescriptions line up together. Or, as another long-time resident said, “It’s *goof* [body] and *neshama* [soul] – *am yisrael* and *eretz yisrael*. They go together. When separated, it doesn’t work and there isn’t growth.”

In contemporary indigenous studies parlance, indigeneity connotes intimate knowledge of land as well as a dialogic relationship between humans and a living, dynamic ground. For example, John Bradley, an Australian anthropologist and activist, writes that certain Australian aboriginal groups conceptualize “country” (meaning space, geography, landscape) in a way “that cuts through the conventional Western dichotomies of subject/object, human/non-human, nature/culture, sacred/profane, intentional/non-intentional, social/non-social and moral/amoral” (2008: 1). In order to understand such non-Western epistemologies, “attempts must be made to examine or

⁷ New Oxford American Dictionary (2005)

even at times deconstruct some of the basic and taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin Western knowledge systems where landscapes can be measured as external contexts of human presence and human action" (7). For aboriginal people, performative and ritual interaction – hearing, painting, singing to, and moving through the land and environment – demonstrates their knowledge of the space, and hence their relationship with it, and their sense of emotional belonging to it. In the Australian aboriginal case, land is simultaneously social, physical, and metaphysical, and identification with place is fundamental to understanding personal identity, ancestry, and life itself (see Rose 1992: 106-122).

Though the Jewish relationship to land is different from that of aboriginal Australians, there are many parallels. For modern religious Jewish Israelis, the ground of Biblical Israel is alive and active. Through cultural and historical knowledge, as well as religious ritual and utterances, Jews express their love and passion for this geographic territory. Indeed, for centuries, Jewish people cited biblical verses, in addition to later texts and prayers, re-inscribing into memory and passing down through the generations an intimate knowledge of this territorial space. Psalms, repeated day after day, conjure descriptive images of flora and fauna, stones and hills, and meteorology of a living landscape. For modern religious Jewish Israelis today, the land is not simply something they desire to "own" or build homes upon, but rather earth on which they feel that they can live more sacred lives, closer to their understanding of the Divine Will. As much as they long for and belong to this land, the land longs for and belongs to them.⁸

⁸ For two millennia, a passage from Deuteronomy 11 has been uttered and reiterated each morning and night: if you follow the biblical commandments, the rains will fall, harvests will be plentiful, and you and

In this sense, I believe that it can be productive to be more attentive to Jewish indigenous claims to the Israeli landscape, especially geography which overlaps with the West Bank. By discussing land as a neutrally-valanced object to be owned, bought, or exchanged, we overlook the complexity of highly emotional and passionate desires of the settlers (as well as the parallel spiritual experiences of Palestinian Arabs).

Acknowledging more sophisticated, metaphysical conceptions of time and space show the limitations of commonly re-articulated verbal and conceptual terms and categories, primary applied in the West.⁹ Other ways, narratives, hierachal structures, and value-systems simply do not fit. In other words, how does secular analysis, based on an inherently ideal division of church and state, express the concerns of West Bank settlers whose fundamental beliefs are predicated on a view of land as sacred and geographic inhabitance as divinely-prescribed? Understanding and embracing more spiritual epistemologies and attitudes, therefore, may push discussion of the conflict into new, and potentially constructive directions, past stale and dichotomous arguments, and towards new, multi-dimensional imaginations of human-land relations.

Critical conversations about the term “indigeneity,” however, have recently emerged, especially amongst European scholars¹⁰. In my experience, invoking

your children will live long, healthy lives upon the ground that God has promised to your ancestors, like the days of the heaven on the earth. Metaphors and themes of health and nature, each in their proper place and time, abound.

⁹ For a critical assessment in the Australian context, see Chapter 6 in Simon Ryan’s *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia* (1996). A second example is presented in “Science for the West, Myth for the Rest? The Case of James Bay Cree Knowledge Construction”, written by the Canadian anthropologist Colin Scott (1996).

¹⁰ Though I have no conclusive evidence, I would posit that discussions about “autochthony” are growing especially in Western Europe because of recent influxes of immigrants into these countries which do indeed, unlike North America, boast cultural majorities (as suggested by Geschiere, with regards to the Netherlands). Autochthonous claims, connected to deep senses of national identity, bump-up against

indigeneity involves an in-depth excavation into a people's emotional, cultural, and performative senses of belonging and home. Autochthony, though a word with a similar meaning, echoes to a greater extent with the vibrations of political analysis, nationalism, and legal claims to land. While indigenous are more often discriminated peoples with whom scholars sympathize and whom they sensitively describe, autochthones are critically assessed for their aggressive attempts to claim local rights to land. In two articles published last year, European anthropologists (Gausset et al. 2011; Zenker 2011) outline parallel distinctions between these terms: indigeneity is increasingly used to designate those who "were there first," and who are now marginalized and demanding, based on historical dispossession, special rights; autochthony, on the other hand, identifies those who exploit historical claims in order to exclude and create boundaries. Ultimately, however, the authors of the first article call for a shift from a debate over such terms, to an active focus on the political projects themselves.

