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Intractable Peacebuilding: Innovation and Perseverance in the Israeli-Palestinian Context

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ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University (S-CAR) was, until recently, the Institute for Conflict Analysis & Resolution. Its continuing mission is to advance the understanding and resolution of persistent, protracted conflicts among individuals, communities, identity groups, and nations.

In fulfillment of this mission, the School conducts a wide range of programs and outreach activities. Among these are its graduate programs offering the Doctorate and Master's of Science in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at its Arlington campus and an undergraduate program offering a Bachelor of Science taught on its Fairfax campus. S-CAR also offers a joint Master's degree in the field with the University Malta in Valetta. Clinical and consultancy services are offered by individual members of the faculty, and a number of short certificate programs are offered, as well as public programs and education that include the annual Vernon M. and Minnie I. Lynch Lecture Series.

The School's major research interests include the study of conflict and its resolution, the exploration and analysis of conditions attracting parties in conflict to the negotiating table, the role of third parties in dispute resolution, and the application of conflict resolution methodologies in local, national, and international settings.

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Long an integral part of the School has been Dr. Marc Gopin's Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution (CRDC), and this center has recently been joined by the Center for the Study of Narrative and Conflict Resolution (CNCR), led by Dr. Sara Cobb. The School has also established the Center for Peacemaking Practice (CPP) under the direction of Dr Susan Allen Nan. Among other activities, CPP will take over many of the short training courses provided by the School at its research, retreat, and conference center down at Point of View on Mason Neck. Most recently, however, is the formation of the Center for the Study of Gender and Conflict to recognize gender as a framework for conflict analysis, led primarily by Dr. Leslie Dwyer.

For further information please consult the School's website at <http://scar.gmu.edu> or via telephone at (703) 993-1300.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Ned earned his doctorate in 2011 from American University's School of International Service; his dissertation assesses the long-term impacts of peace education participation for more than 800 Israeli and Palestinian youth before, during and after the second intifada. For his doctoral research, Ned earned fellowships from USIP and the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School. Before entering the academic field, Ned served as Middle East Program Director for Seeds of Peace, based in Jerusalem, from 1996-2004.

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¹ The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace



Photos: Responses to December 2014 arson attack on Jerusalem's Max Rayne Hand in Hand K-12 School, the only bilingual integrated school in the city. 1) Solidarity march; 2) Student marchers – signs read, "Arabs and Jews Refuse to be Enemies"; "Continuing Together without Hate or Fear." Used with permission of Hand-in-Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel.

FOREWORD

An observer of the state of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, reading most media accounts from the outside – and unfortunately most from the inside, as well – could not be faulted for deciding it is hopeless. The regional turmoil that has followed in the wake of the so-called Arab Spring has complicated the situation by intensifying uncertainty, unsettling or reversing alliances (as between Hamas and the current Egyptian regime), and making bold (and therefore risky) gestures of peace increasingly unlikely. A third Intifada, if anything, looks more likely to many. The Oslo Accords seem a very long time ago.

On the other side, a candle in the wind, we have this invaluable report from the field by Ned Lazarus. Lazarus documents the efforts of four veteran organizations that continue to work in peacebuilding. Two are jointly-led Israeli-Palestinian initiatives: Friends of the Earth Middle East (FOEME) and the Parents Circle Families Forum (PCFF). The other two direct their work to Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel: The Abraham Fund Initiatives (TAFI) and Hand-in-Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel (HiH). All have been in existence for more than a decade, and each has evolved and adapted to the changing (often deteriorating) conditions of Israel's political environment and the broader conflict. Among other things, Lazarus traces how each of these organizations negotiated, internally and externally, the shifting demands, constraints, obstacles and opportunities, which presented themselves. Without this ability to change, sometimes amounting to "reinvention," none would have survived.

Lazarus chose these four strategically, both to describe the wide range of activities or arenas in which they operate, but also to use them to address some longstanding critiques of this sort of Track Two, or people-to-people, peacebuilding – particularly critiques that question their relevance or effectiveness in deep rooted or intractable conflicts, such as Israel/Palestine.

Among the critiques are the following:

- (1) Many peacebuilding endeavors of this sort operate without a clear theory of social change, and therefore without clear goals beyond the nebulous assumptions, dating back to the original Contact Hypothesis, that personal interactions among adversaries or enemies is a good thing;
- (2) Operating at the interpersonal level, they fail to reach "upward" to structural or institutional change;
- (3) They fail to take account of the asymmetric power relations that usually characterize these complex conflict systems.

