

## **Land, Peoples and Identities: A Palestinian Perspective**

### **Charles Strong Trust Lecture**

**Adelaide, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2006**

(As delivered by Dr. Norman Habel)

**Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb**

Dear Friends,

Salaam from Bethlehem. I regret very much that I was not able to be with you in person. Instead, I hope that I will be able to share with you the perspective of a Palestinian Christian. I would have loved to be with you and to learn a unique Australian perspective on this issue; I hope that you will find my perspective interesting and helpful for your context as well. We live from this exchange of perspectives, experiences and insights. Our work here in Bethlehem has been from the beginning interested in developing a contextual theology that is the outcome of an intercultural encounter.

#### **1. Land, People and National Homeland**

The seeds for the Israeli-Palestinian context were sown over one hundred and fifty years ago in England. These seeds would not have borne fruit if they would have not fallen in that specific place (Great Britain) at that specific time (mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century). Great Britain was the place because fifty years later it was the super power with a mandate over Palestine. And mid 19<sup>th</sup> century was the time because this was the era of a flourishing European Nationalism stating that each nation should own a land and exercise its identity in its own state. It was in this context that Lord Earl Shaftesbury wrote in his diaries in 1854 the following remark:

*“The Turkish Empire is in rapid decay; every nation is restless; all hearts expect some great things...No one can say that we are anticipating prophecy; the requirements of it (prophecy) seem nearly fulfilled; Syria ‘is wasted without an inhabitant’; these vast and fertile regions will soon be without a ruler, without a known and acknowledged power to claim domination. The territory must be assigned to some one or other; can it be given to any European potentate? To any American colony? To any Asiatic sovereign or tribe? Are these aspirants from Africa to fasten a demand on the soil from Hamath to the river of Egypt? No, no, no! There is a country without a nation; a nation without a country. His own once loved, nay, still loved people, the sons of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.”*

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire this seemingly wild idea of an English Lord was made official British policy by another Lord. On November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1917 Lord Arthur James Balfour wrote to Lord Rothschild:

*Dear Lord Rothschild,*

*I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist*

*aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet. His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."*

*I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Arthur James Balfour*

Palestine was thus a done deal, a deal between the Lords. According to this deal the Jews are a people who deserve a national homeland. Over 90% of the inhabitants of Palestine are not mentioned by name. Their identity was negatively described as “non-Jewish communities”, whose civil and religious rights are not to be jeopardized. But they were not seen as a discrete people and therefore did not deserve national rights or a homeland. 150 years later, it is still almost the same story: Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish state, while negotiating some civil, religious and humanitarian gestures of good will to ease the situation of the Palestinians.

The timing of the English Cabinet decision was not by chance. The British army, stationed in Egypt, was ready to storm southern Palestine. On November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1917 Bethlehem was occupied by the Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, Sir Edmund Allenby, to be followed by Jerusalem just two weeks later. A four century long Ottoman occupation of Palestine came to an end. Palestine was not any more part and parcel of just another empire but a political entity by itself although under British Mandate. Yet the unity of the country proved to be anything else but a permanent solution.

Two conflicting national movements were trying to get control of this country: An Arab and a Zionist movement. An Arab national identity was developing against Turkish rule and a Jewish national identity was emerging within the context of European nationalism. The two movements, the Arab and the Zionist, were nevertheless not equal: The Zionist movement was not only a national movement but also a colonial one, another feature of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. As many other nationalistic ideologies, the two movements were exclusive in nature and were not able to reconcile.

The idea of one land for the two peoples in one bi-national state, although propagated by some Jews like Martin Buber and many Arabs, had no chance whatsoever. The only solution sought by the UN was to divide Palestine in two states, an Arab and a Jewish one. In 1948 the land was divided by force. The Palestinians lost the better portion of the Land. 900,000 Palestinians became refugees. The Israelis were able to establish a Jewish State on 77% of historic Palestine. Each people started to develop its own identity separately from and against each other.