Peter Geschiere, another European anthropologist, argues for the profitability of scholarly assessment of "autochthony", in lieu of indigeneity. He traces the former term's ambiguous definition, to be "born of the soil" (2009: ix), and his genealogy digs into underlying currents of history and power at play in the invocation of this word. "It's strength is apparently its self-evident, naturalizing appearance: being rooted in the soil would seem to be the most primordial kind of belonging" (x), he writes. Yet, he asks, how can such a powerful sense of belonging shift or even vanish so quickly? Geschiere's entry point into this etymological adventure is the recent repeating application of this politically charged term, from Cameroon to the Netherlands, and

liberal values of equality and inclusion, and such debates are highly relevant in contemporary Western Europe.

many places in between and beyond (6). Tracking it back to ancient Greece, Geschiere shows the impossibility of reconciling autochthony and the inherent movements of history, and, similarly, determining the authentically or falsity of autochthonous origins. What ends up happening, he shows, is an obsession with purification, a never-ending suspicious project to unmask traitors, and a continuous drawing of ever-smaller circles defining those who have true claims. In Africa, colonial forces put a heavy emphasis on maintaining the local people in their local areas, while, at the same time, showing preference for migrants, for their energy and entrepreneurial skills (14). Today, Geschiere writes, “The rapidly increasing mobility of people, not only on a national but also on a transnational scale – which to many is a basic factor of globalization – has generated the wider context for people’s preoccupation with belonging” (17). In Africa, democratization of the 1990s unexpectedly brought exclusion and efforts to distinguish those who do and do not belong (17); simultaneously, however, international development projects became distrustful of the state and began to see it as a barrier. Decentralization came onto the stage, yet it too concentrated on questions of belonging and exclusion (18). This pliable pattern, Geschiere shows, is reiterated across the contemporary globe, in different shapes and forms, and its unfinished, unfinal shape is what makes its discourse so uncertain (34).

More than indigeneity, and according to Geschiere, analysis of autochthonous claims calls attention to issues of naturalness and truth. Returning to Australia, Rob Garbutt, a scholar of cultural studies, reveals the “moral virtue” lying behind white settler claims of autochthony. He shows how the emphasis on being a naturalized local, and thus the erasure of recent histories of Western European migration, “rests on a false

claim of white ‘autochthony’ that to perform its social function must conceal Aboriginal autochthony” (2006: 1). Garbutt acknowledges the complexity of a possible ethics of location, and raises multiple questions about how to proceed, but autochthony, he argues, can help us parse out the imagined geographies (such as that of Australian settler democracy) that require critical scrutiny (11). An ethics of location, he therefore suggests, can commence with a disclosure of concealing and exclusionary tendencies occurring in the name of autochthony, and then subsequently, “an opening of the local as a site of welcome,” to multiple roots and coexistence (12).

Well-known anthropologists, Jean and John Comaroff, also employ the concept of autochthony in order to read into a dramatic moment in recent South African news. Anxiety over the invasion of a foreign plant, they show, was indicative of deeper moral panic over the immigration of strangers. The flora was simply a metonym. Discourses of environmental belonging were used to propel calls for border control, to exclude, and to define which plants and humans can be classified as “natural” or autochthonous.

As discussed above, an investigation of indigenous claims can help us understand deeper desires of Jewish settlers – what exactly they want, and why. Furthermore, an examination of their demands and yearnings may potentially uncover fundamental sources of longing that are different from, and masked by assumptions and limiting terms. Perhaps their desire to live on this land cannot be contained within the epistemological and idiomatic boundaries of current sovereign and political language. Perhaps what they actually long for can indeed prevail with peaceful, multicultural coexistence.

An exploration of autochthonous claims involves an analytical step out, from a wider distance. Looking at naturalizing discourses uncovers a more critical side, showing how Jewish historical claims intellectually, emotionally, and pragmatically exclude a second local population. But what is the nature of this exclusion? How much is born subconsciously out of fear and ignorance? Indigenous claims seem to reflect a more inclusive, spiritual relationship with the land that intersects only loosely with nationalist efforts; by bringing indigeneity into the picture, therefore, might we be able to shift the conversation? Could such a turn, from political to spiritual desires, lead to a change in perceptions, and hence relations and behaviors? Truth claims in the West Bank currently mimic a fruitless game of pingpong because ultimately, as Geschiere states, autochthony, history, and authenticity can never be genuinely reconciled. But if we push past the impractical arguments of “true” belonging, to a recognition of affective longing, what new landscapes become possible?

