

**ARAB-JEWISH COOPERATIVE COEXISTENCE IN
ISRAEL/PALESTINE**

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By

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This thesis is dedicated to
my grandparents, Margalete and Zvi Puni.
May your stories inspire others, as they have inspired me.

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Foreword

The current conflict between Arabs and Jews in Israel/Palestine has ruptured relations between the two peoples, and essentially divided them along geographic, economic, cultural, political, and sociological lines. Yet up until about a hundred years ago, these two peoples enjoyed a rich and deep shared history of coexistence, and lived together as neighbours in relative peace for centuries.

This thesis is an attempt to uncover those memories, and use them to rekindle the tradition of cooperative coexistence between Jews and Arabs in that region. It comes from listening to the stories of my mother's parents, both born in British Mandate Palestine, and from my own unique identity as a Canadian-Israeli-Palestinian-Algerian-Hungarian-Polish Jew and pagan. It comes from my own conflict of understanding the creation of the State of Israel as a rescue spot for Holocaust survivors like my father's mother, and my discontent with religious nationalism and its racist dimensions. It is above all an affirmation that peace is an ongoing relational process worth cultivating, and will never be achieved so long as Jews and Arabs stay separate, segregated, and ghettoized within their respective communities.

Chapter One Personal Reflection & The Politics of Memory

Resting in the shade of an olive tree, I smile as we enjoy an afternoon meal of *pita bread*, *zatar* (spice mixture), and *lebane* (yogurt cheese). We talk for hours about our people, our histories, and ourselves. We cook together, clean together, and plan our days together. Here we are, a group of Jewish Israelis and Palestinian Arabs, in the middle of a war zone, living together around the clock in the West Bank village of Mas'ha. What brings us together is a vision for peace, justice, and coexistence, and we manage to create a microcosm of those very things in a makeshift "peace camp" organized by the villagers. We are visited by an influx of well-wishers and supporters, bringing us supplies and encouragement. The Israeli army also pays an occasional visit, perplexed by our symbolic presence, and the reality of Jewish Israelis feeling at home in an Arab village.

In those dry summer days, I had come to taste cooperative coexistence and experience the joy of breaking down walls of separation through seeing the 'other'. Several years later, Mas'ha still holds a special place in my heart. Keeping in touch with my friends there has been challenging, yet the occasional phone call or e-mail is most celebrated. Knowing that I have lived Arab-Jewish cooperative coexistence gives me fuel to continue the slow and sometimes daunting work of peace building.

Using the rich, shared history between Arabs and Jews in historical Palestine, coupled with critical thinking and analysis, this thesis attempts to answer the question, "How do we renew the tradition of Arab-Jewish cooperative coexistence in Israel/Palestine today?" Memory becomes our first guidepost.

Memory

Memory is mythology. What we call memories are current interpretations of remembered past experiences. Whether it is a memory of the last few minutes, or of an event twenty years ago, our current mindset filters that image and presents it to us as history. So what is history? The story we want to tell ourselves based on our current beliefs. Yet orthodox society insists that memory is an “objective” process of recalling information from the storehouse of the mind, like a big computer database that we simply go into to get “the facts.” This would be true if our minds functioned like an endless tape recorder, storing every last detail and bit of experience that comes our way, unfiltered. Surely this is equated with madness in today’s world. What we call memory is carefully selected information that fits with our preconceived ideas about who we are, what this world is, and how we go about living our lives. So the myths we tell ourselves about life predetermines what our memories will be. And as our myths and worldviews change, our memories change too.

This is both good and bad news. The good news is that we are creatures capable of continuously changing our realities. The bad news is that we often refuse to open our minds to new ways of perception. Our identities become threatened as soon as a new narrative is introduced. Philosophers, historians and even poets often forget that when speaking of human conflict, we are actually speaking of a clash of memories. For often the ‘enemy’ or the ‘other’ does nothing more than challenge the way that we think about our collective and individual history. The intense intimacy between identity and memory, therefore, is the forerunner in determining whom we befriend, and whom we

deplorable. Memory researchers Paul Antze and Michael Lambek write, “Memories do not merely describe the speaker’s relation to the past but place her quite specifically in reference to it.”¹ Freud agreed, “It’s how you remember, not actually what happened.”² So in exploring memory, metaphor and myth become essential guideposts. In this sense, the analogy of a landscape, castle, or city fits better than that of a computer database. Even mainstream psychology understands that memory recall is not a simple matter of linear retrieval. In the area of ‘Eyewitness Testimony’, approximately half of all wrongful convictions are due to misidentification.³ In many cases, witnesses standing next to the perpetrator(s) for a substantial period of time still had a hard time identifying the suspect(s) to police. Memory researcher Elizabeth Loftus has determined that one major factor in this phenomena is violence. People tend to focus on the weapons used, and not so much on the individuals. Loftus and Burns have shown that when it comes to violence towards a child, many witnesses could not remember anything (events, environment) before the child was shot, even when shown an elaborate video. The fixation on the weapon and/or violence committed froze these people’s imaginations to a degree where not much else could be recalled.⁴

Memory is no laughing matter in Israel and Palestine. Cruise around a café in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, or Ramallah, and you will find people debating history quite passionately, rummaging over not just the last 50 years, but 5,000 years. This ritual, this intense hashing out, is a fundamental part of keeping the culture attuned to its own narrative, and relishing a strong sense of collective identity. No doubt many observers

¹ Antze and Lambek (1996), p xxv

² Hillman and Ventura (1992), p 27

³ Wall (2004), PSY100Y1Y Lecture 11

⁴ *ibid*

find this ritual strange, if not pointless. Yet memory and identity run deep in this part of the world, and even semantics are often held in high regard.

In considering political solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the dilemma of convincing people that peace is possible remains. While most Palestinians and Israelis today are determined to find a negotiated settlement to their difficulties, many are still envisioning neutrality at best. Perhaps this is wise in the short-term, but if the goal is relatedness and coexistence, memory could be a powerful tool in bringing these two peoples closer. For Arabs and Jews share a rich and powerful history together as neighbours, friends, lovers, business partners, and family. We must resuscitate these memories not in order to relive them, but to re-imagine them.

Childhood

My earliest childhood memories, as I imagine them today, are the sights, smells, sounds, and feels of Israel from the late seventies to the early eighties. I was the firstborn child of Meira and Shimon Zer-Aviv, a young couple in their early twenties struggling with the duties and pressures of being newlyweds and making a life for themselves. We lived on the outskirts of Tel Aviv, in a low-rise apartment building with a community feel. I remember the kids in that apartment building running wild, always finding another game or adventure to play.

My most vivid memories, though, are not of my parents or that building, but of my grandparents and their house in Givathaim, another suburb of Tel Aviv. Margalete and Zvi Puni were both born in British Mandate Palestine, and became members of the militant *Irgun* underground resistance movement in their teens, where they met. They

went on to marry, and raise a family in the newly formed Jewish state. While eventually breaking ties with political groups and movements in their adult life, they still lived largely in the stories and memories of the *Irgun*, or ETZEL, as they knew it. One of the biggest childhood treats for me was crawling into bed with *Safta* and *Saba* (Hebrew for ‘grandmother’ and ‘grandfather’, respectively) and having them tell me the stories of their childhoods in Palestine, of their struggles, and of their experiences in the wars. I would listen intently, and visualize the images coming through their words. I felt a kindred connection not only with these stories, but also with my grandparents in general.

My earliest impressions of “the Arabs” were not unlike those of many Israelis. My grandparents recited story after story depicting Arabs as violent, murderous, dangerous and ‘other’. Even when I got to the age where I could begin to understand the situation a little better, any mention of compromise with “the Arabs” was met with bitter cynicism and sharp counter-argument.

My parents left Israel in 1981, when I was four years old, to try their luck in Canada. Israel was in economic recession, and my parents were tired of intense personal and collective pressures imposed on them. My mother in particular did not want to see her kids become soldiers in their youth. Continuing in the family work tradition, my parents, grandparents (who also came to live in Canada), and aunt soon opened a bakery in the heart of Toronto’s Chinatown, where we all lived.

One of my greatest initiations came to me with the help of Jesus. I was playing one of Jesus’ Wise Men in the elementary school play, and my mother nearly had a heart attack when she stood there watching me deliver the frankincense and myrrh to the baby Jesus. Aside from possibly being the only Jews in our downtown Toronto elementary

school, my sister and I were among the few non-Chinese students as well. My parents decided they wanted their kids to get a Jewish education, and while falling short of putting us in private Jewish day school, we did pack up and move to the highly Jewish suburb of Thornhill.

I never felt particularly attached to being a practicing Jew, as I was raised to be much more of a Zionist. My father, an aspiring journalist, was very involved with the Israeli community in Toronto, hosting an Israeli radio show every week and bringing performers from Israel to Toronto on a regular basis. I grew up with some of the most famous Israeli musical stars in my living room, not really taking notice of them at all. Judaism was always secondary to Zionism in our household, which is very reflective of Israeli society on the whole. While my parents were never ultra-nationalists, and would probably be described best as 'right-of-centre' politically, Israeli flags would decorate many parts of our house, and my dad would even hook up radio antennas to the backyard fence to pick up Israeli broadcasts half the world away. My parents were proud of their country and identity, and always spoke Hebrew to us.

During my first few years of university, I began to read deeper accounts of Jewish history, and of my Israeli-Palestinian-Algerian-Hungarian-Polish ancestry. I sat with different relatives and dug up our family tree, and tried to get an intimate portrait of my ancestors. Who were they? What did they do? What interesting stories lay beneath the surface? What emerged was a set of unique narratives that resonated deeply with me. And I was determined to dig even more.

Arabs & Jews

Through my excavations, I became really aware of the intimate history that Jews and Arabs shared throughout the years, and how my homeland, Israel, was also Palestine to many Arabs. I began to read history from a Palestinian perspective, as my knowledge had largely been filtered through Israeli eyes until then. I was taken by how in the course of establishing Israel as a rescue spot for Jewish refugees and Jewish self-determination, Palestinians and other Arabs had been uprooted, displaced, and made refugees. I was strongly affected by the plight of the Palestinian people, and while always supporting peace for Israel/Palestine, I had known little of the past and current realities in-depth.

Around the same time, the political situation in Israel/Palestine was heating up tremendously. The Oslo peace process was crumbling, and extremism on both sides was rising exponentially. I had been a strong supporter of the Oslo process, and really believed this would bring resolution to the conflict. When final status negotiations crumbled in 2000, the situation really began to take a turn for the worse. I watched from afar, mourning the apparent descent of the peace process, but never thought to involve myself as more than a spectator and dinner-table activist. All that changed with the election of Ariel Sharon in 2001. It was like a bad dinner guest becoming master of the house overnight. I could not believe such a militant, fanatical, far-right figure would ever rise to power in Israel.