On all counts, these organizations challenge the critiques. Two of them aim to effect institutional and structural change:

- The Abraham Fund Initiatives (TAFI) focuses on fostering systemic changes by transforming policing practice in Arab minority communities in Israel, and transforming the teaching of Arabic language and culture in Israeli schools through integration of Palestinian teachers in Jewish-majority schools.
- Friends of the Earth Middle East (FOEME) focus of the shared interests of both Israelis and Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories in preserving their shared resources and combatting environmental hazards that transcend barriers and borders.

Two of the organizations concentrate their efforts on cultural or relational change:

- Hand-in-Hand (HiH) has built a network of Arabic/Hebrew bilingual schools inside Israel, championing integrated education and providing a shared public space for members of both communities. These have grown in number, and have innovated curricular, cultural and community programs.
- The Parents Circle Families Forum (PCFF) began as the closest thing to the classical dialogue group, but has evolved into a sophisticated laboratory to exploring the tragic and contested narratives of both peoples. The PCFF was founded in 1994 by a few Israeli parents who had lost children to conflict, yet remained committed to peace, not vengeance. It is today a joint Israeli-Palestinian organization with over 600 bereaved families from both communities. In 2013, Lazarus, tells us, it was more focused on “doing” than “being,” and organized more than 1,000 events, within a “portfolio” of activities encompassing lectures, films, dialogues, and research.

Contrary to the criticism that dialogue or peace education programs often evade or “airbrush the harsh realities of the conflict,” the PCFF and HiH, Lazarus writes, have “pioneered methodologies for explicitly engaging with the psycho-cultural core of the conflict: the parallel calendars replete with solemn days of national mourning, the mutually exclusive Arab and Jewish historical narratives.”

In describing these four organizations in detail, Lazarus documents the ways in which they aim self-consciously to “scale-up” their activities, reaching out to relevant ministries and political institutions, to media and other civil society groups: to a range of actors with different “equities” in the society and the conflict, with the explicit goal of broader societal change. An example can be found in the comments of former TAFI co-director Mohammad Darawshe. He sees the advocacy efforts of TAFI, in education and elsewhere, as aimed beyond the “coexistence industry” of the past. He wants to change the State’s model of governance of its Arab minority. “In the past, he said,” my client was the participants. Today the participants are important, but they are the laboratory for testing models of change... our client today is the decision maker.”

As to the final and in some ways the most trenchant of the critiques of efforts such as these – the stark asymmetry that characterizes the conflict and relations between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians, Lazarus writes that in all four of these organizations, “the good news” is that such a criticism is “not news.” All leaders are aware of the challenges presented by these asymmetries of power, and all have “adapted strategy and structure in order to mitigate the effects of asymmetry on programming, public legitimacy and cross-conflict staff relations.” The key word here is, of course, “mitigate” – the only word that makes sense given the structural realities under which the organizations function. But balancing the admittedly modest tactics of “mitigation,” all the organizations keep their eyes on the larger, transformative goals, however aspirational, that peacebuilding underwrites.

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In his important and sobering book, *Transforming Violent Conflict: Radical Disagreement, Dialogue and Survival* (Routledge, 2010), Oliver Ramsbotham notes that deep-rooted and intractable conflicts (Israel/Palestine is his main example) are characterized precisely by a form of “radical disagreement” in which the parties are profoundly committed to fundamentally incompatible outcomes. For this reason, he argues, such conflicts appear to stymie the usual approaches to conflict resolution or transformation. In these cases there is no panacea. What can be done in such situations is what he calls “strategic engagement”: essentially to keep the parties engaged and talking (and when possible, acting). Some of this engagement is cross-party, but some important kinds are intra-party, wherein profound and often radical disagreement is also likely. The aim of this, in turn, is to maintain the possibility for radical disagreements to circumvent destructive violence while continuing to pursue a life-and-death struggle on non-violent political grounds.

Along with his various interlocutors, Jewish Israelis and Palestinians, Lazarus never underestimates the challenges these sorts of endeavors have – and will - encounter, nor how potentially fragile or reversible each success appears to be. Yet in the face of intractability, the organizations themselves have proved remarkably adaptive, effective, and enduring. They provide the critical base, the platform, for whatever hopes there are for peacebuilding, intractably, to persist.

- Kevin Avruch
Dean, School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution



Photos: First-grade students at Max Rayne Hand in Hand Bilingual School in Jerusalem; damage to the first-grade classroom after arson attack, December 2014. Used with permission of Hand-in-Hand.