Models Beyond Sovereign Control

Dalsheim argues that for some people who live in the settlements, there is a higher value placed on the act of living on the land than on state sovereignty, yet “these ideas may not be counted since they do not fall into the categories of either secular liberalism or fundamentalist religiosity” (121). She brings as an example settlers who question modern democratic ideals of citizenship (121), rethinking conceptions of territorial boundaries (125) and the premise of human ownership of land (127). She describes a well-known rabbi in the settlements who holds that “believing in the sovereignty of a higher power requires putting one’s faith in God and letting go of one’s faith in human sovereignty” (123), and that a concept of “fluid citizenship” (125) could allow Jews to live together with Palestinians. While Feige introduces Gush Emunim as

"a nationalist movement in a postnationalist age, and an extreme territorial movement in a global, postterritorial epoch" (6), Dalsheim asserts the opposite through a more sophisticated examination of spiritual discourse and moral values.

Like Dalsheim, I also think that, to varying degrees, settlers privilege a spiritual appreciation of sacred, ancestral ground, over modern ideas of nationalism, borders, and sovereign space. The women in my study are not like the rabbi who Dalsheim cites, but they certainly mentioned the biblical significance of this land more than they talked about the national state. They do believe deeply in the idea of the state of Israel, but they are losing patience with the government, especially its military operations that stand in the way of their (or others') inhabitance. Several spoke with nostalgia about the time when they didn't have a blockading fence separating them from neighboring Arabs, dreaming of a future when such sealed borders can disappear. (It is ironic, perhaps, that in an era where boundaries are increasingly sites of movement and even transgression, Nofharim is an example of a place where the borders have only become more impenetrable.) A handful of women also suggested (admittedly idealistically) that if a Palestinian state will be established, they'd rather stay as minority citizens than leave this sacred land. Shira, for example, professed: "If they would give me the options: leaving and destroying this place, or living here with a Palestinian passport – I would for sure live here! Jews lived here before the state, with a Turkish passport, a British passport. It's a *mitzvah* [commandment from God] to live here. Of course I would prefer for it to be a Jewish state, and ideally, please God, for the Arabs to be citizens too..." The ground is still holy, even if democratically governed by another people.

For many North American indigenous people, the borders between Canada and the U.S.A. have no significance; rather, they perform deep connections to sanctified ancestral land, regardless of modern geographic lines. I would like to draw a parallel to residents of Jewish settlements, for whom it is the ancient significance of the topography that is meaningful, and green or black lines of the modern era are sometimes deliberately obscured. Unlike many indigenous peoples, those in the settlements do desire an ethnic state, but, I think, sovereignty is *second* (and perhaps even just a means) to the active intimacy of personal, spiritual inhabitance.

So what does this mean in terms of imagined futures? While polarized discourses draw-out the conflict in ever simpler terms, the situation is actually a whole lot more complicated. Could a recognition of the complexity of spiritual frameworks lead to the envisioning of new relationships between humans and space? Could post-sovereign, borderless models of land-based social/ethnic groupings exist on a yet unconceivable horizon, in the case of Middle East? Or, are these just idealistic and unrealistic dreams?

Hearing Settlement Narratives

“To discard as meaningless that which gives meaning to so many lives seems impractical if not impossible, but more importantly, it is a form of violence that contradicts its very rationale” (165) writes Dalsheim. Where are the settlers’ spiritual narratives, amidst all the political and condemnatory discourse? I do not mean to diffuse criticism for the tremendously problematic treatment of Arabs in the West Bank, but I do think it urgent that all sides be heard in order to even imagine pathways to solutions.

Lorenzo Veracini (2006), an Australian scholar who focuses on the historiography of settler societies, compares Israel to the colonial models in South Africa and Australia, arguing that Israel is not at all unique. State action in Israel may certainly resemble

colonial processes in other parts of the globe, but what Veracini neglects to compare are the settler's motivations. In fact, his chapter on the historiography of Israeli statehood does not even mention the religious and spiritual rationales that led the Jewish people to this particular geographic area. The Europeans who colonized South Africa and Australia were driven by territorial expansion and new opportunities (land, industry, etc.); they had no particular connection or roots in these new places. Jewish settlers, in sharp contrast, claim deep spiritual, religious, and historical roots to the land on which they are settling. In their view, they are the natives who are indigenous to the location. Their forefathers walked here, across that hill, and through that valley. They are just returning to their natural space, spelled out in the Bible, and for them as a population, there is nowhere else that could be called home.¹¹ According to their view, the Arabs are people who came later, through the centuries, but do not have such a history and heritage on these tracts of rocky ground.

Attention to these desires and senses of affective belonging complicate the common, black and white depictions of land-grabbing settlers. However, by actively listening to such emotional experiences, constructive analysis can potentially emerge, and more sophisticated concepts of pathways forward can hopefully develop.