With Sharon's election victory, and the world blaming Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian leadership for the collapse of Oslo, I knew that something more complex must be going on beneath the surface. I began to unplug from mainstream media, which told a simple story of Arafat rejecting "the most generous offer" ever put on the table by Israel,

painting him as a terrorist and instigator of the second major Palestinian uprising in 2001. I went directly to the source, examining the documents and details of the negotiations, and read both side's accounts of what went wrong. It became so plainly obvious, so blaringly clear, that Israel and the United States had rushed the process and pushed Arafat into a corner for their own political gain. When Arafat rejected "the most generous offer", which was a plan to reduce the new Palestinian state to a series of Bantustans (isolated enclaves), and keep the Israeli army in the Occupied Territories, he was cut-off from the process and branded demonic. Arafat, for his part, did not come up with a counterproposal that would clearly define the borders and status of the new Palestinian state. The Palestinian uprising that followed came from the streets and refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where ordinary people had seen their lives get progressively worse under Israeli military occupation during the Oslo years. Rage that had been building for years came to a head with the final collapse of the process.

When I began to share this information with people, especially my fellow Israelis, I was frowned upon and told that I don't have my facts straight. A new consensus was emerging in Israeli society that "there is no partner for peace" and that the Arabs had once again rejected Israel's attempts at making peace. This was cemented by the fresh eruption of suicide bombings that targeted innocent Israeli civilians on buses and other public places. In a matter of months, Israel was being hit by the strongest wave of Palestinian terror attacks it had ever experienced. Ariel Sharon reoccupied all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip within his first year of office, and unleashed a fury of brutality and devastation through military force. Palestinian life continued to deteriorate, and the Palestinian people as a whole were being punished for the acts of the suicide bombers.

It was painful to see images of Palestinians under collective curfew, being randomly detained, humiliated, and under siege by an invading army. It was just as painful to watch innocent Israeli civilians being blown up on buses and streets. I knew I had to take a stand, as the current status quo was not only unacceptable, but also poisonous. I put my foot down at Passover dinner 2001, reading a speech affirming both Palestinian and Israeli human life, and denouncing the acts of Ariel Sharon and the suicide bombers. I took a clear stand against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and presented some of the atrocities being committed in our name as Israelis and Jews. My family was not pleased, and I was called naïve (which became the least of what I would be called in the years following).

As I “came out” with my viewpoints, it was clear that the situation was polarizing rapidly, and that I would be assigned to the “far left” of the political spectrum. The “mushy middle” seemed to be all but gone, and even some mainstream Israeli dovish circles were calling for force and attack. I knew the dangers of polarization, and my susceptibility to getting “locked in.” Only a few years earlier I had studied polarity therapy, a holistic modality focusing on creating balance through understanding the interconnection of opposites in the body/mind. Healing needed integration of polarities, or opposites, and problems in one part of the system often responded positively to work on another part of the system.

What I found in many radical leftist circles was a voice for my message, but also a lot of rigidity. Israel was often demonized as a colonialist extension of the United States, and many nuances and complexities were conveniently overlooked or ignored. Sadly, I also witnessed a significant amount of militancy in the radical left. I was often

criticized for my pacifist perspective, and found some of my comrades advocating violent resistance, and disregarding human life as sacred. The one group I did hold in great esteem was *The Tikkun Community of Toronto*, a small group of diverse activists calling for an end to all violence, and approaching the situation from a place of compassionate listening and justice for both Palestinians and Israelis. They were often criticized from both the left and right, which I viewed as healthy in such a polarized time.

I spent the summer of 2002 in Israel and the West Bank, working with *The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions* in Jerusalem and the *International Solidarity Movement* (ISM) in the West Bank. I was deeply influenced by what I saw happening in the region, and disgusted by the abuses I witnessed the Israeli army carrying out. After spending a week in Balata Refugee Camp near Nablus, I began to understand how these refugee camps contribute to the breeding of terrorism. I had intimate conversations with some of the youth of Balata, who told me flat out that as their reasons for living deteriorated, they would rather die doing something, anything, than be victimized by the Israeli army. I found this very hard to digest, and did not want to accept this logic at first. Then I saw what life in Balata was really like. Israeli army flares lit up the night sky, with incursions into the camp regularly. Army barricades and roadblocks were everywhere. Basic essential services were missing or severely lacking. The United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) was barely keeping up with the needs of the refugees. It became obvious that so long as people lived like this, in extremism, these camps would continue to breed extremists. While certainly not justifying terrorism or suicide bombings, I began to see some of their deeper causes.

I find myself in Israel again marking the 2005 calendar year, attempting to renew my connection to the peoples and cultures of this region. I am searching for the stories that lie here overlooked, which speak of goodwill and reconciliation between Jews and Arabs. At the same time, I am also looking for the stories that speak of the hardships and down side of relations through time, to remind us what we are working with, and help us understand the fears and traumas that have soaked the land here. My argument that genuine, lasting peace in Israel/Palestine can only be accomplished by bringing together Arabs and Jews for cooperative ventures, free of nationalistic goals, should not be confused with the 'melting pot' idea, where everybody is encouraged to give up part of their identity to form a homogenous monoculture. The emphasis is on multiculturalism, not assimilation. The emphasis is on diversity, not uniformity. My vision is to see Arabs and Jews living once again as neighbours and friends, with each group feeling safe and secure in an environment rooted in full equality and respect. I see the fabric of this new society resting on cooperative structures that promote partnership, community, environmental sanity, human rights, and personal boundaries, while moving beyond hierarchal, centralized structures. It is my belief that such a revolution will happen at the grassroots level, and stay there to promote a diverse range of networks and microcosms.

I share my story to initiate and invoke memory as healer, bridge builder, and wise counsel. What is desperately needed right now in Israel/Palestine is a new way of memory making. The last 100 years have drastically changed Jews and Arabs perceptions of one another, and what many remember now centers on a legacy of war, occupation, displacement, and bloodshed. This is perhaps the worst form of cultural erosion. Like the earlier example of eyewitnesses only being able to recall the violence

and weapons at the scene, many Israeli and Palestinian imaginations have become frozen, forgetting each other's faces and stories. My basic premise in this thesis reflects that of memory researchers Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, who state "...that memories are never simply records of the past, but are interpretative reconstructions that bear the imprint of local narrative conventions, cultural assumptions, discursive formations and practices, and social contexts of recall and commemoration."⁵ More simply put, what we remember is determined by what we have become accustomed to believe and think.

Terminology

In moving forward on this journey, it is important to be aware that there is no such thing as a 'value-neutral' term. Definitions and terminologies are all rooted in a particular perspective and source. They are littered with assumptions and biases, and even commonly used terms can be very widely contested. In attempting to put together a work on 'Arab-Jewish Cooperative Coexistence in Israel/Palestine', I am very invested in using terms and definitions that transcend segregation, and highlight equity and diversity. In making my argument, I have chosen to omit several common terms I feel are problematic, the first of which is the term 'Middle East'. It is Euro-centric in origin because it defines the regions of the world in relation to Europe as the center. Obviously it is a colonialist remnant still popularly used today. In speaking of the Eastern Mediterranean Coast region, which includes Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Turkey, the term 'West Asia' is used throughout this work. West Asia also

⁵ Antze and Lambek (1996), p vii

encompasses the Arabian Peninsula, which includes Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. ‘West Asians’ are referred to as the collective people of the region. In referring to European influence in the world, the term ‘Occidental’ or ‘Occidentalism’ is used instead of ‘Western’. Likewise, in describing Asian influence, ‘Oriental’ or ‘Orientalism’ is used instead of ‘Eastern’.

Some other popular terms omitted here are ‘Israeli Arab’ and ‘Arab Israeli’. The majority of Arabs and Palestinians living within Israel proper today define themselves as such, without considering themselves ‘Israelis’.⁶ In more accurately reflecting these people’s chosen identities, the term ‘Arab citizen of Israel’ and ‘Palestinian citizen of Israel’ will be used here. In transcending nationalism, the term ‘Israel/Palestine’ is used most often to describe the entire region of modern-day Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. The term ‘Israel’ is used when describing modern-day Israel, minus the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The term ‘Palestine’ is used to describe the territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Lastly, the term ‘Historical Palestine’ is also used to describe the area of Israel/Palestine, keeping in mind that Palestinian national identity is only a recent development.

Some common misconceptions need to be cleared up as well. The term ‘Semitic’ refers to that of the Afro-Asiatic language family that includes Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, and Ethiopic.⁷ Thus all peoples who identify with those languages can be considered ‘Semites’, including Arabs, Jews, Ethiopians, and Armenians. There is a common misconception that only Jews are Semitic peoples. The term ‘Arab’ refers to a member of a Semitic people originating in the central and northern Arabian Peninsula, now

⁶ Abu-Nimer (1999), p32

⁷ Penguin English Dictionary (1992), p 844

widespread throughout West Asia and North Africa, with Arabic as their common language. Arabs trace their lineage to Abraham through his son Ishmael. Not all Arabs are Muslims, and only 1/5th of the world's Muslims are Arabs. Arabs do not consider themselves a nation-state, but rather a people.⁸ The term 'Jew' refers to a member of a Semitic people tracing their lineage to Abraham through his son Isaac. They are historically and biblically known as 'Hebrews' or 'Israelites'. Jews consider themselves a people, as well as a religious, ethnic, and cultural group. The majority of Jews in the world today live in Israel and the United States, but can be found in many different countries around the world.⁹

Lastly, this work is written with an inclusive and egalitarian perspective. The terms 'she' and 'he' are used interchangeably when speaking in the third person. The stories and narratives selected attempt to reflect a diversity of experiences, and consider people whose stories have been drowned out by dominant patriarchal culture.