In 1967 a major shift took place in the history of Palestine. The State of Israel occupied the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan heights and decided to continue occupying it. The land was unified geographically but one nation was controlling the other and suppressing its identity and preventing it from having a national homeland of its own. This war meant a serious crisis for Arab nationalism and a rise of religious Jewish national ideologies. The Palestinians decided to take their future in their own hand and fight for their own state, thus developing a distinct Palestinian national identity. The Jewish religious national groups started settling in the West Bank claiming the whole of historic Palestine for themselves, for one people leaving no room for the other one.

Looking back at over a hundred years of history one has to admit that both national movements have failed: The project “Israel” has failed. The occupying state based on military force, still without borders or constitution, was not the dream of the first Jewish immigrants. The way the Israeli Military is behaving (not only these days) puts every serious Jewish person to shame. The project called “Palestine” is falling apart as well. The performance of the Palestinian authority and the projected Palestinian mini state cannot be the realization of the dream of the Palestinian people. The same is true for the whole region as well. The promised new Middle East is anything but. Chaos in Iraq, tensions in Lebanon and Syria, civil crises in Egypt and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict are symptoms of a serious crisis in the identity of our region. The common denominator in the whole region right now is the rise of religious identities.

## **2. Land, People and God**

Already in the words of Lord Earl Shaftesbury from 1854 we were able to see that his national agenda was very well woven with a religious one:

*The Turkish Empire is in rapid decay; every nation is restless; all hearts expect some great things...No one can say that we are anticipating prophecy; the requirements of it (prophecy) seem nearly fulfilled; ...There is a country without a nation; a nation without a country. His own once loved, nay, still loved people, the sons of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.*

What is obvious here in this theology is the ease with which Lord Earl Shaftesbury moved between biblical prophecies and British national politics. England was here seen as the instrument for fulfilling the Divine plan. What is typical for this kind of reading of Holy Scriptures is that it equates God’s beloved people of the Bible with a modern political entity, in this case the ‘Jewish nation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century’, as if there were no 30 centuries of history in between. While the Land (Palestine) is the same then and now, the people of the Land (Jews) are seen as being the same people as Israelites in the Bible; there is no mention of the whole notion of identity.

This missing thinking about the “notion of identity” and about the context of the text as well as the context of its interpretation is what makes this reading a fundamentalist reading. When the question about the identity is ignored, then the biblical story (the ancient Israel story) is confused with modern history, a confusion that is dangerous.

This confusion of identifying the biblical story about Israel (His-story) with the Israel of actual history (History) was found not only among fundamentalist Christian Theologians, but also among many liberal Western theologians. By emphasizing the continuity between Old Testament Israel and today's state of Israel, they tried very hard to work out and give reasons for the validity of the promise of land to the modern state of Israel. The aim of these efforts was, above all, to counteract the thesis that Judaism is merely a religion, to understand that Jews are a people, and to declare that a land of their own is of great importance to their existence- a reason that only became important after 1945!

The cynical aspect of the liberal theology is, however, that precisely those theologians who tried to counteract the spiritualization of Judaism (into a religion) and of the promise of land (into eternal life), either knowingly or unknowingly, fell into the trap of spiritualizing the land in another way. They referred to the land—or more specifically “the land of Palestine”—as if it were an unpopulated space (*terra nullius*), that had remained a fallow land, and as if there were no people with a two-thousand-year history who had continued to live on this land.

In the same moment while these theologians were countering a kind of a “replacement theology”, a theology that understands the Christian Church to have replaced the biblical Israel, they fall in the trap of another “replacement theology”, a theology that replaces the Palestinians with the Jewish people. This theology sees the land being connected to only one people, that is the Jews, and not to those who remained there for centuries and might have more Jewish roots than most of those Jews “imported” for demographic reasons from Russia, Ethiopia or India. This “replacement theology” that focuses on the triangle of land, people and God, provided a theological cover for the ongoing racial replacement policy of the State of Israel.

This confusion of biblical Israel-Story (His-Story) with History was evident after the 6 days war in 1967. Israel's victory over the whole Arab World was seen as a glorious act of salvation, as a fulfillment of prophecies, and as the “little David” defeating the “mighty Goliath”. Watching Moshe Dayyan entering the old City of Jerusalem was like witnessing a divine drama unfolding. Christian theologians in many European and American countries, as well as in the continents of Africa and Asia, were filled with the new wine of this victory that they started producing *theologiae gloriae*.