(Not) Seeing the Other

Whether it was during a seated conversation, or on a stroll down the road, I noticed, over and over again, that the women in Nofharim just don't see their Arab neighbors. They are there in the vague, abstract sense that only ignorance can allow. On a landscape painted with the brush of the bible and its commentaries, Arabs are

¹¹ Amira Hass in fact identifies Israel as a refugee state. But with this classification, she asks, how do you talk about such a state that then creates circumstances of oppression towards others?

perceived through distracted, even diverted eyes. As demonstrated in the film at the winery, theirs is an inhabitance that doesn't fit neatly into the Jewish narrative. Normalization discourses, emphasizing what is within the borders of the community and obscuring what lies beyond, further push conceptual awareness of Arabs to the intellectual periphery. From this distance, women's thoughts tend to encompass a conflicting variance of sympathy for individuals, together with anger and mistrust for a sweepingly broad social group who support acts of violence.

Those with whom I spoke in Nofharim were simply not aware of the suffering and hardship of Arabs caught in the geographic claustrophobia of the Israeli occupied West Bank. Though a Palestinian Arab family may live a mere one hundred meters from a woman's home (as the bird flies, but of course, not possible today on human feet), there is no knowledge of who they may be, their ways of life, their desires, and their fears. Michal encapsulated this situation in her reflections about growing up in Nofharim. For her, too, this is a fundamental problem in the road to coexistence. "It was less that they said bad things – they didn't really. It was just as though the Arabs didn't exist. Day to day, we saw them, traveled through their towns... but there wasn't attention to individual people or what it means to be Arab," she told me sadly.

Between Sympathy and Anger

In my own research, I did not come across any significant hatred towards the Arabs, nor violent emotions that could permit corporeal brutality. Instead, there was a recurrent pattern of oscillation – initial expressions of sympathy for Arab individuals, followed by feelings of anger for unpredictable terror (sometimes paired with references to Arab desires to wipe the Jews off the Middle Eastern map, and an ideal of Arab emigration), and then back again to a wish for neighborly relations and peaceful sharing

of the land. This confusing mixture of attitudes reflects a tension: On a personal level, women in particular do consider their theoretically far-off (and physically close-by) neighbors with a degree of compassion; and yet, the Arab *people*, from whom deadly violence emerges, is seen with suspicion and outrage. Overlaying it all is also a longing for safety and peace.

Shira, for example, expresses this empathy in the scene she describes, when she hands her baby for a moment to an Arab woman at the grocery store. There is a sweetness and trust in her depiction of casually passing over her most precious possession. And yet, a few moments later, Shira's voice conveys anger concerning the unknown Arabs who cause terror. Shlomit articulates a wider spectrum of thoughts on this subject. First she expresses wistful affection for the years when she could shop in Ramallah. A few minutes later she exclaims, "If they want to live here, they can stay – just don't make problems!" Then, she tells me that the Arabs are just waiting to drive the Jews into the sea. Though I didn't expect it considering her earlier sentiments, at the end of our conversation Shlomit speaks about the Jewish-Arab treatment center she dreams of building. Esther's proclamation that the Palestinians should move to other Arab lands, and Batia's assertion that there is no possibility for comprehension and dialogue, stand side by side with the stories of a social worker from Nofharim about her excellent Arab co-workers, Batia's later approval of Arab residence as long as they accept a Jewish government, and Miriam's statement: "I think it is possible to have a good connection and to live in peace... there were years when it was like that, when we were neighbors and friends. Also in the Galilee it is like that."

Blindness and Ignorance

The film at the winery, recounted in the previous section, illustrates quite plainly how Arab residence on this landscape is simply disregarded. Arab characters do not emerge, as enemies or allies. Their narrative is just not there at all. One woman who I met with, when gazing out from her balcony each morning and night, sees only Jerusalem in the far distance. Her eyes simply pass over the urban sprawl of Ramallah, lying directly beneath and beyond her balcony. “They should be there,” she gestures outward, “and we should be here... without mixing.”

Day to day in Nofharim, I never heard anyone volunteer a reference to an Arab resident in Ramallah, to their worldview, or to their experiences. After raising the issue in conversations, I sometimes prodded the question about the lack of Palestinian rights and citizenship in the West Bank. The usual response was a sad shrug.

Some women, when I nudged, commented on the never-ending construction in Ramallah, and how the city (the borders of which used to be quite in the distance) has become so big and prosperous that it has swallowed the former, sparsely populated Arab town beside Nofharim. Looking out from the road at the top of hill in Nofharim, one sees large villas, high-rises, stores, and tower cranes building new structures. “They’re not suffering!” the women exclaim, “Look at all that wealth!” It’s true that Nofharim happens to be situated directly beside one of the wealthiest Arab centers in the West Bank, but this fact does not deny the political distresses of all Arab inhabitants, nor the reality that economic hardship flourishes in Ramallah’s midst.

Other women acknowledged the unfortunate situation, but suggested (somewhat apologetically) that they are outside the problem, that they have no power to change anything. Some even affirmed hope that Arabs in the West Bank would soon obtain

Israeli rights and citizenship. Nevertheless, if they pray for potential change, they see it as the sole responsibility of the government.