⁸ Bickerton and Klausner (2002), pp 4-5

⁹ Bickerton and Klausner (2002), p 5

Chapter Two

Awakening Memory: The Historical Seeds of Cooperative Coexistence

The first contact between Arabs and Jews can be traced to biblical times. In the Old Testament, the term *Arab* was given to the nomadic people of the central and northern Arabian Peninsula. Different tribal groups made up this collective, all sharing a desert lifestyle and an unwritten code of honor called *muruwwa*.¹⁰ Jews trace their own heritage to the Semitic tribe or group of peoples known as the Hebrews or Israelites. Since biblical records of contact, Arabs and Jews have been in close contact through the Hebrew, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine periods. With the rise of Islam in the 7th and 8th centuries, Arabic became the main language in West Asia. Arabs and Jews coexisted continuously since the rise of Islam in a vast geographical area stretching from Morocco to the borders of China. The Jews of the Islamic world made up about 90% of world Jewry until the 13th century. Even by the 17th century, half of all world Jewry was found in Muslim lands.¹¹

The period of Ottoman rule over historical Palestine stretched for over 400 years, from 1516 to 1918. During these years, Palestine was divided into several districts, called *sanjaks*, which were parts of larger provinces or administrative units called *vilayets*.¹² Under this system, Palestine never formed a political administrative unit of its own. The Ottoman government in Constantinople paid little attention to the Palestine districts until the middle of the 19th century. The area raised only minimal revenue, and had little military or strategic importance. Only after a decade of Egyptian occupation in

¹⁰ Bickerton & Klausner (2002), p 4

¹¹ De Lange (1997), p 143

¹² Bickerton & Klausner (2002), p 17

the mid 19th century, coupled with Anglo-French interest in the region, did the Ottomans take more notice of Palestine and assert their control. This included increasing their military presence, encouraging modernization in communications, education, roads, and infrastructure, and allowing a European company to build a railroad between Jerusalem and Jaffa in 1892, and then between Haifa and Deraa (Transjordan) in 1905.¹³

Palestine has historically been diverse in terms of the urban-rural-nomadic divide. Its villages were small, isolated and poor. The main source of income was from growing crops, and raising a few goats or sheep.¹⁴ These rural communities were organized into patrilineal clans called *hamulas*, which set out defined roles and responsibilities. *Hamula* chiefs were called *shayks*, and they were responsible for collecting taxes for the Ottoman authorities.¹⁵ Sunni Muslims made-up the majority religious group in Palestine, with Christian, Jewish, Shiite, and Druze minorities.¹⁶

The Ottoman Empire provided a hospitable welcome for Jews fleeing Christian lands. Most of the new settlers were *Sephardim* (of Spanish ancestry). The center of the new community was not in Jerusalem though, but in the northern Galilee town of Safad. The turbulence of the times in Europe was marked by Jewish expulsion, the breakdown of religious unity, and the retreat of Christendom before the Turks. All of this led many Jews to believe that the Messiah was arriving, and that they should take to studying scripture and mysticism. Safad, aside from being an important commercial center, was a historic center of Jewish mysticism, commonly called *Kabballah*. The 16th century Jews

¹³ Bickerton & Klausner (2002), p 19

¹⁴ Bickerton & Klausner (2002), p 19

¹⁵ Farsoun & Zacharia (1997), pp 24-26

¹⁶ Bickerton & Klausner (2002), p 20

of Safad lived in a tight-knit community, separate from Arab neighbourhoods.¹⁷ Kabballah study flourished during these years, and the community grew rapidly until regional instability, coupled with a strong earthquake in 1759, saw the end of Safad's rise as the central Jewish center in Palestine.¹⁸

By the mid 17th century, there were some one million Jews worldwide, with about half living in Islamic countries.¹⁹ Under Muslim Ottoman rule, there was no single uniform policy towards the treatment of Jews and other non-Muslims. Whatever policies existed were considered ad hoc and liberal, and largely depended on the ruling *caliph*.²⁰ Non-Muslims were considered *dhimmi*s, historically translated to mean 'people of a contract or covenant', but implemented to mean 'second-class citizens'.²¹ *Dhimmi*s were subjected to a special poll tax called *jizya*, and restricted from much of societal life. Their testimony against Muslims was not accepted in courts of justice, and they were subject to forced relocation. Jews in particular were required to wear a yellow turban, and wear a bell around their neck upon entering the bathhouse, announcing their arrival.²² Muslims treated Jews better than Christians overall during Ottoman rule. This may be due in large part to the fact that Christians were less subservient to their Muslim conquerors than were the Jews. Historian Moshe Ma'oz comments, "Jews in Syria and Palestine usually endeavored to prove their loyalty to the Muslim Ottoman State, particularly when it was exposed to external danger, such as during the Crimean war."²³

¹⁷ Stillman (1979), pp 89-91

¹⁸ Stillman (1979), pp 89-91

¹⁹ DeLange (1997), p 143, 201

²⁰ Stillman (1979), p 91

²¹ Bickerton & Klausner (2002), p 7

²² Cohen (1984), p 72

²³ Ma'oz (1975), pp 161-162

Jews could, however, practice their religion freely, and were given a considerable degree of autonomy within the Ottoman ‘millet system’. This system guaranteed each individual non-Muslim religious community official State recognition, represented through a designated community leader. This left non-Muslims with complete management of their own affairs in the areas of education, law courts, religious worship, and personal status. The Turks also established a chief rabbi, the *Haham Bashi*, in Constantinople. His role was to oversee Jewish affairs in the entire Empire.²⁴ Religious pluralism and tolerance was present at all times, with a notable degree of joint religious feasts, shared places of pilgrimage, and mutual saint worship across Palestine. One famous example is the holy spring near Akko, where Jews and Muslims would gather to pay worship and pilgrimage. Biblical saints common to both religions were worshipped, including King David/The Prophet David, The Patriarch Abraham/Ibrahim, and his great-grandsons. Most unique, perhaps, was the practice of employing members of another religion to pray for you, which was done by Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Palestine.²⁵

Common folk culture has long been shared between Arabs and Jews throughout West Asia and North Africa. Many beliefs and practices around spirits, amulets, and protective devices were practiced across religions. In my interviews with Jerusalemite elders, documented later in this chapter, I have heard more than once that “99% of people in Jerusalem died of the Evil Eye, and 1% from disease.”²⁶ This expression reveals the belief in malefic spirits and curses common in both Arab and Jewish cultures. Malefic spirits, called *Jinn* in Arabic, are warded off through protective measures. The Evil Eye, common to Jewish culture, is another source of harm often counteracted by such things as

²⁴ Park (1949), pp 166-167

²⁵ Patai (1986), pp 171-173

²⁶ Interview with Margalete Puni (2004)

amulets, fire, and water. A popular protective amulet in both Arab and Jewish traditions is the *khamsa*, meaning ‘five’ in Arabic, shaped like a human hand. The Star of David is another protective charm for many West Asian and North African Jews and Arabs, especially in Morocco. One traditionally popular folk practice used by both Arab and Jewish women was swallowing of the foreskin as a fertility charm. Infertile women in Tripoli, Libya especially used this practice.²⁷

There are numerous Ottoman records documenting joint Arab-Jewish cooperative projects and ventures in Palestine throughout the 16th century onwards. In Jerusalem, for example, Jews and Arabs formed joint businesses, and relied on one another for specific goods and services. Many Muslims purchased meat from Jewish butchers in the belief that it was more sanitary. Meat slaughtered by Jews was often distributed through Muslim meat vendor’s shops in the market. Among shoemakers, records reveal joint Arab-Jewish working environments, and interaction between Arabs and Jews in buying and selling from one another.²⁸ The spice market in 16th century Jerusalem featured a mix of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish merchants, all doing business next to one another.²⁹ In 1537, two Jews and one Muslim were jointly operating a flourmill.³⁰ Jewish bakeries rented their ovens to Muslims for baking, and many Jewish traders did business with Bedouins who frequented Jerusalem.³¹ Arab villages outside Jerusalem invited Jewish cheese makers to sell their products in their communities, and jewelers were known to transact across ethnic boundaries.³² Among the medical profession, Arab and Jewish

²⁷ Patai (1986), pp 153-161

²⁸ Cohen (1984), pp 159-161

²⁹ *ibid*, pp 171-172

³⁰ *ibid*, p 189

³¹ *ibid*, pp 191, 196

³² *ibid*, pp 168, 188

doctors were known to substitute for one another when one was away from the Jerusalem for short periods. In 1547, the Muslim head doctor of Jerusalem appointed a Jew and Christian to replace him while on leave to Istanbul for a few months. Similarly, a Jewish head doctor in Jerusalem appointed a Muslim to replace him while on a three-month trip to Cairo in 1571.³³

My grandmother, Margalete Puni, remembers life in British Mandate Palestine where she was born. Born 1930 in Jerusalem to Mazal and Yousef Baruchiel, *Sephardic* Jews with roots there, Margalete was raised in the newly formed city of Tel Aviv. As a child, she would visit her relatives in Jerusalem. Her aunt, Yochevet Baruchiel, was a commanding woman well known in her community. She raised eight children, and was often overflowing with breast milk. Jerusalem was very poor in those days, and many mothers did not have enough food to give their children. Many babies even died of starvation. Yochevet would gladly share her breast milk, nursing both Arab and Jewish babies on a regular basis. Like most Jerusalemites in the Old City, Arabs and Jews would live in mixed neighbourhoods, and interact on a daily basis as friends, neighbours, business partners, and even lovers. My grandmother tells me that her aunt's story is not unique, and that many women shared their breast milk, whether an Arab mother with a Jewish baby, or vice-versa. This story leaves the most powerful impact on my soul, and brings tears to my eyes. "If we can share breast milk, we can certainly share land", I think aloud. My grandmother also tells me that Arab women had the best reputation as midwives in Jerusalem, and were often found delivering Jewish babies into the world.

³³ Cohen (1984), pp 176-177

This was not a business relationship, as commonly understood today, but a matter of a neighbour or friend helping with the birth process. I think of all the Jewish babies who came into this world with an Arab hand, and smile.³⁴

The religious quarters of Jerusalem were not always well defined in the city's history. No official Jewish quarter existed in 16th century Jerusalem, and Jews lived largely mixed with their Arab neighbours in all but one section of the city.³⁵ Some Arab and Jewish homes had no real separation between one another, and children could often enter a neighbour's home by mistake.³⁶ As historian Amnon Cohen highlights, "A property [in 16th century Jerusalem] was not necessarily owned by a single person or even a single family: often one part of a house was sold to one person, another part to someone else. Jews usually sold to Jews, but occasionally the buyer was a Muslim, resulting in joint Jewish-Muslim ownership of a property."³⁷ Records also reveal some 40 different houses and rooms rented by Muslims to Jews in 16th century Jerusalem. There are also examples of Muslims renting from Jews, although this was less common.³⁸

The 17th and 18th century saw Palestine as a neglected Ottoman district, as local governors became more independent of central control, and were prone to corruption and mismanagement of their duties. Public works were not carried out, agriculture and trade declined, and the majority of the population were impoverished and oppressed.³⁹ The ruling Turkish minority treated the average Arab Muslim almost as poorly as they did any

³⁴ Interview with Margalete Puni (2004)

³⁵ Cohen (1984), p 17

³⁶ *ibid*, p 207

³⁷ *ibid*, p 205

³⁸ *ibid*, p 199

³⁹ Bickerton & Klausner (2002), p 17

other minority. This, coupled with a series of natural disasters, left Jewish centres like Safad and Tiberias utterly depopulated.⁴⁰ Safad was the most populous Jewish centre until 1837, when another major earthquake forced many of its inhabitants to head for Jerusalem. By 1839, Jerusalem had 5,000 Jews, Safad 1,500, Hebron 750, and Tiberias 600. Smaller centres of Jewish life included the three sea-coast towns of Akko, Haifa and Jaffa, which accommodated about 400 Jews, and the city of Nablus with about 150. An estimated 400 Jews remained in other Palestinian villages. This gives a total of about 10,000 Jews in Palestine by the year 1839, roughly the same number living there during the first 50 years of Ottoman rule.⁴¹ By 1839, the entire population of Palestine was between 300,000- 400,000 people.⁴²

Ibrahim Abu El-Hawa, born, raised, and still living in Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, invites me to his home. I first met Ibrahim at a peace gathering event several years ago, where he spoke of the importance of bringing together Arabs and Jews for authentic contact and dialogue. Ibrahim embodies his talk by opening his home to guests from all over, especially welcoming Israelis and Jews to visit his Palestinian neighbourhood. He insists on picking me up from Damascus Gate, and we slowly make our way to a house he is constructing for his family and to welcome more guests. Ibrahim explains that his parents and grandparents instilled in him the tradition of coexistence by keeping their house open to anyone who needed a place to rest, regardless of their religious or cultural background. His grandfather worked in the local Jewish cemetery where he had 14 donkeys that delivered stones from neighbouring communities.