The first real wake up call for the world came with the first Intifada. Here it became obvious who is David and who is Goliath. The picture of the Palestinian boy throwing stones at an Israeli military tank was broadcast on so many screens. On September 13<sup>th</sup> 1993, when Rabin and Arafat shook hands at the lane of the White House, it was but a first important step for two so far exclusive national movements (the Zionist and the Palestinian) to become more inclusive, to accept the other and to reconcile. What this handshake said to the outside world is that in historic Palestine there are two peoples, Israeli and Palestinian, who have no other option but to exist side by side and to work towards developing inclusive and dynamic identities.

The dilemma was that the two people do not exist on the land with equal footing, rights and powers. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish religious killer, the rise of the Islamist movements in the West Bank and Gaza, the collapse of the Oslo agreement, the failure to achieve a comprehensive treaty at Camp David in September 2000, led finally to the second Intifada which showed in turn that in historic Palestine there is an Israeli State which wants to remain Jewish, without allowing a viable Palestinian State to develop. On the other hand there is a Palestinian people who pretend to have a ruling authority, but are in fact an occupied people lacking a leadership that is capable of ending the occupation or building a modern state for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A one state solution was rejected. A two states solution, though praised today by the international community, is made impossible with the current form of Israeli control involving continuing settlement activities, construction of walls and segregation policies. Palestine looks today like a piece of a Swiss cheese, where Israel gets the cheese, that is the land, and the Palestinians are pushed in the holes. This is the mess we find ourselves in right now.

It is obvious now that at the very time when the two national movements started leaning towards a more inclusive understanding of themselves, a counter movement was launched very intentionally and vigorously to keep the old exclusive understanding of the conflict. Religion was utilized to perpetuate a static understanding of land, people and identity: the whole land was declared holy, a religious trust which needs to be under religious (Jewish or Muslim) law with a place there for only one people.

The existence of the other people is not directly denied but is seen as something temporary that will not last and this by divine plan. Within these counter movements one cannot find much that is new; the old exclusive nationalistic “ideology” persists with a religious packaging. This national agenda, with a religious packaging promoted by Lord Earl Shaftesbury in the mid of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during a time of religious revival, was now part and parcel of Jewish and Islamic national thought.

While a similar theology continues today within the Christian right and Christian Zionist movements, we see that the local mainline Christian Churches worldwide has become more and more critical of such a theology. The major shift in these mainline churches happened after the first Intifada when the local Church became more vocal and involved in communicating the untold story of the Palestinian people in the Land of Palestine. This was seen as an important role for a community of faith in this conflict.

A good example of this shift can be seen in the writings of the well known American theologian Walter Brueggemann. In 1979 he published his book called “The Land”, which was a typical book of biblical theology. In this book one could not find any mention of the peoples of the land, nor to their identities. He and other mainline theologians did not share any of Lord Earl Shaftesbury theology, but nevertheless they wrote about the Land as if it were a land without a people for a people without a land.

In the preface to the second edition of his book *The Land* Brueggemann writes about five major developments in Old Testament studies that need now (2002) to be taken into account that were not on his horizon at the time of the initial writing in 1979. One of them

*is the recognition that the claim of 'promised land' in the Old Testament is not an innocent theological claim, but is a vigorous ideological assertion on an important political scale. This insight is a subset of ideology critique in the field that has emerged as a major enterprise only in the last decades. Perhaps the most important articulation in this matter is the recognition of Jon Levenson that Israel's tradition demonizes and dismisses the Canaanites as a parallel to the anti-Semitism that is intrinsic to the New Testament. That is, Israel's text proceeds on the basis of the primal promises of Genesis 12-36 to assume entitlement to the land without regard to any other inhabitants including those who may have been there prior to Israel's emergence...*

*The shortcoming in my book reflects my inadequate understanding at that time, but also reflects the status of most Old Testament studies at that time that were still innocently credulous about the theological importance of the land tradition in the Old Testament...Most recently, scholarly attention has been given to the ongoing ideological force (and cost) of the claim of 'promised land'. On the one hand, this ideology of land entitlement ...has served the ongoing territorial ambitions of the state of Israel, ambitions that, as I write (April 2002), are enacted in unrestrained violence against the Palestinian population.*

What Brueggemann does here is to unveil the national Israeli agenda behind the religious packaging. Here we see that the original peoples of the land, the Canaanites and the Palestinians, are actually mentioned by name and the suffering done to them under religious pretext is recognized. The myth of the land without a people (*terra nullius*) is uncovered. Brueggemann is not alone in realizing this, but is surrounded by many other important theological writers.