Directly beneath these shrugs, and even the wishful dreams of coexistence, lies ignorance. From the root “ignore,” ignorance, at its root, is not passive. It implies a lack of knowledge, but oftentimes also a choice in the matter. Furthermore, wholesale ignorance is not just on the level of individuals, but expands across the perceptive field of settlers in general, and perhaps even many Israelis.

Racheli, for instance, conveyed her irritation of the muezzins’ loud calls to prayer, and commented suspiciously that she doesn’t even know what is being said (despite the fact that it is repeated five times a day). I do not blame preoccupied mothers, like Racheli, for not discovering the meaning of these broadcasted words, or learning the significance of such noisy rituals, but it seems odd that they live in a place where such things are not taught.

From the perspective of an outsider, it seems absurd to imagine any kind of coexistence with such a lack of education. Without knowing the other, and without encountering him or her, one cannot even attempt to understand their ways, wants, and desires. Worse, without knowing the other, one cannot truly communicate or compromise in order to cease violence and create a semblance of social order. Hence the complex mixed bag of sentiments expressed by the women: They are caught between genuine human sympathies for abstract individuals, and the fear and rage that prevail with the absence of knowledge for the terror that emerges from the social unknown.

Ironies of a Border Zone

Shira: "We also know they are good people... they build the land too. We shop with them in Sha'ar Binyanim [the nearby strip mall]. I can give my baby to a lady from Ramallah to hold while I get something. We shop together! We sit and eat pizza together! We trust the Arabs more than the people who live in Tel Aviv! They think it's like a zoo, with different cages, so that we don't see each other ever. I don't think we need to *study* together – we have different languages, different culture, but we do live here in the same place!"

The large grocery store, Rami Levi (Fig. 3-9), as well as many of the roads (Fig. 3-10), represent border zones between Jewish and Arab communities. And yet, apart from an odd nod, there isn't much in the way of dialogue. Is this coexistence? Without actually learning about the other, listening to the other, and talking to the other, the answer is definitely negative.

Ultimately, a network of issues complicate the situation. Discourses of political-economic normalization cause Jewish women to focus on the positive aspects of their settlement, and thus overlook the presence of physical security measures as well as what stands on the other side of the fence. The biblical lens through which they look out over the landscape, and their religious and historical sense of natural belonging on this geography further push Arab existence to the intellectual margins. From both sides, anger stands in the way of approaching the Arab or Jewish other in the West Bank. It seems that both are paralyzed by the sight of all the violence (political, physical, or emotional) the other one has wrought, unable to look beyond it. Anger impedes the ability to see, to encounter, to learn, to understand, and to truly sympathize. From the

Jewish perspective, Arab inhabitants are therefore easily disregarded, and the entire conflict is pushed to the side as someone else's problem.



Figure 4-1. Modern house interior: the dinning room area in one of the homes at the top of the hill.

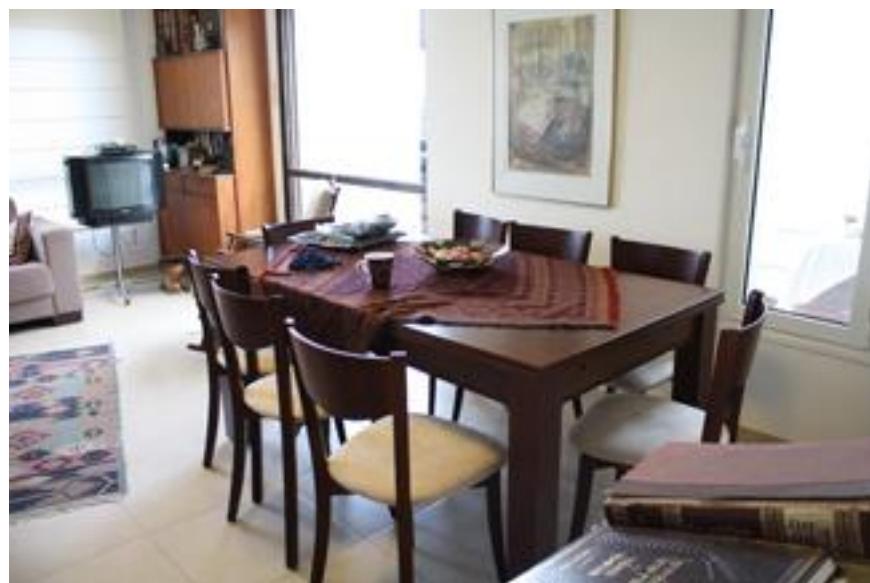


Figure 4-2. Another house interior: the dinning room area in one of the older homes at the top of the hill.



Figure 4-3. A father walking two young children up from the caravans on the eastern slope, to the nursery schools at the top of the hill.



Figure 4-4. A boy riding his bike to the elementary school.