⁴⁰ Stillman (1979), p 93

⁴¹ Park (1949), p 261

⁴² *ibid*, p 276

His father also worked in the Jewish cemetery until 1948. Ibrahim, born in 1942, recalls his father's many Jewish friends, who would often come for dinner. He speaks of a time when the deep divisions between Arab and Jew did not exist, and how well these two peoples got along on so many levels. We make our way back to his current home, where the walls of his guesthouse are draped in peace stickers and messages of reconciliation. A young Jewish Israeli man has been living there for close to a year, active in the local community and with peace building projects. Ibrahim tells me that hundreds, if not thousands, of people have stayed here, and that his work is to promote Arab-Jewish reconciliation by bringing people together. Ibrahim says he would like to support a similar-type guesthouse to be constructed in the Jewish part of Jerusalem, welcoming people from all over at no cost, including Palestinian Muslims like himself. Somehow I think his vision is not so unrealistic, even in these turbulent times.⁴³

The Ottomans began to take more notice of Palestine in the mid 19th century, after Egypt started to assert its independence from their control, along with strong Anglo-French strategic interest to control the Suez isthmus. The *sanjak* (district) of Jerusalem suddenly became more important to the Turks, and was closely monitored by Constantinople. Sultan Abdul-Hamid II, who began to rule the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century, invested a lot of his energy in transforming Palestine through enhanced communications, education, roadways, and transportation systems. He ordered an increased military presence in the region to strengthen his control. He even allowed a European company to construct a railroad between Jerusalem and Jaffa in 1892, and then

⁴³ Interview with Ibrahim Abu El-Hawa (2005)

between Haifa and Deraa (Transjordan) in 1905. The consequence of this rapid modernization plan was an increased presence of European influence in Palestine.⁴⁴

Increased trade and globalization led to a dramatic shift in the Palestinian economy, especially for *fellahin* (peasants) and the rural farming population. The introduction of monetization, coupled with heavy money-lending, led to mass indebtedness of the rural population. Many landowners were forced to give up their lands, and become tenants on their ancestral farms. A growing gap between the poor and wealthy led to a marked decline in small and medium sized properties, an increase in land prices, and a rise in huge estates. Europeans of all types also began to settle in Palestine, and as Ottoman control weakened, several European nations claimed special rights to West Asia as “protectors” of the European settlers living there.⁴⁵

In the meantime, growing anti-Jewish pogroms in Eastern Europe and Russia led about 50,000 European Jews to immigrate to Palestine between 1882 and the beginning of the First World War.⁴⁶ Many Palestinians greeted this influx as an extension of European interference with the local economy and culture. These immigrants were perceived as part of the major change and disruption resulting from European colonialism and trade. This hostility was not directed at native Palestinian Jews, the majority of who were *Sephardim* (of Spanish ancestry) and *Mizrahim* (of West Asian and North African ancestry), and were seen as part of the cultural landscape.⁴⁷ Documents from early 19th century Palestine reveal that a number of Jews and Arabs formed partnerships, as brokers

⁴⁴ Bickerton & Klausner (2002), pp 18-19

⁴⁵ Lerner (2003), pp 17-18

⁴⁶ Farsoun & Zacharia (1997), pp 47-48

⁴⁷ Lerner (2003), pp 17-19

in wheat or livestock, or joint businesses like a local dairy.⁴⁸ The *Ashkenazi* (of European ancestry) Jews coming to settle in Palestine embodied an entirely different culture that was foreign to the Arabs and Jews of the region. Growing European interventionism, occupation, and oppression would eventually replace the existing Ottoman regime by the end of the First World War⁴⁹. Growing anti-Jewish oppression in Europe would also mean an emerging Jewish desire to find refuge in Palestine. A series of events and factors, not to mention British promises of nationhood to both Palestinians and Zionists, would spark a now century-old conflict.

Margalete Ben-Ezer, and her sister Esther Malki, greet me with open arms as I make my way up the staircase to Margalete's apartment. This exchange is particularly emotional for me, as these women are blood relatives that I have never met before. A large tray of food is ready for our meeting, and the stories I am about to hear will teach me about my ancestry, and more about Arab-Jewish Relations in early 20th century Jerusalem. These are the daughters of Yochevet Baruchiel, my grandmother's aunt mentioned earlier in this chapter. Yochevet was a folk healer, wet nurse, and all-around old school Jerusalemite. With her passing several years ago, her children are the gateway to the memories, stories, and traditions she imparted. They are both eager to share their early impressions of Jerusalem with me, and impressed with the topic of my thesis. Margalete, born 1930 in Jerusalem (same year, city, and first name as my grandmother), remembers many good things about the way Arabs and Jews got along. Both her and Esther grew up in Givat Shauel, just minutes away from the neighbouring Arab village of

⁴⁸ Halper (1991), pp 31-32

⁴⁹ Bickerton & Klausner (2002), p 17

Deir Yassin. She tells me of the warmth and trust between these communities, and the many rituals they shared throughout the year. Margalete remembers going to Deir Yassin every *Purim* (a Jewish holiday) and trying on dresses the villagers would give her. She remembers the celebration at the end of *Pessach* (Passover), as Deir Yassin villagers would bring large platters of food to Givat Shauel residents as a token of friendship. The Jews of Givat Shauel would offer Passover *matzas* (unleavened bread) to the Arabs, who gladly accepted. Relations were so good that some Jews even lived on the outskirts of Deir Yassin, as one of their aunts did. Margalete and Esther speak of the tradition of sharing breast milk between mothers, and how ethnicity or religion would play no part in this. Their mother took part in this tradition, and supposedly had very rich milk. They remember house courtyards that Jews and Arabs shared, sitting together and living in the same compound. Even more fascinating are the stories of mixed Arab-Jewish marriages that were common in Jerusalem, especially in the area of Karen Ha'Temane (Yemenite Quarter). They explain that it was very common to find a Jewish woman marrying an Arab man, but very uncommon for an Arab woman to marry a Jewish man. As I already knew, there is even one such occurrence in our family, as one of Yochevet's sisters married an Arab man from Egypt. I brought up the topic of Deir Yassin once again, and of the terrible massacre that was committed there by Jewish militants in 1948. Margalete looked up at me and told me about the pain in her heart when she heard about what happened there. It was so obvious that she cared deeply about the people there.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Interview with Margalete Ben-Ezer and Esther Malki (2005)

These histories and stories highlight some of the rich and meaningful shared experiences between Arabs and Jews in historical Palestine over the last 500 years. They can be used to renew the tradition of cooperative coexistence by teaching us about ancestry, culture, and custom. Arabs and Jews are not starting from scratch, and these memories can be treated like ancient recipes, many of which offer valuable tips and clues, even if the ingredients are outdated or unavailable. These stories also highlight some of the injustices and animosities between these peoples, including the second-class status of the Jews. In moving towards a model for genuine cooperative coexistence in Israel/Palestine today, it is overly simplistic and dangerous to default to nostalgic interpretations of the past, or promote “a return” to the way things were. Any reading of the history informs us that relations between Arabs and Jews in Palestine were far from perfect, although considerably better than that between Israelis and Palestinians today. Modern realities have also changed the collective needs and aspirations of both Arabs and Jews, and changes in national identity, technology, communications, and other areas places cooperative coexistence in a different context than during Ottoman times. In awakening these historical seeds, our next step involves creating a critical analysis that does look to the available ‘ingredients’ of today, challenging us to find new tools and devices to heal and transform modern Arab-Jewish relations in Israel/Palestine.

Chapter Three
A Critical Analysis:
Arab-Jewish Cooperative Coexistence In Israel/Palestine Today

Pioneer peace researcher and educator Johan Galtung defines one type of coexistence as “an agreement between parties to proceed on parallel tracks, each within its own dialectic.”⁵¹ While this definition may be seen as a progressive step forward between warring parties, this thesis argues that a long-term, viable, warm peace is best sustained by joint efforts that bring people together for social, cultural, political, economic, and other interests. In the case of Arab-Jewish Relations in historical Palestine over the last 500 years, there existed a considerable level of cooperation and interdependence in areas like housing, business, and cultural/social activity. At the same time, structural realities promoted segregation in other areas like the legal system, public facilities, and the minority status of the Jews.

There exists a range of assumptions about what cooperative coexistence is, and failure to understand this point is bound to result in further confusion. Indeed, many Arab-Jewish coexistence programs today have failed their participants because of a lack of understanding about dynamics and structures. In many cases, programs have been created with little or no input from the diversity of groups they are meant to be serving. Some critics observe that many of these initiatives do more harm than good by preaching the principles of equality and pluralism, while consecutively promoting an agenda of assimilation.