It is important to recognise that we have the possibility and responsibility to search for a new understanding in relation to land, peoples and identities.

### **3. The New Triangle of Land, Peoples, and Identities:**

#### **A new reading: The Scripture as a set of narratives on Land, peoples and identities.**

Much research has been done in the course of the centuries on biblical hermeneutics, or how to read and interpret the bible. But no attempt has been made to understand the entire Bible as a collection of diverse and contextual "Narratives on land, peoples and identities". But this is exactly my thesis. The whole bible from Genesis 4 all the way to Revelation 21 is but a collection of different narratives about land, peoples and identities.

The story of Cain and Abel is but the story of two prototypes representing the Kenites in the Hebron Area with the Jerusalem monarchy. The following story of the flood ends with the three sons of Noah: Shem, Ham & Japheth representing three groups of peoples with distinct identities. Babel relates an attempt to reverse this diversity and to transform it into a uniformity of one people with one culture, a project which ended with confusion.

In the stories of the Patriarchs one can see a continuing process of election and rejection, projecting different concepts of relations between the peoples in the land. In this context three different traditions from three regions (Abraham in the Negev, Isaac in Beersheba, and Jacob in Bethel and Samaria) are unified in one single story of three generations while a process of selection is undertaken distinguishing Isaac from Ishmael, Jacob from Esau, and Joseph from his brothers, each representing a distinct group.

The Exodus story is about a people liberated and led to enter the Promised Land. The Torah is all about the how to live in the land. Joshua & Judges deal with the relations of this one people to the other peoples of the land. Ruth is about the relation of the one people to their neighbors in Jordan, the Moabites. The books of Samuel deal with the desire to have a state like all other neighbors, telling a success story of David unifying the whole land with its diverse peoples. Solomon expanded these boundaries to include more peoples, a unification that did not last more than 40 years when the land was divided between the south and the north similar to the situation before Solomon. Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther tell the story of returning to the land after the exile and the new relationship to those who stayed in the land. The prophets speak words of truth to the kings so that they will not lose the land, and words of comfort to those who were brought away from the land into exile promising them a new relationship to the land.

Skepticism toward the way monarchs were ruling the people in the land along with the exile occurring later resulted finally in eschatological and messianic expectations. This is when the idea emerges of a coming ruler who will rule justly and wisely and in whose time there will be "peace without end" (Isa 9.5f.; 11:1-10; Micah 5:1-5; Jer 23: 5f.; Zech 9: 9f.) The idea of the "Messiah" expands the narrow national narratives. Peace is increasingly interpreted to mean Israel's peace with its neighboring peoples and is even expanded to encompass the whole world. It is no longer viewed as peace for Israel at the expense of others.

At this point the New Testament links up with the Old Testament. Scripture links neither the Messiah nor God's kingdom to any existing or future earthly kingdom or state. In my opinion, this was not just determined by history; it was theologically necessary, for this was how skepticism toward every institution of a worldly state was maintained. An end was put to any exclusive nationalistic narrative with or without its religious packaging and the land (*eretz*), understood to encompass the earth, and justice and freedom, achieved universal significance.

It might be easy to read the Old Testament as a collection of narratives on land, peoples and identity, but what about the New Testament? All theological attempts to trace concepts of the Promised Land in the New Testament proved to be vague, not convincing and ideologically manipulated. But is it possible to read the New Testament as a collection of narratives on land, peoples and identities? This is a real challenge. There is not yet much research done on this subject. But it is important to put on new and unusual lenses.