Figure 4-5. The front entrance to one of the nursery schools (and the photograph that got me into trouble one Sunday morning).



Figure 4-6. A boy returning home from school one afternoon.

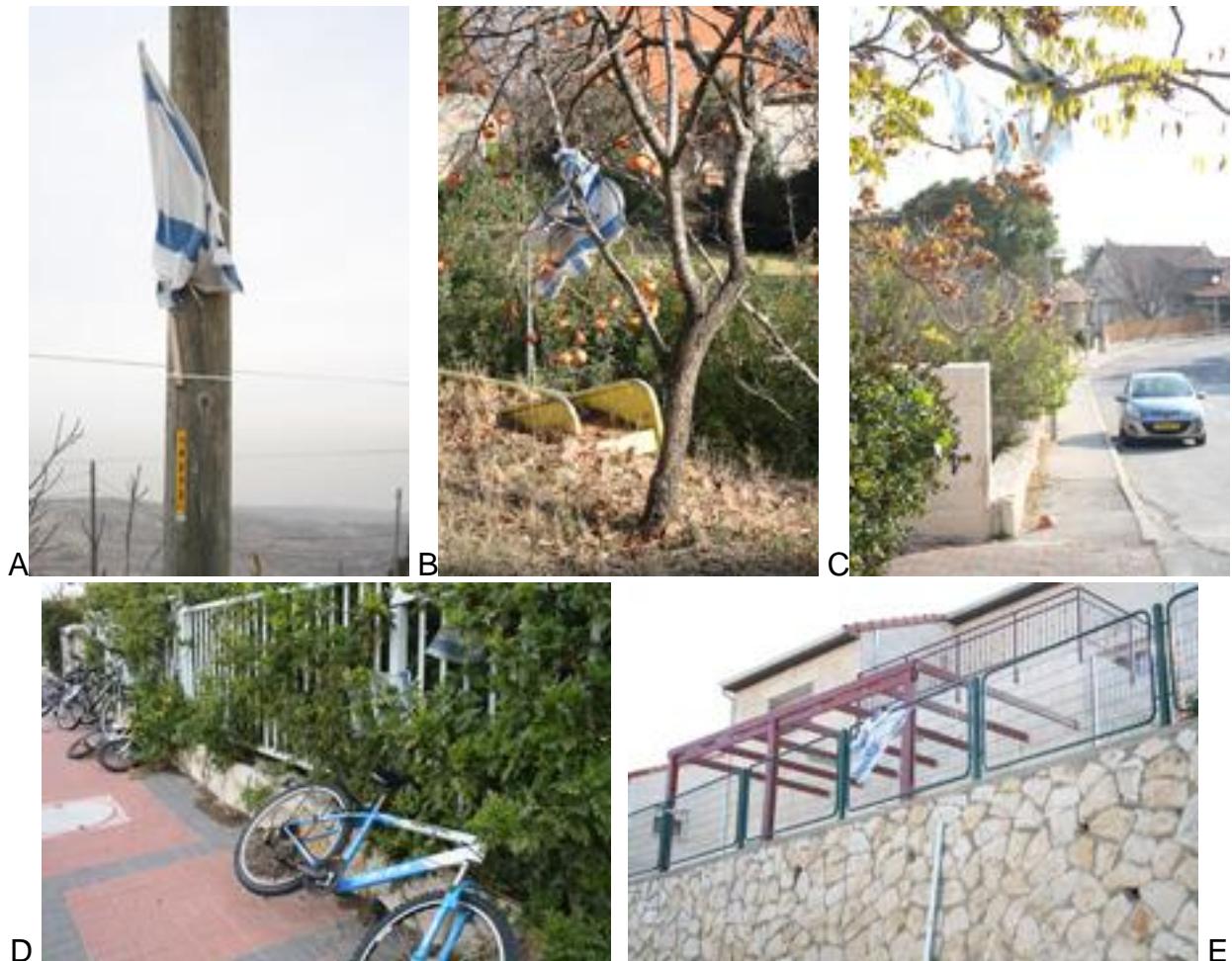


Figure 4-7. Series of flags. A)-E) Finding flags in Nofharim is not always easy, and most do not seem to be well taken cared for.

