

THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN COLLEGIAN

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Two Peoples, One Land engages in dialogue on cultural barriers, solutions

Sam Hutton, News Editor  
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Collegian | Julia Percy

Activist Noor A'wad and Rabbi (((Hanan Schlesinger))) answer crowd questions at the Two Peoples, One Land talk held by Colorado State University Sept. 19. A'wad and Schlesinger shared personal stories about how they got involved with Roots, a grassroots organization that is a local Palestinian-Israeli initiative for understanding, nonviolence and transformation.

Colorado State University hosted Rabbi (((Hanan Schlesinger))) and activist Noor A'wad Sept. 19 to engage in dialogue surrounding the ongoing war in Gaza and the West Bank. The speakers also discussed political solutions to the Israel-Hamas war and provided resources for American activists.

As members of the Middle Eastern activist organization Roots, which works to foster conversations and build community between Israelis and Palestinians around the world, Schlesinger and A'wad primarily explored their personal identities and experiences in the West Bank to encourage understanding and nonviolence between Israelis and Palestinians.

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Schlesinger, an Israeli settler, and A'wad, a Palestinian from the West Bank, are continuing to tour internationally on behalf of Roots, educating audiences on the rigid cultural barrier between Israelis and Palestinians and offering solutions for a better future for both peoples.

“For my whole life, I lived within my Jewish identity, and I didn't make any room for anything else. I was blind to (the Palestinian) existence, or my identity made them transparent. Today I know that, in addition to the Jewish story in (the West Bank), there is also another people in that land: the Palestinian people.”  
–(((Hanan Schlesinger))), rabbi and Roots co-founder

Both Schlesinger and A'wad expressed hope that their initiative for understanding between Israelis and Palestinians will make positive progress in the region. They also both explicitly called for a permanent ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war and emphasized the importance of finding an international political solution to the conflict.

Schlesinger was born in New York and moved to the West Bank over 10 years ago, settling south of Bethlehem. He spoke at length about the isolation of Israeli and Palestinian citizens in the West Bank and the lack of understanding that results.

“What happens when two peoples — two enemies — live so close together but in completely different worlds with no contact?” Schlesinger said. “Ignorance of the other side, stereotypes, bigotry, racism, discrimination and lots of resentment, fear and hate.”

Schlesinger proceeded to emphasize the “humanization of the other,” claiming the first step toward a peaceful, two-state solution is to bring Israeli and Palestinian citizens together to find common ground. The second step, Schlesinger said, was to instill “humility, not exclusivity” among local Israelis and Palestinians to bridge divides and break down decades of isolation and misunderstanding.

Co-founding Roots in 2014 after engaging with Palestinians for the first time in his life, Schlesinger also recounted the personal difficulty he faced in challenging his beliefs when confronted by new perspectives. Schlesinger said Israelis and Palestinians both have ancestral claims to the West Bank region and are unaware of the other's claim, reinforcing the cultural barrier between the two groups.

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Born in Jordan after his parents left Israeli-occupied Bethlehem in 1991, A'wad spoke on his experience returning to the West Bank amid ongoing violence and recounted his first experiences with Israeli perspectives. A'wad also provided ample historical context in describing the last several decades of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

A'wad also said his only experience with Israelis before joining Roots was limited to interactions with Israeli soldiers who occupied West Bank territory. Coupled with his experience living in the West Bank during the Second Palestinian Intifada revolution against Israeli occupation in 2002, A'wad also personally testified to the feeling of dissatisfaction toward Israeli governance that persists today.

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“If you (were) a Palestinian living in the West Bank in those years, it doesn't take you a long time and you don't (need to) think like a lecturer on political science to understand that the No. 1 reason in the West Bank that makes our life complicated, takes away our national political rights and also sometimes takes away our basic human rights is the fact of the occupation,” A'wad said.

A'wad then spoke about his experience as a tour guide assisting American students on a trip through the West Bank and his first meeting with Schlesinger and other Roots members.