1. Introduction

Advocates of Israeli-Palestinian peace face a season of soul-searching as the second decade since the Oslo Accords passes without the key deliverable: the final status treaty originally scheduled for signing in the twentieth century. The present research coincided with the rise and fall of another round of peace negotiations, led this time by US Secretary of State John Kerry. Initiated to modest fanfare in August 2013, the “Kerry Process” ended in deadlock nine months later, with no publicly visible progress or prospects for renewal.¹ This failure has, for the moment, vindicated the skepticism of Israeli and Palestinian publics regarding the prospects of a negotiated peace, while setting the stage for fifty days of fighting between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, a rising tide of intercommunal violence and speculation about a third Palestinian intifada, or mass uprising.²

Journalists have responded with a predictable proliferation of autopsies of the peace process, most concentrating exclusively on violent attacks and futile negotiations.³ In the Israeli-Palestinian context, Track Two and Three peace efforts are perennially overshadowed in the public eye by action – or the lack thereof – on Track One. In July 2014, for example, Haaretz convened an incongruously-timed “Conference on Peace” in the opening days of “Operation Protective Edge.” The event, which earned public attention primarily for being evacuated due to rocket fire, featured but a lone voice from civil society among a legion of parliamentarians, pundits and plutocrats.⁴

Yet while official final status talks have occurred in fragments, comprising a handful of the twenty lost years since Oslo, a core of determined grassroots and civil society peacebuilders have been at work on the ground, day in and day out, through the traumatic rupture of the second intifada and the diplomatic stagnation that has followed in its wake. These Israelis and Palestinians have not waited for peace to trickle down from above; they have built organizations, networks and programs steadily over time, revised methods and strategies to incorporate critical feedback and to adapt to abrupt shifts in context; they have both innovated and persevered.

Too often, grassroots and civil society peacebuilding is evaluated through the lens of current affairs in the official peace process. Occasionally portrayed as promising during interludes of Track One negotiation, “people-to-people” work is frequently framed as futile during periods of violent escalation or the “new normal” of prolonged stalemate.⁵ Such blanket assessments

typically make scant effort to convey the complexity or diversity of the actual Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding field, and little if any reference to empirical research.

This paper aims to challenge this Track One-centric framing by highlighting the contemporary work of four veteran organizations, all of which have continued throughout the tumultuous times initiated by the interim agreements. Two are jointly-led Israeli-Palestinian initiatives: Friends of the Earth Middle East (FOEME) and the Parents Circle Families Forum (PCFF).⁶ The others focus on Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel: The Abraham Fund Initiatives (TAFI) and Hand-in-Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel (HiH). After years in the field, their names may be familiar; the cutting-edge aspects of their current work, however, merit further attention. This report will highlight specific projects and overall organizational strategies that can provide models for inspiration and potential adaptation for peacebuilders in other global contexts of unresolved conflict.

For even as the Israeli and Palestinian Ministries of Education omit the historical perspective of the other side from their national curricula, Arab and Jewish teachers at the integrated Hand in Hand bilingual school network work together every year to teach and commemorate five Israeli and Palestinian “national” and memorial days in a period of six weeks, with all the complexity and controversy entailed.

Even as the unequal allocation of West Bank water remains a source of division between the Israeli government and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, FOEME enlists dozens of Palestinian and Israeli communities in partnerships to build capacity and infrastructure, mitigate hazards, reduce pollution and protect the ecosystems that both populations share, regardless of barriers or borders.

Even after the Israeli government shelved the 2003 Or Commission recommendations for policing reform, aimed at preventing the recurrence of the tragic violence of October 2000, TAFI engages the leadership of the Israel Police and Palestinian minority citizens in a long-term process of implementing community policing and violence prevention approaches from other deeply divided societies.

Even as Israeli legislators advocate demoting Arabic from its current status as one of the country’s official languages, TAFI’s Ya Salaam project is changing the way Arabic is taught to Israeli Jewish students, bringing Palestinian teachers to teach spoken Arabic with a dynamic, interactive approach that has elicited enthusiastic responses

from principals, parents, teachers and students at schools across the country.

Even as leading Knesset factions attempt to ban public recognition of the Palestinian tragedy, bereaved Israeli and Palestinian members of the PCFF facilitate dialogue groups focused directly on confronting the competing core historical narratives of the conflict – bringing Israeli and Palestinian participants together to destroyed Palestinian villages from the 1948 War and to Yad VaShem, Israel’s Holocaust Memorial Museum, in the process.

Even as anti-normalization activists in Palestine campaign to ban Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, and conventional wisdom proclaims the Israeli public utterly apathetic towards peace, PCFF members lead a multi-media campaign to “put peace back in the picture” - sharing their stories with hundreds of audiences around the country, producing and screening films in Israeli universities and Palestinian refugee camps, and establishing a thriving social media portal entitled “Crack in the Wall.”