I would argue that the whole New Testament is but a collection of narratives that challenge the then existing exclusive national and religious narratives. The New Testament introduces a new lens in that, instead of identifying with one people over against the others, which is the traditional way of forming one's identity, it calls us to reflect on this process of identification as misleading.

It is not by chance that in the first chapter of the New Testament, three non-Israelites are included in Jesus' genealogy. It is not by chance that the narratives of the Samaritans are so widely included, although their narrow national discourse is questioned. It is not by chance that the marginalized sinners and tax collectors are included creating an inclusive community based on social justice.

Jesus was concerned about reconciling the different groups in the land, knowing that this is a prerequisite to peace, when he said: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate." How true these words are even today.

It is not by chance that the three synoptic Gospels end with a call to cross boundaries and reach out into the world, a program which is shown in the Acts of the Apostles, starting with Jerusalem, mentioning both Judea and Samaria as regions to receive the Gospel, until the ends of the earth.

In the Pauline letters the main issue is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its implication for the relationship of the Jewish people and the Gentiles. As a result of his identity crisis as a Jew from the Diaspora, Paul came to be grounded *in Christo* as his home. According to Paul, Christ breaks down the wall of hostility creating a new inclusive community, where "there is neither Greek nor Jew, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female." The New Testament ends then with the vision of a new heaven and new earth with a new people made out of all nations and tribes. It is high time to read the Gospel with these new lenses.

### **A New Understanding: The Land as the Fifth Gospel**

The land of Palestine was described by one of the church fathers to be something like a fifth Gospel. One cannot understand the Bible without knowing the land. The land is thus one of the hermeneutical keys to understanding the message of the Bible. It is important therefore to have a brief look at the land.

Historic Palestine, the land between the Jordan River to the east, the Mediterranean to the west, the Negev Desert to the south, and the Hermon to the north has a unique and



interesting position in the region. This land is isolated by these 4 natural barriers of water, deserts and mountains. And yet this land is located on the crossroads of 3 continents forming a bridge and thus is anything but isolated. This meant that the peoples living here had an identity distinct from that of the neighboring peoples, but that there was always an ongoing exchange, through trade, inter-marriage, migration, exile and displacement with many of the other regional peoples.

Palestine has a unique positioning: the land was given the image of being the heart of the region, the “navel of the earth”, and the center of the universe, while in fact it is nothing but a land on the periphery, the south west periphery of the Fertile Crescent, and a peripheral borderline for diverse empires. The land has the tragedy of having a grand ideological reputation that does not correspond to its actual size, geographic location and geo-political role. Due to this positioning Palestine has been mainly an occupied land, occupied by Egyptians, Assyrian and Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans, Arabs, Crusaders, and the Ottomans. While almost all of these superpowers had a longstanding, accumulative and strong identity, the peoples of Palestine had to keep adjusting their identity according to the changing context.

A look into the historic maps of Palestine reveals that the land was unified as one entity mainly when it was occupied, with the exception of the Davidic State at the turn of the first millennium B.C. Because of its location on the periphery, the land often came under more than one imperial influence at the same time which resulted in fostering diverse identities according to regions and peoples. Yet, whenever there was a political vacuum in the region, and whenever the peoples of the land were left to themselves, they always had difficulty in ruling themselves, in sharing the land and in keeping its unity. The land was thus divided between the different peoples according to different regions.

There was almost never ever a strong and developed identity that is inclusive enough and strong enough to unite the different peoples in the land enabling them to form a united and independent political entity in this small and narrow land. Because the peoples of the land were mostly occupied, they did not develop a well established notion of self rule. The desire to resist the occupying forces created something like an inbuilt ongoing instability.

Besides, the land is surrounded by semi deserts from two sides. It was also here in the deserts that most of the Zealots and fighters would retreat to escape the persecution of the occupier. Yet at the same time, these same Bedouin tribes would terrorize the populated city centers of Palestine preventing any accumulation of power, culture or civilization to succeed. It is in this context that Jesus was critical of the Zealots. We have to understand the geography and geopolitics of Palestine if we really want to understand its history and the identity of its people.