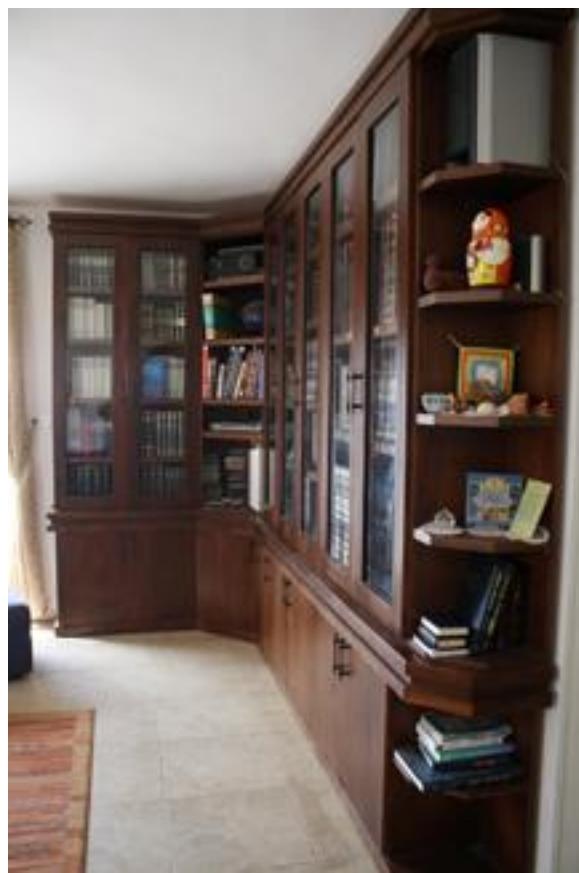


Figure 4-8. Bookshelves with numerous versions of the bible, the Talmud, and commentaries, in addition to more modern religious texts.



Figure 4-9. Rami Levi, the large grocery store, situated here between a Jewish settlement on the upper left and an Arab town on the right.



Figure 4-10. Israeli and Palestinian license plates, back to back in traffic, along a road in the West Bank.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

Perception: “the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses”; “a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something; a mental impression.”¹

A line-up of modes of perception runs through this thesis. Ways of seeing sit atop dense networks of emotion, desire, fear, and anxiety, and thus, as their surfaces are probed, deeper contours emerge. In this investigation of perception in the West Bank, the social and political landscape of this internationally recognized conflict becomes an increasingly complicated thicket.

I first attempt to interrogate assumptions and essentializing terms surrounding the perception of Jewish settlers in the West Bank. I juxtapose popular imaginations as well as academic descriptions, with a small set of individual female voices, depicting those who are often lumped into these broad categories of “religious fanatics,” or “radical extremists.” Female settlers, I argue, reflect more practical and sympathetic perspectives that are especially under-represented in popular and scholarly imaginations.

By encountering and actively listening to the voices of women from an established settlement, we can focus in on a second frame of perception – how these women perceive their own lives. What comes into view is a practice of normalization – both the intentional creation of relatively normal life, as well as a discourse that works to block out of sight all that may seem out of the ordinary. Further regarding the women’s words brings into relief a profound spiritual and religious relationship with this territory, a third

¹ Definition from the New Oxford American Dictionary.

perceptive structure. Many settlers, I propose, see themselves as the indigenous people of this slice of the Middle Eastern geography. They believe that they originate from this topography, belong to it, and are its natural human inhabitants. When they look out onto the sacred landscape, they see it through a lens dominated by biblical text and historically populated by divine promise. Arab inhabitants, who do not fit into this narrative, are therefore overlooked. The fourth form of perception, following from the third, is the way the women look upon their Arab neighbors. By overlooking them and distancing themselves from the Arabs, by not encountering them nor knowing them at all, the women reproduce a situation of distinct ignorance. Emotionally, genuine human sympathy mix freely with anger and fear, encouraging further intellectual and physical distance from this unknown other.

My study concentrates on the voices of settlement women. Would I hear a generally different scope of responses if I spoke with men? Is it possible that women stress the practical aspects of life in such a location, while men emphasize the political struggle? Are mothers more interested in a safe, nurturing, and productive environment for their children, while fathers are more concerned in control of the land? Are some women more sympathetic than men to Arab others? There are a scattering of moments in my limited study which could possibly point to answers to these questions. I will only venture to suggest that, perhaps due to the themes and approaches taught and reproduced through often separate social interaction, women in this milieu do express overall more practical and compassionate attitudes. If this is true, it is even more reason to hear the voices of women in the context of political conflict. Though they represent half of those who populate the issue, their input seems to be drowns out by a discourse

of zealous and militant language mostly uttered by men. A much wider and broader form of this research also begs an ethnography of women from the other side of the barbed wire fence I keep mentioning. After encountering women from Nofharim, it would be ideal to hear the voices of women from Ramallah as well.

Emmanuel Levinas is one of the first philosophers to write about the “other,” and the responsibility we have deep within our human selves to encounter the other (1999: 103). For Levinas, we are ethically obligated to approach this encounter, and it is through it that we realize our potential for goodness and invoke the experience of the infinite (1999: 106; 1969: 51). Ryszard Kapuscinski, who was very much influenced by Levinas, contextualizes the urgency and courage of this philosophical school of ethical responsibility as emerging “at a time when in modern culture the dominant attitude involves limiting and enclosing oneself in one’s private, egotistical ‘me’, within a tightly isolated circle where one can satisfy one’s own urges and consumer whims” (2008: 72). And though it is said that we live in “a global village,” Kapuscinski critiques this concept as representative of a false sense of encounter and relationship. The widespread usage of Marshall MacLuhan’s term, he says,

has proved to be one of the greatest mistakes of modern culture, because the essence of a village depends on the fact that its inhabitants know each other well, commune with each other and share a common fate. Meanwhile nothing of the kind can be said of society on our planet, which is more like the anonymous crowd at a major airport, a crowd of people rushing along in haste, mutually indifferent and ignorant (75).