And indeed, in recent years, while the conventional wisdom has said that Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding is all but impossible, all of these initiatives have grown.

TAFI’s Language as a Cultural Bridge projects expanded tenfold in less than five years, now reaching 23,700 students across the country. FOEME’s “Good Water Neighbors” project has grown from 11 to 28 Israeli and Palestinian community partnerships, and generated hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in local capacity and infrastructure. HiH has added Haifa and Tel Aviv-Jaffa school programs to its three existing bilingual campuses in the last two years, while building “Shared Communities” programs around each school. PCFF members have averaged nearly 1000 public presentations per annum in recent years, while facilitating seventeen “History through the Human Eye” narrative dialogue groups, among numerous other programs. These programs’ expansion is a testament that a significant number of Israelis and Palestinians continue to value meaningful opportunities for bilateral engagement and peaceful change – even if it means swimming against the tide.

Indeed, none of the achievements listed above are simple “success stories.” All of the organizations profiled have navigated episodes of failure and periods of crisis; they continue to face the formidable array of challenges inherent to intergroup work in a protracted, asymmetric conflict. Yet the contributions of their efforts at personal,

local and communal levels are evident, as is the remarkable expansion of their initiatives despite the daunting environment of recent years.

Their work has not, of course, been sufficient to undo the effects of stalled negotiations, 47 years of military occupation and cyclical violence, dizzying regional upheaval, and the constellation of powerful political forces opposed to resolution of the conflict – nor would it be realistic to expect such outcomes. The peacebuilders featured here are hard workers, not miracle workers. Yet as the official peace process begins its third decade without a solution in sight, it is high time to recognize the evolution and contributions of their work on the ground.

Moreover, this work has resonance beyond the contested boundaries of Israel and Palestine. The initiatives profiled here have established models and strategies for peacebuilding in a hostile context, which can serve as points of reference and inspiration to people engaged in similar struggles around the world.

2. Research Overview

It is crucial to emphasize that this report highlights only a handful of examples of a larger Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding field encompassing diverse approaches and many dozens of organizations and initiatives.⁷ I have selected these initiatives from the broader field in order to highlight the innovative aspects of a) contemporary projects that effectively address specific drivers of conflict, and b) long-term strategies to achieve concrete change within ongoing conflict situations. As stated above, we see these projects and strategies are noteworthy in and of themselves; they also provide models potentially useful in other contexts of protracted conflict.

Data was gathered for this report primarily during three field research phases, in January, March and July 2013, through the conduct of semi-structured interviews with 36 current and former project directors and staff, and 20 site visits for participant observation of project-related events and meetings and conversations with participants. Follow-up conversations were conducted in July 2014. Documentary sources include evaluation reports, academic articles, press reports, and media and publications on the organizations and their contemporary projects.

These profiles are portraits, not formal assessments – though they are informed in each case by evaluative research. I have observed all of the profiled projects at work in the field, and have verified that each has indeed met rigorous standards of evaluation required by supporters including governmental agencies and philanthropic foundations.

I have full confidence in the integrity of the activities and outcomes described here, and their potential for broader impact over the long-term.

Each profile will include three aspects – a review of the organization’s background and evolution; portraits of an innovative contemporary project or projects; and the role of each project in a strategy for long-term change. The profiles are organized into two sections, according to Lederach and Neufeldt’s typology of change.⁸

First, I will profile a pair of initiatives primarily designed to effect institutional and structural change:

- The Abraham Fund Initiatives (TAFI): Reforming policy and mitigating dynamics between the Israel Police and the country’s Palestinian Arab citizens and communities through the Police – Arab Society Relations project, and changing the way Arabic language is taught in Israeli Jewish schools through the Ya Salaam/ Language as a Cultural Bridge project.

- Friends of the Earth Middle East (FOEME): Projects such as the Good Water Neighbors and Neighbors Path linking Israeli and Palestinian communities to solve shared environmental and resource problems through joint analysis, building of capacity and infrastructure, and effective advocacy and public education campaigns.

Second, we will profile initiatives primarily designed to effect personal, cultural and relational change:

- Hand-in-Hand (HiH): Building a growing network of bilingual schools that serve simultaneously as groundbreaking curricular laboratories for integrated education in divided societies and shared public spaces and joint activity centers for building shared communal life between Jewish and Arab citizens.

- Parents Circle Families Forum (PCFF): Facilitating groups of Israeli and Palestinian citizens and peacebuilders in constructive engagement with each other’s core conflict narratives through the History through the Human Eye dialogue program, and ongoing multi-media campaigns to promote empathy and reconciliation.