⁵¹ Abu-Nimer (2001), p 3

The Work of Mohammed Abu-Nimer

One of the leading scholars in the area of Arab-Jewish Encounter Programs in Israel is Professor Mohammed Abu-Nimer, a Palestinian citizen of Israel lecturing at American University in Washington DC. Professor Abu-Nimer is both a supporter and critic of many Arab-Jewish coexistence and encounter programs, and has conducted numerous studies into their dynamics and effectiveness. His most exhaustive work on the subject is presented in his book *Dialogue, Conflict Resolution, and Change: Arab-Jewish Encounters In Israel (1999)*. Looking at six different encounter programs in Israel, he probes each one in-depth and from a variety of angles. His conclusions suggest that the most established and popular coexistence programs in Israel seriously fail to address the needs of their participants, and often reinforce tensions by ignoring essential issues at the heart of the conflict. He suggests a critical re-evaluation of these programs and their most basic premises.⁵²

Abu-Nimer brings up the whole idea of ‘Contact Hypothesis Theory’, a central concept in modern inter-group relations. This theory states that bringing people together to increase interpersonal relations will affect changes in attitudes and opinions of one another. Contact Hypothesis Theory comes largely out of the human relations movement that arose after the Second World War.⁵³ Modern psychology is largely rooted in this understanding, and the premise of many therapy and support groups rest on this theory.⁵⁴ With respect to Arab-Jewish encounter groups, Abu-Nimer says that the focus on

⁵² Abu-Nimer (1999), p 166

⁵³ Abu-Nimer (1999), p 1

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p 1

individual psychology may be unable to affect significant changes at the macro level, where the roots of the problem may be.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Arabs and Jews in Israel vary significantly in the modes of interaction they are accustomed to via their cultural context. Arab culture tends to stress the value of interaction ritual, in which acts towards the subject is held in high esteem. Jewish culture in Israel tends to adopt more of a direct manner of interaction and individual self-expression.⁵⁶ Abu-Nimer notes that all of the encounter programs he studied overlook this fact, and facilitators bring in the Occidental techniques of “emotional clarification”, where a participant is expected to expose herself to others. Since this is not intrinsic in Arab culture, which looks more to collective processes, many Arabs in these encounter groups come off as more polite and less direct in the encounters, which makes them appear more suspicious to the Jewish participants.⁵⁷

Abu-Nimer points out that many encounter groups in Israel consider themselves to be apolitical, and avoid political discussion as a rule. The focus is on personal and cultural acquaintance, with the final goal of looking for common ground and focusing on similarities and solutions.⁵⁸ Skipping the political discussion phase, “the problem” is framed as a lack of communication between Arabs and Jews, or a misunderstanding of culture and identity. It is assumed that once these problems are cleared up, both groups can move forward towards coexistence and peaceful relations.⁵⁹ Abu-Nimer’s research reveals that many of the participants, intervenors, and facilitators of these programs do not believe that the main issues of the conflict are dealt with in these programs.⁶⁰ In fact,

⁵⁵ Abu-Nimer (1999), p 8

⁵⁶ *ibid*, pp 154-156

⁵⁷ *ibid*, p 155

⁵⁸ *ibid*, pp 164-165

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p 45

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p 112

this leads him to ask if these programs act as a way to relieve the Jewish participants guilt at being associated with the oppressor group, while providing the Arab participants a release-valve at feelings of political and structural disempowerment.⁶¹ At the same time, Abu-Nimer stresses the value of encounter programs as the only opportunity for Arabs to interact with Jewish Israelis without being accused, feared, or humiliated, and for Jewish participants as a safe space to look deeply at the culture and perceptions of Arabs.⁶²

The Ministry of Education, a branch of the Israeli government, funds many of the largest encounter and coexistence programs in Israel. This subjects these programs to the Ministry's inspection, policy, and authority, and creates an immediate bias because of the link to Israeli government policy.⁶³ Many critics ask if coexistence is being used as a tool for cooptation of the Arab population in Israel. Abu-Nimer asks if such programs are a clever attempt at making Zionism more palatable to Arabs living in Israel by presenting the universal face of Israel.⁶⁴ He critiques that many of these programs seek to increase the Israeli identity of the Arabs participants, while decreasing their national Palestinian or religious identity. In fact, all of the programs Abu-Nimer studied use Hebrew as the spoken language in the encounter, generally meet in a Jewish space, and have more Jewish involvement at the leadership level.⁶⁵ As political discussion is restricted, the question of the legitimacy of a Jewish State as opposed to a state of its citizens is not broached, which places the assumption of Israel being a "Jewish, pluralistic, and democratic State with equal civic rights" on the Arab participants.⁶⁶ The inherent

⁶¹ Abu-Nimer (1999), p 152

⁶² Abu-Nimer (2001), p 237

⁶³ *ibid*, 161

⁶⁴ Abu-Nimer (1999), p 153

⁶⁵ *ibid*, p 66

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p 155

assumptions in this definition are not discussed. There is even a history in Israel of some dialogue organizations being run by ruling political parties to mobilize political support among the Arab minority.⁶⁷

In her work on majority-minority interethnic dialogue, researcher Amy S. Hubbard concludes that participants from each group view dialogue differently. She states, “Majority participants are more likely to approach dialogue with an interest in communicating with minority participants. Minority participants are more likely to expect political action to come out of their dialogue efforts.”⁶⁸ She defines ‘majority participants’ as those “whose people or community or nation are in the relatively more powerful position”, whereas ‘minority participants’ are in the relatively less powerful position.⁶⁹ She also discovered that majority participants are more likely to view the Race Relations process in the context of ‘conflict resolution’, whereas minority participants are far more drawn to the ‘social justice’ framework.⁷⁰ The first context suggests that everyone must change in some way to bring about peaceful relations, whereas the latter approach suggests that peaceful relations can best be accomplished if the majority group changes their ways and justice is brought forward.⁷¹

When determining what “success” means in many of the encounter and coexistence programs that Abu-Nimer studied, participants often had very different ideas. He found that many Arab participants define “success” as reaching an agreement on a conflict issue, convincing the Jewish participants of their ideas, and building friendships, in that order. Many Jewish participants define “success” as building a friendship, having

⁶⁷ Abu-Nimer (1999), p 157

⁶⁸ Abu-Nimer (2001), p 281

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p 278

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p 282

⁷¹ *ibid*, p 283

fun, and getting to know the Arabs better, in that order.⁷² Again, the majority of these programs are designed to facilitate success based on the Jewish participant's perspectives, reflecting the asymmetry at the organizational/leadership level of the program.

In approaching cooperative coexistence in Israel/Palestine, separating the political context from the personal context directly favours the majority participants by protecting the status quo and its inherent structural imbalances. Abu-Nimer's work suggests that schools in Israel have become social agencies supporting and preserving government policy by implementing encounter programs void of any political discussion. An even greater risk is the promotion of non-critical and non-analytical thinking skills when designing and implementing encounter programs. Abu-Nimer says, "An effective encounter program is one that is able to provide its participants with critical analytical skills to understand and systematically analyze the structural as well as perceived causes of a conflict situation. To do so, the model of coexistence program should focus on power imbalance analysis, too."⁷³ Many coexistence and encounter programs in Israel today are designed with the perception that stereotypes, miscommunication, and interpersonal experiences are the sources of the conflict. As long as these assumptions go unquestioned, and terms defined only by the majority group, cooperative coexistence will never develop into a relationship based on equality, pluralism, and all of the values many proponents claim to espouse.

Abu-Nimer recommends some major changes to the way encounter programs are designed and implemented in Israel. Among these recommendations are that directors and decision-makers be both Jewish and Arab, both having equal influence in shaping the

⁷² Abu-Nimer (1999), p 124

⁷³ Abu-Nimer (2001), p 251

program. As well, funding and financial support for programs should come from both Arab and Jewish communities, even if the Arab resources are often restricted or scarce. When it comes to accepting government support and funding, any conditions that influence or limit the decisions of the program should be rejected.⁷⁴

While Abu-Nimer's bias is obviously geared toward the Palestinian side, his work becomes important in clarifying majority-minority dynamics, and advocating programs that look to meet some neglected and overlooked needs of participants. I have focused highly on his work so as to include a Palestinian-centered perspective on coexistence programs, which is often missing in a Jewish led field in Israel. In implementing his recommendations and insights, it is important not to do so at the expense of the Jewish participant's established needs, or risk creating a reverse vacuum effect. Politicizing the encounter, a major need for Arab participants, must be done in a way that does not cancel out the major Jewish need for personal relationship building and cultural acquaintance.

Understanding The Political & Social Contexts

In looking at cooperative coexistence initiatives in Israel/Palestine today, understanding the political and social context is essential to informing a critical analysis. Without this basic understanding, efforts become divorced from current realities, and the ability to perceive the needs and responses of participants become more difficult. At present, Israel has been militarily occupying both the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 1967, protecting a series of Jewish settlements built there. Over three million Palestinians live under Israeli occupation daily, and this involves regular curfews,

⁷⁴ Abu-Nimer (1999), p 166

checkpoints, and other harsh measures imposed on the entire Palestinian people. West Bank and Gaza Palestinians are restricted from entering Israel proper, and Israeli law currently prohibits any Israeli citizen from traveling to these Territories.⁷⁵ This makes the prospects for joint Arab-Jewish initiatives in the West Bank and Gaza very difficult, if not nearly impossible at points.

Also, Israel defines itself as a Jewish State, while about 20% of the population is Arab.⁷⁶ This includes Palestinian, Druze, and Bedouin communities. On the whole, Arabs living in Israel are subjected to a range of discriminatory policies, especially in the area of land ownership, where non-Jews are limited from leasing lands.⁷⁷ The education system in Israel is highly segregated, with both Jewish and Arab schools.⁷⁸ Further, Arab communities, towns, and cities generally receive much lower levels of government services and resources.⁷⁹ These imbalances in government policy make mixed housing communities a challenge to set-up, with only one known running project at present.⁸⁰

Jews are coming out of the most gruesome period in their history, where acts of genocide claimed six million Jewish lives throughout Europe some 60 years ago. This, coupled with thousands of years of oppression at the hands of majority groups, has spurred many Jewish people to seek self-determination in their own national homeland. Anti-Jewish racism has not ceased, continuing to rear its ugly head in many parts of the world today. Ongoing persecution and genocide transformed the collective Jewish psyche, as Jews gathered to find a refuge where they could be safe and determine their

⁷⁵ <www.weekly.ahram.org.eg/2003/650/op9.htm>

⁷⁶ <www.adalah.org>

⁷⁷ Dalal (2003), p 33

⁷⁸ <www.adalah.org>

⁷⁹ *ibid*

⁸⁰ <www.nswas.com>

own affairs. While many Jews continue to live outside of the State of Israel, the large majority supports political Zionism, the idea of a Jewish State.

Arabs are coming out of hundreds of years of colonialism at the hands of foreign powers that often abused and violated them in many different forms. In the process of shaking off colonialist influence, Zionism brought hundreds of thousands of European Jews to settle in Palestine at the same time it was under British military occupation. These settlers came with an ideology to erect a Jewish State in Palestine, and overlooked the fact that there were other people living there. The famous Zionist slogan, “A land without a people for a people without a land” ignored the existence of Palestinians. The Zionist movement remained largely ignorant of Arab concerns and struggles. When the State of Israel was declared in 1948, over 750,000 Palestinians were uprooted from their homes and made refugees.⁸¹ This happened again in 1967, when 500,000 more Palestinians were forced to flee their villages and dwellings.⁸² Palestinians and Arabs that remained in the newly formed Jewish State lived under military rule from 1948-1966.⁸³ They continue to live as second-class citizens even today.