Intervals of proximity and technical communication are not sufficient to build true connections.

So what is a real encounter? Levinas focuses on the minutiae and intimacy of the individual relationship between the I and the other, and his philosophies are therefore

particularly productive in an analysis of voices in an ethnographic context. However, I have not come across an exposition of the *activity* of the I, or the self – the activity involved in the “going outside oneself” (Levinas 1999: 97) in order to address the other. Rather, Levinas assumes that when encountering the other, when standing before his or her face, “there is already the vigilance for the other” (98).

But what about the *activity* of seeing, of opening one’s eyes to the other? Do we always perceive the other with clarity? Do we not often see him or her through a fog of pre-existing assumptions, associations, and simplified formulae? Intellectual blindness and ignorance are about the self choosing, consciously or unconsciously, to not see the other, to perceive him or her through a distinct lack of knowledge, to contain him or her within the confines of maximally uncomplicated pictures. I am interested here in the work of the self, before the “I” even approaches the encounter.

In the case of Nofharim, normalization of everyday life within the parameters of a set community entails a conceptual disregard for whatever is happening outside. Secondly, narratives of belonging privilege those who are perceived as indigenous, to the exclusion of those who do not fit into the narrative. Anger and fear, proliferating from ignorance, further reproduce aggressively maintained distance, and therefore an ever-increasing lack of awareness about the other.

On a broader scale, international media and even scholarship imagine the West Bank settlers in the most simplistic terms, within binary models. They are minimized as homogenous, violent, land-grabbing, and religiously and politically zealous, standing aggressively and hatefully against Palestinian Arabs.

According to Levinas, true encounter takes the form of face-to-face engagement, which inherently results in communication, learning about the other, and feeling responsibility to him or her. This is all ideal. However, one must first choose to step forward and open their eyes to the other, to actively perceive him or her through sight, sound and intellectual engagement. True encounter must involve an engagement with complexity, difference, heterogeneity, and even perhaps new epistemological models. Only then is it possible to overlay previous abstract conceptions with the education of personal experience, to dialogue, and finally, to feel the weight of ethical responsibility. Sharpening perception of others, and opening to encounter them, thus seems like a most basic, yet especially crucial step in the contentious context of the West Bank region.

APPENDIX: GLOSSARY

ALIYAH	Movement to Israel; term implies a direction of travel upwards.
AM YISRAEL	The people (or nation) of Israel.
BAR MITZVAH	The coming of age ritual for Jewish boys, customarily at the age of thirteen.
BAT MITZVAH	The coming of age celebration for Jewish girls, customarily at the age of twelve. In liberal communities, the ceremony also involves ritual performance.
ERETZ YISRAEL	The land of Israel.
GEMARA	The later commentary on Jewish law that forms a major part of the Talmud.
HALAKHAH	Jewish law.
KIBBUTZ	A collective community in Israel, often agriculturally based, influenced by Socialist and Zionist ideologies; pl., kibbutzim.
MIKVAH	A small constructed body of water used for Jewish ritual immersion.
MITZVAH	The Jewish commandments; good deeds; pl., Mitzvot.
SEPHARDIM	Jews of Spanish and North African descent; adj., Sephardi
SHIUR	Class or lecture; pl., Shiurim.
SHIVA	The week of mourning following the death of an immediate relative; commonly referred to in the verb form, to sit shiva.
SHTAHIM	Literally, “the areas,” “the grounds,” or “the territories”; generally refers today to the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and the former Jewish settlements in Gaza.
SUKKOT	Often translated as the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Tabernacles; one of the three biblical pilgrimage holidays. In the northern hemisphere, this holiday occurs in the autumn.
TALMUD	The written compendium of rabbinic discussions and commentary concerning Jewish law.
TANAKH	The term in Hebrew for the Jewish biblical canon.
TORAH	The five books of Moses.

TEIMANIM	Jews of Yemenite descent; adj., Teimani.
YEHUDAH VE'SHOMRON	Translated as Judea and Samaria; the biblical names of the territory that roughly corresponds to the area known today as the West Bank.
YESH'A	The acronym for “Yehudah, Shomron, Ve’Azza,” which translates as “Judea, Samaria and Gaza”; corresponds to part of the territorial area occupied by the Israeli military in 1967.
YESHIVA	A Jewish educational institution for in-depth study of traditional religious texts. Until the past few decades, a place of study for men only; pl., yeshivot.
YISHUV	Term directly translates as “settlement,” but is also used to refer to Jewish settlements in Palestine before the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948; pl., yishuvim.

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