3. Strategies for Systemic Change: “Scaling Up” Project impact

People-to-people peacebuilding interventions, when effectively structured and facilitated, have demonstrated potential to transform perceptions, mitigate hostility, inspire critical thinking and build cross-conflict relationships among immediate participants at the interpersonal level.⁹ Yet for leading stakeholders in the field – donors, evaluators, scholars and often practitioners – this level of impact is increasingly not, by itself, enough. Contemporary RFP’s require peacebuilders to detail the longer-term contributions of proposed interventions to “peace writ-large.”¹⁰ Academic and professional literature in the field places ever-greater emphasis on the explicit articulation of theories, types and levels of change.¹¹ Critical scholars advocate emphasis on fostering social-structural changes that directly address intergroup power relations and unequal distribution of resources, rather than focusing primarily on changing interpersonal attitudes.¹²

Three paramount demands for peace practitioners emerge from this chorus of critical voices.

- 1) To “scale up” positive outcomes above and beyond direct participants, in order to produce “ripple effects” and broader impact;
- 2) To engage actors at multiple levels, from grassroots through civil society to governmental/institutional;
- 3) To demonstrate tangible contributions to social-structural change;

These are significant challenges for small grassroots initiatives in any situation – but much more so in a hostile context such as Israel-Palestine, where decades of unresolved conflict and unsuccessful diplomacy have entrenched structural asymmetry and relational hostility between Israelis and Palestinians, and socioeconomic and psychological gaps between Jewish and Arab citizens in Israel.

Nonetheless, a pair of contemporary intergroup initiatives – TAFI and FOEME – are visibly rising to these challenges. Each provides a model of designing contextually relevant interventions, based on lucid analysis and strategic thinking. Both organizations work “across the tracks” – effectively engaging and leveraging actors at grassroots, civil society and official/governmental levels.

As a result, their pilot programs are spreading to multiple localities in different regions, and generating changes in infrastructure, policy and local capacity. For example:

- TAFI's Ya Salam Arabic language and culture instruction program, mentioned above, began by training and placing Arab teachers in a handful of Israeli Jewish schools in 2008. After initial successes, the program was adopted in 2011 by the Ministry of Education's Haifa and North regional school districts, and is now implemented in 25% of the secular Hebrew public elementary schools around the country – with more all but certain to follow.¹³

- Since 2001, FOEME's Good Water Neighbors program has expanded from 11 to 28 Israeli and Palestinian partnering communities, as well as 8 neighboring communities in Jordan. These partnerships have resulted in the establishment of multiple waste water treatment plants, sewage and clean water access systems, educational "ecofacilities" and eco-parks, "neighbors' path" conservation trails and joint cleanup and advocacy campaigns that have reduced pollution and impacted policy, including halting construction of Israel's Separation Barrier in three locations and restoring the flow of clean water from the Sea of Galilee to the Jordan River.¹⁴

Subsequent sections will elucidate the content of specific projects. It is important to emphasize, however, that quality program content is nothing new for the local peacebuilding field, which has and continues to produce multiple examples of outstanding practice and scholarship. It is effective overall change strategies, above all, that have distinguished these initiatives and led to remarkable degrees of expansion and impact. As former TAFI co-Director Mohammad Darawshe, who began his career facilitating dialogue in the 1980s, asserts, "Today our initiatives reach more people in a year than the entire 'coexistence industry' did in the past."¹⁵

The Abraham Fund Initiatives

Portrait – Language as a Cultural Bridge

At the Re'ut School in Tiberias, twenty-odd Israeli Jewish fifth graders in identical pale blue t-shirts park themselves at desks in a crowded classroom, their disparate conversations drowned out by the quotidian staccato monotone of a school bell. The scene is the epitome of everyday routine, until a Palestinian woman appears at the door, exclaims "Marhaban!" and promptly lofts a red Nerf ball into the center of the room. Students scramble

to grab it like baseball fans after a home run in the bleachers. When a winner emerges with a grin, hoisting her prize in triumph, she is rewarded with a battery of rapid-fire questions - in Arabic: "What's your name? Where do you live? What grade are you in? What are the names of your family members?" The student stammers a bit through this sudden public interrogation, but her smile broadens with acknowledgment of each correct Arabic answer. After six successful responses, she fires the ball into a friend's eagerly grasping hands across the room. Class continues SRO-style, the ball zipping around the room; no one sits until every student has stood the test. Finally, the teacher – Suheila, as she is addressed directly by her students – orders pencils out and workbooks open. The students remain visibly in thrall throughout the remainder of the period, as Suheila leads them through Lebanese singer Majida Al-Rumi's rendition of a classic children's song, sharing the singer's biography in the process.