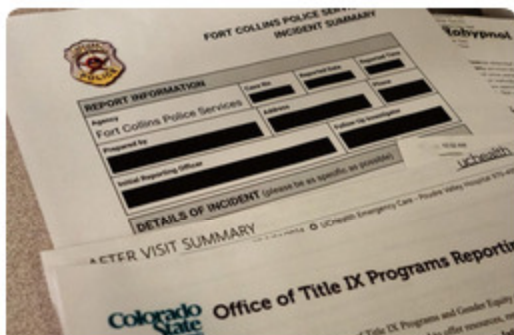
“I started to think deeply about the things Rabbi Hanan said about my side and my truth but also his side and what he considered his truth,” A'wad said. “It was the first time ever that someone from the Jewish side would present his or her identity and narrative not in a way that is denying or delegitimizing my identity and narrative.”

Schlesinger and A'wad concluded by answering questions from the audience, where they reaffirmed their commitment to finding a peaceful solution to conflict in the West Bank at a personal, grassroots level, while also advocating for an equitable two-state solution.

Reach Sam Hutton at [news@collegian.com](mailto:news@collegian.com) or on Twitter [@Sam\\_Hut14](https://twitter.com/Sam_Hut14).

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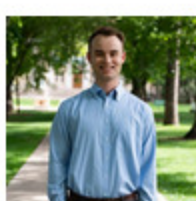


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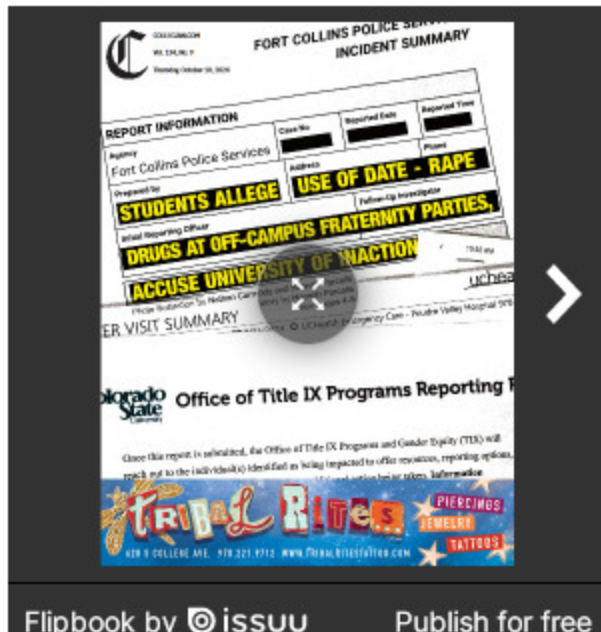
About the Contributor



Sam Hutton, News Editor

Entering his third year at *The Collegian*, Sam Hutton is currently a news editor, a role he couldn't be more proud to step into. Hutton has over two years of news reporting experience under his belt, largely comprised of student government coverage. Opinionated to no end, Hutton is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in political science with a concentration in U.S. politics, and he plans to work as a public administrator after his time at Colorado State University. He's honored to be acting in his position as news editor and hopes to continue improving as a writer, colleague and student every day. Hutton is from Colorado Springs, Colorado, and is thrilled to be a part of the Fort Collins and CSU communities, although a part of him will always miss the backdrop of Garden of the Gods and Pikes Peak. Mindful of *The Collegian's* long-established tradition of high-quality and fact-based news reporting, Hutton is especially excited to be acting as news editor during a national presidential election. He plans to apply what he's learned during his time at CSU and *The Collegian* to ensure readers are properly and fairly informed. He's reassured by the incredible team of journalists around him and is eager to see what *The Collegian* can accomplish next.

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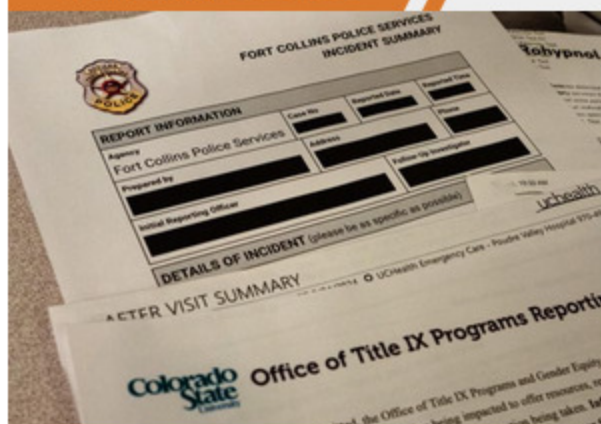


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Lory Student Center, Room 118  
Colorado State University, 8038  
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Editor in Chief: Allie Seibel  
[editor@collegian.com](mailto:editor@collegian.com)

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