Both peoples are coming from authentic places of concern and need. Arabs refuse to live under military rule, systemic policies of discrimination, and be subject to extremely harsh and brutal living conditions. They refuse to allow Jewish settlers to steal their ancestral lands, deplete their water resources, and have preferential status. The large majority of West Bank and Gaza Palestinians are asking for their own self-determination in a Palestinian State, and the official position of the Palestinian government is to establish a State in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Palestinians and

⁸¹ United Nations (1979), p 71

⁸² United Nations (1984), pp 55-56

⁸³ Dalal (2003), p 30

Arabs living within Israel are asking to be treated as equal citizens, and not have their non-Jewish status held against them in any way.

At the same time, most Jewish Israelis remain committed to the idea of a Jewish homeland, where they can determine their own affairs and not be subject to majority rule. The memories and traumas of the Holocaust are still fresh in the collective Jewish psyche, and Israel is the only country in the world that defines itself as a safe-haven for Jews. Palestinian terror groups like *Hamas* have targeted and killed Israelis in buses, shopping malls, and other public spaces. Jewish Israelis are determined to live in a safe and secure homeland, and the threat of terror attacks makes this impossible for them.

Efforts at cooperative coexistence must take these realities into account. Simply ignoring the Jewish and Palestinian plights does nothing to heal the roots of the conflict. Jewish concerns about security and safety, and Arab concerns about self-determination and equality, are crucial in understanding the context of the conflict in Israel/Palestine. Coexistence efforts that skip this stage, and do not integrate the social and political spheres into their efforts, risk becoming ineffective in meeting their participants needs. Jewish concerns about safety and security must not be dismissed as mere “paranoia”, as this amounts to insensitivity and devaluation. Arabs concerns about equality and self-determination must not be reduced to “propaganda”, as this overlooks fundamental structural imbalances and daily realities for many Arabs.

The three case studies examined in the following chapters are attempting the difficult and rewarding task of building bridges between Arab and Jewish communities in Israel/Palestine. They are doing this in ways that are cooperative, democratic, pluralistic, and sensitive to both people’s needs. They have been selected because they most closely

reflect the process of renewal, critical analysis, and empowerment cultivated throughout this thesis. Also, these projects span a range of different coexistence areas, from housing, to political activism, to education. In analyzing these projects, I will be looking at the strengths and weaknesses of each according to the perspectives and criteria outlined in this chapter. The work of Mohammed Abu-Nimer is of particular value in this analysis, as it highlights some major areas of importance in the set-up, design, and implementation of Arab-Jewish coexistence programs. The chart on the next page lists these major areas of importance, and will be used to assess each project. While exploring key elements of each case study, the framework of this analysis is meant to be a general overview and introduction to using critical thinking skills. A comprehensive, methodical, and in-depth study of each project is beyond the scope of this thesis. My intention in this exploration is to spur the reader's imagination to begin thinking critically about the future of cooperative coexistence efforts in Israel/Palestine, and stimulate dialogue about the issue on the whole. There is no magic formula for "making peace" happen, and none of these case studies are presented as the ultimate or definitive answer to the ongoing separation between Arabs and Jews in Israel/Palestine.

Major Areas of Importance In Assessing & Analyzing Arab-Jewish
Cooperative Coexistence Programs In Israel/Palestine (Abu-Nimer)

<u>Major Area</u>	<u>Factors & Considerations</u>
Contact Hypothesis Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Cultural contexts & assumptions *Occidental Vs. Oriental approaches *Modes & models of interaction *Psychological Vs. Structural Approaches *Interaction Ritual Vs. Individual self-expression
Political Vs. Apolitical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Who defines the terms? *Political/Apolitical assumptions *Relationship to status quo *How is the conflict framed?
Majority Vs. Minority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Different needs of participants? *What is “success” and who defines it? *Zionism & Jewish State assumed? *Political & other influences? *Neutral space? Arab/Jewish space?
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Symmetry/Asymmetry in language? *Hebrew as the main language? *Translation?
Leadership, Facilitation & Decision-Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Arab/Jewish symmetry at leadership level? *Organizational structure? *How are decisions made? *Mandates/mission statement/goals?
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Subjected to evaluation/critique/ethics? *Political influence(s) of funding sources? *Conditions/restrictions of funding sources? *Balance between Arab/Jewish sources? *Hidden agendas?
Critical/Analytical Thinking Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Developed or repressed?

Chapter Four Rekindling The Fires: Three Case Studies

(1) Hand In Hand: The Center For Bilingual Education In Israel

Lee Gordon and Amin Khalaf began with a simple yet profound vision: to bring together Jewish and Arab children for desegregated, bilingual education in Israel. Eight years since the founding of their organization, *Hand In Hand: The Center For Bilingual Education in Israel*, hundreds of children have been educated in the organizations three schools. Gordon and Khalaf, citizens of Israel of Jewish and Arab origin, set out with a mission “to catalyze the creation of a network of integrated schools around the country, providing Jewish and Arab parents the option to send their children to schools where they can learn and interact with all their neighbours.”⁸⁴ The Israeli education system continues to be highly divided along ethnic lines, with Jewish schools receiving significantly more money and resources per student. Human Rights Watch reports that Arab schools in Israel are often overcrowded, understaffed, poorly built, badly maintained, or simply unavailable.⁸⁵ In looking for receptive communities to host Hand In Hand, the city of Jerusalem and the Regional Council of Misgav, along with the Arab town of Sakhnin and the village of Shaab, were all interested in working to help open a school.⁸⁶

Hand In Hand opened its first two schools in September 1998, with 20 kindergarten level children in Jerusalem, and 25 first-graders in the Upper Galilee. These were Israel’s first bilingual schools implemented in mixed residential areas. Only one

⁸⁴ <www.handinhand12.org>

⁸⁵ <www.hrw.org>

⁸⁶ <www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=188>

other such school, Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salaam, existed in an isolated community ideologically identified with promoting Israeli-Palestinian coexistence. Currently in their sixth year of operation, the Jerusalem school boasts 11 classes, starting from junior kindergarten to grade six, while the school in the Upper Galilee has expanded to include a junior high school program. In September 2004, a third school opened in the Wadi Ara region of Israel, with 100 students ranging from kindergarten to grade three. Over 500 students currently attend Hand in Hand's three schools.⁸⁷

The schools are set-up so that each has two principals, one Arab and one Jewish, as well as two teachers per class, also one Arab and one Jewish. The student body is divided roughly to contain half Arabs and half Jews. Mixed classes offer a bilingual, multicultural, and egalitarian learning environment, with emphasis on symmetry between Hebrew and Arabic in all aspects of instruction. This is accomplished by having the two homeroom teachers speak their mother tongue, interacting with each other, elaborating each other's sentences, and offering no translation. The children are encouraged to reply in whatever language they feel comfortable using. All aspects of the curriculum are taught in both Hebrew and Arabic, with teacher's focusing on equal language use, and making sure the children understand the content. The visual school environment is also bilingual, including the books, signs, letters, computer keyboards, and numbers displayed.⁸⁸

School policies and decision-making practices are made in local school steering committees, which are made up of the two principals, parents, and government education representatives, who all meet once a month. Hand In Hand is recognized by the Israeli

⁸⁷ <www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=188>

⁸⁸ Beckerman (2005), pp 5-8

Ministry of Education as a nonreligious public school system, and is funded in the same way as other nonreligious public schools. The Israeli Ministry of Education has separate departments for Arab and Jewish schools, each having its own curricula. Hand In Hand is developing its own unique curriculum by drawing from both streams.⁸⁹

Aside from language and curriculum challenges, bringing together peoples with very different and often opposing historical narratives has also proved to be a complex task. Holidays like Israel's Independence Day, marked with celebration by many Jews, is marked as the *Nakba*, or Day of Catastrophe, by many Palestinians. Committed to multicultural education, the school has decided to mark both events by holding separate ceremonies, one for Jews and one for Arabs. This is supplemented with in-class discussions between all students, exploring the sensitive subject matter by presenting a plurality of historical narratives.⁹⁰ Another related internal conflict arose when Palestinian President Yasser Arafat passed away in 2004. Many of the school's Jewish parents objected to any commemoration of Arafat, while many Palestinian parents felt it was very important to commemorate him. After much heightened emotion and disagreement, it was decided to compromise by placing some photos of Arafat in one corner of the school, allowing anybody who wished to pay tribute.⁹¹

Hebrew University ethnography researcher Zvi Beckerman spent two years researching Hand In Hand schools, conducting over 120 interviews with parents, staff, and students. This research included sitting in on numerous classes, attending all school events, and recording all steering committee meetings. His conclusions reveal that while the organization is making a serious, committed, and sustained effort at bilingual

⁸⁹ Interview with Ala Khatib (2005)

⁹⁰ Beckerman (2004), pp 596-598

⁹¹ Interview with Ala Khatib (2005)

education in Israel, symmetry has not yet been achieved. Palestinian teachers were found to be fluent in both Hebrew and Arabic, while their Jewish counterparts had only a very limited, if any, knowledge of Arabic. Students generally preferred to interact with teachers and other students of their own national background. Students also generally used Hebrew when in a mixed group, even when the majority of children were Palestinian. Beckerman's study reveals that based on the children's language proficiencies, bilingual instruction was more successful among Palestinian students. Hebrew was also the dominant language during teacher interactions, at teacher's meetings, training sessions, parents meetings, and steering committee meetings.⁹²

Ala Khatib, one of the Jerusalem school principals, admits his school still has a ways to go in achieving a fully bilingual school environment. He is committed to the objective, though, and believes it is within reach. He points to the school's rapid expansion in the course of a few short years, with more kindergarten classes than ever before at his school, including the addition of a junior high program planned for next year. I ask him about the curriculum, and how the school contends with some of the challenges around devising an integrated Arab-Jewish approach. He replies that staff in his school work extra-hard by not only integrating the regular, standardized curriculum streams, but also going beyond it to incorporate a bi-national, multicultural, and bilingual approach that aims for balance and inclusivity. He says that the greatest challenge facing the school is to finish and finalize the curriculum.⁹³

If stories make memory, then languages give meaning. Ethnographer Zvi Beckerman explains that languages "produce and express identity, create connectedness

⁹² Beckerman (2005), pp 5-10

⁹³ Interview with Ala Khatib (2005)

in political and social communities, and are consequential in the marketplace.”⁹⁴ Hand In Hand has taken on an extraordinary task in the midst of renewed sociopolitical unrest. A quick cross-reference with the chart on page 40 indicates that the organization seems to be making notable headway in the creation and promotion of multiculturalism, pluralism, and bilingual education in Israel. This is evidenced not only by its rapid growth, expansion and popularity among Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel, but also by its inclusive decision-making process, which sees joint Arab-Jewish leadership and symmetry at the internal level. Critical analytical thinking skills also seem to be encouraged and developed through open forums, input from parents and administrators, and engaging students to question and examine socio-cultural assumptions and narratives. Where Hand In Hand falls short, though, is in its failure to meet its own goal of a fully bilingual educational institution. Arabic continues to be a secondary language, even after continued attempts to balance the dynamic by applying “affirmative action” approaches to its use in the schools. In fairness, the current sociopolitical realities in Israel make it extremely difficult to promote Arabic as a central language. Hebrew far outweighs Arabic in its use in the workplace and in economic spheres in Israeli society. Nevertheless, by creating one of the first comprehensive models for bilingual education in Israel, the prospects for a truly multicultural, pluralistic, and inclusive society are already underway.