This scene is remarkable for a number of reasons – the presence of a dynamic Palestinian teacher in an Israeli Jewish school, the students' obvious adoration for her, and their enthusiasm for subjects - Arabic language and culture - which many Israeli Jewish students, mirroring larger society, regard with disinterest, suspicion, or hostility.¹⁶ The course, teacher and experiential curriculum are all part of the Ya Salam/Language as a Cultural Bridge program designed by The Abraham Fund Initiatives, aimed at transforming the teaching of Arabic in Israeli Jewish schools. It is apparently quite successful in this instance. But the distinctive aspect, in terms of peacebuilding practice, is that this scene is not unique. The Ya Salam program has been adopted by two large regional school districts with full support of Israel's Ministry of Education, such that similar scenes will take place this year in 185 schools around the country.

A Social Change "Start-Up" - The Laboratory Model

The Abraham Fund Initiatives represents the reinvention of the Abraham Fund, an American foundation established in 1989 to support Arab-Jewish coexistence education initiatives in Israel. The tragic events of October 2000, in which Israeli security forces killed 13 Arab protesters during an unprecedented wave of demonstrations and riots in Arab areas throughout Israel, provoked a paradigm shift in the organization. The mission statement shifted from a long-term goal of fostering coexistence through education, towards the urgent pursuit of "strategic action to change policy in everything related to Arab-Jewish relations in Israel and relations between the Arab minority and the State."¹⁷ As Darawshe explained, "We realized that [previously] we were reaching only 3% of the population... nothing that could be scaled, that could be a product for the masses in the education system."

To implement this new vision, TAFI evolved, in the words of co-Director Amnon Be'eri-Sulitzeanu, "from a 'projects organization' to a social change 'start-up' organization." TAFI developed a unique strategic model entitled "Advocacy Through Action" – a title which evokes the new emphases of their work, but does not quite do justice to their elaborate process of identifying social-structural drivers of conflict, designing and implementing successful pilot programs that embody the ideal policy for addressing each issue, and then campaigning to make government policy match their successful interventions. For TAFI's "start-up" programs, the windfalls come not in stock options, but in official adoption of models and reforms in governance vis-à-vis the Arab minority. "In the past, my client was the participants," explains Darawshe. "Today, the participants are important, but they are the laboratory for testing models for change... our client today is the decision maker."

TAFI's initiatives are thus grounded in a sober social-structural analysis of the contemporary situation of Arab minority citizens in Israel, their relations with the State and the Jewish majority. Their model is also grounded in a realistic understanding of both the potential and the limitations of Israeli civil society's ability to change policy, allocate resources, and effect large-scale social change. TAFI's directors emphasize that neither grassroots nor civil society

initiatives on their own can transform the situation of Arab citizens. Sweeping changes at the state level are necessary in order to interrupt the mutually reinforcing feedback loop of entrenched structural discrimination and social marginalization that have defined the experience of Arab citizens in Israel since the foundation of the State.¹⁸ As Be'eri-Sulitzeanu explains, "Civil society in Israel is thriving. There are thousands of associations. But the question is what will make effective change. Social issues in Israel cannot be solved by the citizens alone – no – they need to convince, to press the government to do something."¹⁹

It is TAFI's approach to "convincing the government," above all, that offers a promising direction for the peace and conflict field. On the one hand, like a traditional advocacy NGO, TAFI researches social and political trends, publishes critical reports and responds in the media to relevant political developments. However, rather than imagine that change comes about through damning op-ed pieces, TAFI strives to break through institutional inertia by inventing effective, feasible alternatives to current policies and assumptions, demonstrating their viability in practice, and then relentlessly lobbying, persuading and pressuring officials at all levels to change course. Be'eri-Sulitzeanu explains the organization's role as: "To illuminate an issue... to develop the language, to demonstrate the implications – what are the potential benefits of doing something – and what can be done... to bring before the government a variety of possibilities and alternatives, in regard to the how – how they can do it."