## **A New listening: The Peoples of the Land as the Sixth Gospel**

If the land was considered the fifth gospel, I would like to suggest that the peoples of the land constitute something like a sixth gospel. So far in doing theology “Israel,” whatever that meant, was considered the continuum from the time of Abraham until Christ. This is without doubt a very naïve, a-historical and fundamentalist approach to the Scriptures, even if it is done by very sophisticated or even liberal theologians. This is a confusion of the biblical story (His-Story) with History and adopting a mono-cultural perspective.

The sixth gospel I am suggesting is the peoples of the land. The Palestinian people are an important continuum from the biblical times until today. Their understanding of the context is important to understand the text of the Bible. They constitute another important hermeneutical key to the Bible. It is important to listen to their experience, which might prove to be more relevant to our exegesis than that of the Israeli people.

The peoples of the land lived often as aliens in their own homeland, because the land was controlled by others. On the other hand the neighbor was seen as a stranger and sometimes as an enemy. A subculture mentality was often developed with exclusive identity. The land was good enough but the others living on it were seen as bad people. It is in this context that Jesus was challenging the Jews to see in the Samaritans potential neighbors, and even models to be followed.

## **A New spirit: The Power of Culture**

In the quest for a new identity, what this land and its peoples need is a new spirituality. The land has been drowning in many nationalistic ideologies, a quest for militarization, and a culture of violence. The land is drowning in religious fundamentalism but is lacking spirituality and humanity.

In this context there is a real need to rely on the power of culture. This new spirit is non-violent in nature based on the conviction that “the meek should inherit the land.” The new identity needed cannot be based “in a written code, but in the spirit; for the written code kills, but the spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3,6). This new identity cannot be static in nature but must be dynamic, unafraid of change and open to reach new heights. The *ruach* or *pneuma* is not confined to Christians. It blows where it will (John 3,8). It is a divine power, an insight that we can share with Jews and Muslims and Christians.

## **A New Vision: Not Babel but Jerusalem**

The Middle East has been, throughout history, one of the most diverse regions in the world. In Acts Two, we hear about 15 different ethnic groups, each having its own distinctive languages, cultural practices and religious identities. This diversity was always a reason for tensions, wars and confusion. The question in the Middle East has always been what the overarching common identity of this region is. What holds this region together? There is no territorial continuity in this region: it is separated by deserts and seas. There is no religious uniformity. There is no one ethnicity. What holds the region together? Even the name for the region tells the problem of this

region: Middle East: Middle of what? And East of where? This is not how the people of the Middle East view themselves, but how the Europeans viewed them.

Unfortunately our region was united only when foreign occupying powers were ruling it. From Alexander the Great to the Romans, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Turks or the English, most of these occupiers tried to unite the region by imposing one language, or one culture or one religion. All of these superpowers were attempting to build their version of the tower to Babel. And like Babel they ended with confusion. All the attempts by the superpowers have failed. All these attempts were aiming at suppressing the local cultures and striving towards a cultural hegemony.

The question has been how one can achieve a unity in diversity. It is the spirit that helps us achieve this unity in diversity. It helps us to communicate. The challenge of a unifying region has not only to do with the diverse cultures and religions inhabiting it, but also with a geography divided by deserts that are difficult to bridge, by national boundaries that are artificial and do not make sense and by a missing infra structure needed for the exchange of peoples and goods. Palestine and the whole region are still searching for a new vision that is capable of overcoming the tribal attitudes, thus reconciling the diverse peoples, and for a system of communication to bridge the vast deserts and high walls within it.

### **A New Solidarity: Cross-cultural Connections**

The triangle of land, peoples and identities is not unique in human history. There are so many similar contexts with which to connect. We are not alone in this struggle, but we have a cloud of witnesses also among us this day: sisters and brothers from the Americas, from Aboriginal Australia, from former Yugoslavia, from South Africa, from Israel and from so many other countries. We want to listen to their narratives and connect in solidarity with them. My trip to Australia was planned to make just these connections, to learn from your experience, to share our story with you and to see how together we can make a difference in so many lands that have diverse peoples and multiple identities. This is a huge challenge, but it brings with it endless possibilities.

### **References**

Brueggemann, Walter  
2002 *The Land*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. (page?)