⁹⁴ Beckerman (2005), p 15

(2) Ta'ayush: Arab-Jewish Partnership

Arabic for “living together”, Ta'ayush came about in the autumn of 2000, following Ariel Sharon's controversial visit to the Temple Mount with 1,000 police officers, and the ensuing violence that erupted thereafter. Started by both Jewish and Arab peace activists living in Israel, this grassroots, nonviolent, direct action organization has two main goals: an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and full equality and civil rights for all of Israel's citizens. With no set ideological doctrine or manifesto, Ta'ayush prides itself on being a joint Arab-Jewish movement invested in nonviolent direct action as its main focus. In its short history, the group has captured headlines by coordinating bold and symbolic actions aimed at challenging the status quo, and drawing attention to issues conveniently overlooked by the mainstream Israeli public and press.⁹⁵

Ta'ayush's first major public action, beginning in December 2000, was organizing convoys of food and medicines to besieged Palestinian villages in the Occupied Territories. These convoys were led by Ta'ayush activists directly, in trucks and private vehicles, and implemented more as a solidarity action with a humanitarian tone. The police and army had a difficult time explaining why they would wish to prevent aid from getting through. More than ten such convoys reached Palestinian communities in the midst of renewed war and violence, providing essential relief. Thousands of Israelis crossed checkpoints and barriers, exposing themselves to the daily

⁹⁵ <www.taayush.org>

realities of occupation, seeing first-hand the impact of roadblocks, settler-only highways, military abuse and harassment.⁹⁶

What makes the organization unique is its rejection of hierarchal leadership structures, and its commitment to inclusive, process-oriented decision-making. Working committees open to all members come up with ideas for actions and projects. These ideas are taken to general meetings where they are discussed, and then either approved or rejected. Decision-making is done through consensus, and supposedly actions are rejected if even one member objects strongly. Leadership roles are shared, and there is no formal leadership level. As an Arab-Jewish movement, everybody is encouraged to use their own mother tongue, and the meetings are held in both Arabic and Hebrew with the use of a volunteer translator. In reality, the conversation usually defaults to Hebrew when there is no translator available, as most of the Jewish members do not speak Arabic, while many of the Arabic members speak Hebrew.⁹⁷ As part of the organizations attempt to be non-patronizing, all actions are done together with the community Ta'ayush is working with.⁹⁸

After a year of continuing to lead food and medicine solidarity convoys, the situation became more complicated as the army closed off more roads in the Occupied Territories. This did not stop Ta'ayush from working with the half-nomadic, indigenous cave-dwelling inhabitants of the South Hebron Hills region, who were being forcefully driven and expelled from their dwellings by Israeli settlers and army. Ta'ayush members acted as a protective human chain so that the expelled inhabitants could return to their dwellings. This proved successful, as they did manage to return. Ta'ayush continues to

⁹⁶ <www.taayush.org>

⁹⁷ Interview with Leena Dallahseh (2005)

⁹⁸ <www.taayush.org>

work closely with these people, monitoring the situation regularly. With ongoing regional instability and decay, Ta'ayush actions in the Occupied Territories faced harsher resistance from the Israeli army. One demonstration at A-Ram checkpoint, which brought together over 3,000 people from a range of groups to protest the occupation and deliver a relief convoy, was tear-gassed and violently dispersed. Still, the humanitarian supplies managed to get through to Ramallah. Not all future convoys were as lucky, though, with some held-up for days or even denied altogether.⁹⁹

In recent years, Ta'ayush has moved away from solidarity convoys, which can be seen to weaken the political message. The main focus now is on the separation wall being constructed in the West Bank, and trying to stop it. This wall has been a grave source of land confiscation, entrapment, and ghettoization for many Palestinians. Aside from educating the Israeli public on the impact of the wall, Ta'ayush activists have taken part in numerous demonstrations with West Bank Palestinians leading nonviolent movements against it. One such demonstration saw over 1,000 Palestinians, Israelis, and Internationals gather in the West Bank last August 2004, with speeches from Mahmoud Abbas, the current Palestinian President, and Dr. Arun Gandhi, the grandson of the late Mahatma Gandhi. In some cases, such resistances have worked in pressuring the Israeli government to change the route of the wall closer to Israel's own borders. Ta'ayush is working closely with several other Israeli and Palestinian peace groups on this campaign, including Gush Shalom, The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, and the villagers of numerous West Bank Palestinian villages.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ <www.taayush.org>

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*

Leena Dallasheh, a highly active Palestinian member of Ta'ayush, joined the organization in the autumn of 2001. She explains some of the challenges facing Palestinian members of Ta'ayush, and how they are being addressed. On a practical and logistical level, it is generally more difficult for Palestinians to come to meetings, as they usually take place in highly Jewish urban centres like Haifa and Tel Aviv. Palestinian women in particular are challenged, as it is custom for them not to travel alone. To remedy this dynamic, some meetings have been moved to Palestinian centres. Another factor in the Arab-Jewish dynamic is that most Ta'ayush actions fall on a Saturday, this being the only full day off for many Jewish members. Some Arab members are prevented from attending because they must work on Saturday. Leena mentions that the Arab-Jewish demographic of Ta'ayush is roughly the same, and even slightly higher, than the national average: 20% Arab, 80% Jewish. With regional Ta'ayush groups across Israel, including Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem, the group can claim no more than between 1,000-1,500 active members, and generally manages to get a few hundred members out to regular actions. What appeals to Leena about the organization is its "very fluid dynamic" that lets individual members make their own personal decisions about what they feel comfortable doing, and the fact that Palestinian concerns and input are taken seriously. Indeed, the idea of an Arab-Jewish movement in Israel is a totally new idea, and a learning process when it comes to working as a joint activist group.¹⁰¹

Examining the working chart on page 40, it is quite arguable that Ta'ayush is one of the best working models for Arab-Jewish cooperative coexistence in Israel/Palestine today. From the decision-making and planning process, to the event level, the group is open to challenging itself through an open forum. Both Jewish and Arab members work

¹⁰¹ Interview with Leena Dallasheh (2005)

closely together, with no set ideological doctrine. Explicit political goals leave little room for confusion about what brings Arabs and Jews together. Critical and analytical thinking skills seem to be encouraged through engaged dialogue and a relatively symmetrical power-sharing structure. Sensitivity is given to the majority-minority dynamic, with a willingness to balance asymmetry by focusing closely on Arab and Palestinian concerns and needs. In the words of Azmi Bdeir and Yasmine Halevi, two active members of Ta'ayush, "It [the word 'Ta'ayush'] means living together, struggling together against alienation, against the separation wall, discrimination and racism, mastery and patronism, humiliation and boycott, exploitation and occupation."¹⁰² This expanded definition of the word has brought together Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel to challenge their society, and create a working model that seeks to end injustice, while promoting power-sharing strategies between Arabs and Jews.

¹⁰² <www.taayush.org>

(3) Mosaic Communities

Mosaic Communities arose from the need and vision of desegregated housing communities in Israel. At present, the laws of the State of Israel do not provide equal access to housing and land. The government of Israel controls 93% of the land in the State, and leases out to its citizens.¹⁰³ Arab citizens have very limited access to this land, as most communities are segregated through zoning, land use planning regulations, and requirements such as army service.¹⁰⁴ Mosaic Communities mission statement is to “establish integrated housing communities open to all residents of Israel, thus challenging housing policies that institutionalize legal segregation. Mosaic Communities will lease and purchase land, facilitate planning, development, and construction of homes. It will also sell or lease the homes, and provide supporting services to communities when they are established.”¹⁰⁵

The idea of Mosaic came about 20 years ago, out of the ashes of the desegregation movement happening in the United States. Mosaic’s founder and current Executive Director, Fred Schlomka, was very involved in the movement to buy homes in white residential areas, and sell them to black families. When he came to live in Israel in 1985, he had an idea to start a private development company with an interest in affirmative action for mixed communities. It became quickly apparent that a private company would not be enough to deal with the institutionalized segregation in Israel. After meeting and discussing with interested Arab and Jewish partners over the course of several years, it

¹⁰³ <www.mosaic-coop.org>

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*

was decided that a housing cooperative could best embody the goals and objectives envisioned. A cooperative is a member-run organization that is democratic by nature, and can also do business at the same time.¹⁰⁶

Mosaic Communities officially launched in 2003, with a Board of Directors made-up of both Jewish and Arab members and a full-time Executive Director. During the process of being established, it was decided that the city of Ramle would be an excellent starting base. Ramle is a microcosm of the ethnic divide between Arab and Jew inside Israel. Its population now reflects the demographics of the country (20% Arab, 80% Jewish), and it has become one of the most impoverished locales in Israel. The low standard of living is coupled with a poor history of Arab-Jewish relations, with highly segregated sections and a municipal administration favouring the Jewish residents in the areas of municipal services, education and housing.¹⁰⁷ Based in Ramle, Mosaic Communities has developed a youth project that brings together Arab and Jewish teenagers for workshops and dialogue on conflict issues. This includes the use of drama, art, and photography, with an upcoming plan to develop a youth training and business cooperative. The youth meet on a regular basis, and both Arabic and Hebrew are spoken, with the use of a translator.¹⁰⁸

The current goals of the organization are to develop a membership base by outreaching to the Ramle community. Already a steering committee of Ramle residents has been formed, with the task of deciding how to create the conditions to bring Mosaic Communities into their community. Mosaic's intention is to spend its first few years of development on projects "entailing joint activities and common action by which their

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Fred Schlomka (2005)

¹⁰⁷ <www.mosaic-coop.org>

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Fred Schlomka, Executive Director

nature generate cooperative narrative, rather than develop the less productive route of Arab/Jewish dialog groups.”¹⁰⁹ The intention behind this is to begin creating the conditions for the establishment of mixed communities in Ramle. This includes expanding the current youth project, deepening the understanding of Arab-Jewish demographics in Ramle, and building local contacts. The youth project in particular is meant to become a joint business cooperative and training program that can increase economic prosperity in the city, and provide local services for Arabs and Jews in a mixed setting. This includes a variety of courses and services that will be discounted for members of Mosaic Communities, with the underlying goal of building a membership base. It is intended that through this unique initiative the larger aims of Mosaic Communities will be made known to more Ramle residents.¹¹⁰