The organization is currently engaging government and society on five fronts, each of which generates specifically targeted actions and initiatives:

- Advocacy, Public Education and Government Relations
- Economic Development and Employment,
- Education for a Shared Society,
- Egalitarian Services,
- Policing in a Divided Society

Within these issue areas, each targeted initiative evolves through what amounts to a five-stage process:

- a. Analysis: Needs Assessment, Issue Identification

b. Project(s) Design

c. Pilot: Initial Implementation and Formative Evaluation

d. Making it Official: Campaign for Governmental Adoption/Participation

e. Scaling Up: Broad Implementation and Evaluation

Each TAFI initiative is thus conceived and designed in response to identification of a critical source of conflict or discrimination, which simultaneously constitutes a potential leverage point for change. The pilot and formative evaluation stages are, in Darawshe's words, "the laboratory - If we have an argument, if we want to make a case for something, we should develop the best pilot program, bring it to best practice, test it, execute it." The stages are not neatly sequential in real time; TAFI begins the campaign to "make it official" at the project's inception, according to Be'eri-Sulitzeanu: "Before it succeeds, we get representatives from the government to be part of the steering committee, reach out to the community, to get the mayors and the other religious leaders to be part of the program, and then to be the selling agents for the program. We start the buy-in process very early."

Two flagship initiatives aptly illustrate the full five-stage process.

First, the Sherikat Haya/Arab Women's Employment initiative was established in response to research identifying a gap between Arab women's low rates of participation in the labor force and high levels of motivation to work. Be'eri-Sulitzeanu describes the program as an antidote to common excuses blaming women's unemployment on the "Arab Mentality." As he explained, "I met a government minister who said Arab women won't go out to work, so I said we'll offer the trainings, the pill against 'mentality' - you build the infrastructure for the women to work." TAFI designed a year-long training program and worked proactively to cultivate the governmental and industrial "buy-in" to realize the vision through placement and support - as Darawshe explains, "We developed a strategy for each and every participant. It's a tailor made program - we find her placement - we find her a job." Be'eri-Sulitzeanu asserts that, "This tiny organization, in 3-4 years, managed to prove the government wrong... to break down this paradigm. Now the government has to invest billions, in order to

offer jobs. Now it is an established fact that there is demand in the Arab sector for work among women."

In August 2013, TAFI celebrated Sherikat Haya's achievements at a gala iftar dinner at which 550 program graduates, TAFI staff and supporters, and civic, religious and government officials including Israel's Minister of Work and Welfare - gathered to break the Ramadan fast together in the Galilee town of Deir Al-Assad. In concrete terms, the project has grown from 8 to 50 localities, and achieved a 72% placement rate for graduates - as compared to a 19% overall rate for women in the Arab sector.²⁰ Raising the latter figure, of course, is the project's long-term goal - and the model seems poised to do so, as it is adopted across the country.

Second, the Ya Salam/Language as a Cultural Bridge initiative is conceived in response to realities of widespread antipathy, fear, ignorance and prejudice among Jewish citizens toward Arab culture and identity. This is rooted, of course, in Israel's historical and present realities of conflict with Palestinian militant groups and Arab and Muslim states. It is reflected in a willful inability to communicate in or comprehend the language of one-fifth of Israel's citizens and all neighboring countries - despite Arabic's legal status as one of Israel's two official languages.²¹

Prevailing attitudes towards Arab culture and language have long been reflected in most Israeli schools, where Jewish teachers have taught Arabic to Jewish students, speaking in Hebrew and emphasizing grammar rather than culture or communication. Moreover, the curriculum has focused on fus'ha Arabic - the formal language used in official documents and news broadcasts - rather than 'amiyya, the colloquial Arabic that would enable students to actually converse with Arab people. The vast majority of Jewish students complete their studies with minimal knowledge, interest, or conversational ability; the minority who excel in Arabic are valued primarily as recruits for military intelligence. Darawshe describes this paradigm as "learning the language of the enemy, not a potential friend."

Ya Salam is designed to transform both linguistic capabilities and negative perceptions of Arabic culture, language and people through a renaissance of the pedagogical approach to Arabic language instruction in Jewish schools. It mandates three fundamental changes from previous practice:

- a) Placement of outstanding Arab teachers in Jewish schools;
- b) Emphasis on everyday spoken language;
- c) An experiential, culturally situated, humanizing and stimulating curriculum;

TAFI Educational Director Dadi Komem explains the rationale:

“We started from the perspective that the teachers should be highly qualified, Arab teachers... If they are Palestinian, they speak Arabic from the first class, they speak about daily life, music, food, difficulties – and in most cases, they’re the first encounter of those Jewish children with an Arab, not the hummus place, not my father’s friend from the garage – twice a week they have an Arab teacher who is with them, when they’re laughing, when they’re crying... We also added Arab artists coming into class with Arab cultural activities, with plays, hakawati (storytelling) workshops, they’re in Arabic and they allow the children to know that they can speak Arabic, and they know more and more Arabs – we’re not affecting just the children, we’re affecting the teacher’s lounge, the parents, the community.”