Mosaic is currently in negotiation with the Anglican Church for the lease of a property in downtown Ramle to serve as an administrative and activity facility for the organization. This space will serve as a regular meeting spot for all of the courses and services that will be offered as part of Mosaic’s strategic plan. Some of the planned activities include additional youth groups, computer training, language classes, performing arts, computer/internet access, a barter network, and summer camp. Some of these activities are already available in Ramle, but only within segregated environments. These programs will bring the diverse members of the Ramle community together under one roof, and expose them to the organization’s values and philosophies.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ <www.mosaic-coop.org>

¹¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹¹ Interview with Fred Schlomka (2005)

The process of registering as a cooperative is subject to stringent government rules and regulations in Israel.¹¹² For this reason, Mosaic is still in the process of petitioning to be officially registered as a housing cooperative. Until this happens, the organization remains under the sponsorship of *AL-BEIT: Association for the Defence of Human Rights In Israel*. Its funding currently comes from several sources, with the main benefactor being *The Green Foundation* in New York City. This private foundation awards fellowships to non-profits in their beginning stage, and has provided Mosaic with enough funding to hire a full-time Executive Director for three years. The other main backers include *The New Israel Fund*, a non-profit funding agency with a mandate to promote equality and pluralism among all of Israel's citizens, and *The Mennonite Central Committee*, a religious organization interested in issues around peace and justice. Smaller donations come from private individuals and other organizations. None of these donations subject Mosaic Communities to conditions or restrictions in the way it operates or implements its mandate.¹¹³

Mosaic's first mixed housing community is planned to be ready for occupancy in the next five years. By growing its membership constituency, registering as a cooperative, and being in the public eye, the organization is planning to transform from a top-down structure to a bottom-up one. This means that all members will be offered participatory planning status, enabling them to shape decisions on the whole. Once a potential building site is secured by Mosaic Communities, it is almost certain to elicit a reaction from the government and residents of Ramle, especially through the process of applying for development approval. Mosaic views this as an opportunity to stimulate

¹¹² Interview with Fred Schlomka (2005)

¹¹³ *ibid*

public debate on the issue of segregation, enhance the visibility of the Ramle project, attract more interest in membership, and offer additional public relations opportunities. Legal action will be initiated if the authorities reject the development plan. If the plan is approved, however, then the impact on Israel and Ramle would be enormous, as the government would have to consider providing services to all of its citizens on an equal basis for the first time. In this way, Mosaic Communities is planning to be a catalyst for dramatic social change in Israel.¹¹⁴

Based on the working chart on page 40, Mosaic Communities seems to be developing in ways that consider power imbalances, looking to correct them. This is evidenced in the use of both Hebrew and Arabic at all levels of operation and implementation, and the critical analytical thinking skills cultivated through open forums and public consultations. The organization is still too early in its beginning stages to accurately assess some of the deeper dynamics at play, such as the specific needs of its participants and their definitions of “success.” One key challenge is in the organization’s own goal of transforming from a top-bottom structure, as it is currently designed, to a bottom-up one, where members share power and all decision-making. This factor may be the single most important component to creating an effective program.

¹¹⁴ <www.mosaic-coop.org>

Afterword

The revolution towards Arab-Jewish cooperative coexistence in Israel/Palestine is underway. As highlighted in the previous chapter, thousands of Israelis and Palestinians are spearheading joint movements aimed at eliminating barriers that keep them apart, working together for peace, justice, and reconciliation. While still small in number and size, these people and their projects are the foundations for a future where Arabs and Jews live side by side again, in a society grounded in equality, diversity, and mutual respect. It is only in such a context that the term ‘Holy Land’ can be redeemed, so as to value the holiness and sacredness of every living thing on its soil.

In considering political solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we can refer once again to the chart on page 40 and ask ourselves if the basic requisites of power-sharing, joint decision-making, and inclusiveness are being developed and implemented in the process of negotiating and formulating a strategy. Who is making the decisions? Do they represent the interests and needs of the majority of their people? How will this solution be implemented to address the needs of both peoples? Under which conditions could a solution work? These questions are the backbone of devising and executing a negotiated political settlement that will actually work for both sides both in the short and long term. The failed Oslo Accord lacked this very thinking, and was especially removed from the ordinary lives of many Palestinians it claimed to be serving.

I agree wholeheartedly with visionary activist Rabbi Michael Lerner that our central goals in this historical moment for Israel/Palestine should be to end the oppression of the Palestinian people, and ensure Israel’s survival and security, eliminating terror as a

daily reality there.¹¹⁵ Israel's ongoing military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, coupled with discriminatory policies against Arab citizens of Israel, means that Arabs continue to suffer as underdogs. Jewish realities of the last century have created an intense need for a safe and secure homeland, and for self-determination. The world largely failed Jewish refugees seeking to escape genocide and persecution by not allowing them entry into their borders. Israel remains the only place committed to embracing Jews from the world over. So long as anti-Jewish racism continues to rear its ugly head, the need for such a homeland remains. Only in a climate where the pressing political needs of both Arabs and Jews are addressed and remedied can cooperative coexistence flourish, and move beyond isolated, fringe projects. While the framework of this thesis has been post-nationalist, it is my strong belief that the best way forward for Israel and Palestine right now is within the context of a fair and suitable two-state solution. Such a solution that is embraced by a significant majority on both sides will help end the pressing and immediate human rights crisis in Palestine vis-à-vis the occupation, and ensure Israel's survival as a democracy. As life gets better for ordinary Palestinians, extremist terror groups like *Hamas* will find themselves more isolated and weakened. Their ability to carry out deadly terror attacks in Israel will decline.

Several detailed and comprehensive two-state peace treaties have been devised between Israeli and Palestinian leaders. The most famous, known as 'The Geneva Accord', came about after secret negotiations between top Palestinian negotiators and senior Israeli leftist politicians. The agreement has generated much dialogue in Israel and Palestine, and received worldwide attention. The major details are as follows: Israel, for its part, withdrawing to pre-1967 borders, with minor border changes in exchange for an

¹¹⁵ Lerner (2003), p 143

equal amount of land on a one-to-one basis. All Israeli settlers would be returned to Israel proper, based on the newly formed borders. Arab sections of East Jerusalem would be handed over to the newly formed Palestinian State, serving as its capital. West Jerusalem would remain the capital of Israel. An international fund would be established to provide compensation for Palestinian refugees uprooted in 1948 and 1967, with no significant right of return. Palestine, for its part, would fully recognize Israel as a Jewish homeland, concede any major right of return for Palestinian refugees, and agree to live in a demilitarized state.¹¹⁶ The majority of Israelis and Palestinians today support a negotiated settlement to their differences based on a two-state solution compromise.¹¹⁷ The Geneva Accord puts forward just such a compromise, and has gained notable support among both the Palestinian and Israeli public since it was announced in November 2003. While the Palestinian government has been open to it, the current Ariel Sharon government has rejected it outright.¹¹⁸

From the perspective of Arab-Jewish cooperative coexistence, The Geneva Accord lacks a strategy to transform the hearts and minds of Israelis and Palestinians, so that a lasting peace can be better embraced and facilitated by ordinary people. Rabbi Michael Lerner advocates some concrete and immediate steps both Israelis and Palestinians can take to initiate a citizen-based peace movement. On the Israeli side, he calls for a far-reaching campaign to collect and deliver food and other necessary supplies to the Palestinian people currently living in refugee camps. This includes sending medical care and services to refugee camps, a “peace corps” of volunteers dedicated to improving quality of life for Palestinians living under occupation. He also calls for

¹¹⁶ Lerner (2004), pp 20-58

¹¹⁷ <www.geneva-accord.org>

¹¹⁸ Lerner (2004), p 60

Israelis to invite Arabs, Muslims, and Palestinians to their homes, and get to know them.¹¹⁹ Lerner calls for more Palestinians to speak out against violence and terrorism directed at Israelis, recognizing their humanity. He calls for a mass non-violent Palestinian movement aimed at ending the occupation.¹²⁰

Arab and non-Jewish citizens of Israel must also be ensured full civil rights, including equal economic entitlements to any Israeli who has served in the army. Israel's commitment to Jewish self-determination must not interfere with the rights of its non-Jewish citizens. Many would argue that this is impossible, since the idea of a Jewish State is by default discriminatory to non-Jews. I would respond that Israel's creation was an international remedy for the plight of Jews, decided upon by a vote of the United Nations, and as such an act of "global affirmative action" for the Jewish people. Israel continues to hold a special role as the only nation with an affirmative action policy for Jews. This need not take away or clash with the rights of any non-Jewish citizen living there. Israel today still has a considerable way to go in ensuring its non-Jewish population full equality. Among some positive and immediate steps Israel would be served by taking include compensating for power imbalances by implementing affirmative action programs for non-Jewish citizens, embracing Arabic more fully as an official language, and continuing to commit to practices and policies that are democratic, secular, and pluralistic.¹²¹

Once a fair and suitable two-state solution is implemented, the stage will be set to catalyze a revolution in the area of Arab-Jewish cooperative coexistence. With more symmetrical power dynamics and less boiling crisis, the message of cooperative

¹¹⁹ Lerner (2004), pp 133-134

¹²⁰ Lerner (2004), pp 143-146

¹²¹ Lerner (2003), p 144

coexistence will be easier to sell to the public. One of the first major steps is to set-up a Peace and Reconciliation Commission in charge with implementing efforts aimed at healing and transforming relations between Arabs and Jews. A host of cooperative efforts could be launched, including joint citizen-based dialogue groups, exchange programs, and entrepreneurial ventures. In addition, the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission could allow victims from both sides the chance to tell their stories publicly, having their truths acknowledged, and work to provide reparation and rehabilitation. Perpetrators could seek potential amnesty if they agreed to full disclosure of their violations. Such testimonies could help establish a fuller picture of the nature, causes, and extent of human rights violations committed. Such a process could very well trigger public apologies from political leaders for the pains caused by their nation's action. This would be a powerful symbolic gesture.

With continued efforts bringing together Arabs and Jews for peace building and cooperative coexistence, massive transformations at the sociopolitical level may very well follow. This could lead to a climate where divisions along ethnic lines no longer remain a major dividing factor. A renewed spirit of generosity and goodwill could eventually lead Israel and Palestine in the direction of joining a confederation with other West Asian countries for economic and political cooperation. Energies devoted to war and militarism could be directed at stopping the continued deterioration and destruction of the planetary environment, clearly the biggest modern threat facing Arabs, Jews, and all of humankind. Global cooperative efforts at environmental sanity could very well lead to a stateless and borderless world divided by eco-regions. Israel and Palestine

could become two of the first 20% of nations to overcome the trappings of nationalism and militarism by abolishing borders and achieving full disarmament.¹²²

If these images of a connected, related, and interdependent world seem too lofty, than rewind to a time where Arabs and Jews lived as neighbours and friends in relative peace for centuries. Whether in some small Jerusalem bakery sharing an oven, or in some creative futuristic vision of a new West Asia, cooperative coexistence has served us, and can continue to.

¹²² Lerner (2003), p 147

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