The program’s initial phase is aimed at students’ first years of Arabic instruction, fifth and sixth grade – their formative (pedagogical) experiences with the language.

As mentioned previously, the program has elicited rave reviews and expanded rapidly, growing from 22 to 202 total schools – now reaching 23,700 students annually - in less than five years. Additionally, dozens of participating schools combine Ya Salam with supplementary activities: 35 Jewish and Arab schools participate in TAFI encounter programs; 17 of these pairs incorporate additional Arabic or Hebrew cultural education as part of their encounter program.²² An extensive mid-term evaluation by the Henrietta Szold Foundation, published in 2012, reports high levels of satisfaction from all stakeholders – 95% of

Arab teachers surveyed feel accepted within the Jewish schools and 89% felt that their work positively changed students’ perceptions of Arabic language, culture and people; 90% or more of school principals reported improved student performance, parental support and successful integration of teachers, and recommended national implementation of the program by the Ministry of Education.²³

These are initial results, of course; much more time and study will be necessary to assess any broader impact on the status and perception of Arabic in Israeli society. However, this model’s immediate success has foreshadowed, and may have contributed to, the abrupt end of a longstanding policy of de facto segregation: Israel’s Ministry of Education announced in June 2013 a plan to integrate 500 Arab teachers into understaffed Jewish schools – a development with no other precedent in mainstream schools, other than Ya Salam.²⁴

A third TAFI initiative, Policing in a Divided Society, engages one of the most painful interfaces between Arab citizens and the state – relations with the Israel Police. This initiative, due to its sensitivity, has required extensive focus on the “buy-in” aspect – both with the Police, and Arab community leadership. The project aspect is currently at the pilot/formative stage, yet to “scale up” to the degree of the previous examples. Nonetheless, this initiative illustrates TAFI’s determination to seek social-structural change where it counts. “The goal of our work,” Darawshe asserts, “is not to do nice programs. The goal is to be strategic.”

TAFI’s directors conceived the policing initiative in response to the deaths of 13 Arab protesters from police fire in October 2000 – and the failure of successive Israeli governments to implement recommendations issued by the official Commission of Inquiry (Or Commission), to the effect that the government “must educate its police that the Arab public is not the enemy, and should not be treated as such.”²⁵ In the analytical phase, TAFI conducted research on relations between the Israel Police and the Arab minority in comparison with other divided societies, ultimately identifying a pair of destructive dynamics symptomatic of majority-minority conflict: Overpolicing, meaning the frequent use of excessive force by police in confrontations with minority citizens, and underpolicing, i.e. the failure to provide basic services or maintain “law and order” in minority communities. Both dynamics simultaneously illustrate and perpetuate the lack of communication and trust between police and the Arab community, both leaders and ordinary citizens.

TAFI published these findings in a 2009 report, and set to work on two tracks – transforming the culture of minority policing in the Israel Police, and working with Arab community leadership to establish the official, communal and grassroots relationships, mechanisms and trust necessary to implement a successful “community policing” policy within Arab localities in Israel. According to this model, “the Police sees [cultivating] the trust of citizens as an essential component of its activity, and the citizens see the work of the police as a civic service to which they are entitled and depend upon to preserve their security and quality of life.”²⁶

Given the profound sensitivity involved, the project has proceeded deliberately and often separately on each track – building networks and programs in parallel, and gradually convening joint forums and establishing mechanisms for ongoing communication. Over thousands of hours of consultation with the Police command structure and Arab community leaders, the initiative’s directors report having made significant inroads; they sense a genuine recognition of the problems involved, and a mutual motivation to build a different dynamic.

They cite several milestones in terms of official recognition – the human resources and internal education departments of the Israel police have approved the project as a “partnership initiative,” with significant financial and legitimacy implications. 5,000 police officers have undergone the “Community Policing” training regimen developed jointly by TAFI and the Police. Multiple groups of police commanders and Arab community leaders have traveled to Northern Ireland and urban centers in the United States to study successful reforms in locations of chronic, severe police-minority conflict.²⁷ Prominent national leaders of the Arab community have publicly endorsed the program, such as Nazareth Mayor Ramez Jaraisy, who hosted an unprecedented “roundtable” conference with the leadership of the Police in 2012. In its first several years, Project Director Ayelet Naor explains, the project consisted largely of exploratory research, “trial and error, and relationship-building. Since 2009, it’s got a spine.”

The project’s progress is evident in Kafr Qara, an Arab town of approximately 15,000 residents in the Wadi ‘Ara region, where the town council and regional police command have established a pilot “Community-Station” working group facilitated by TAFI Police-Arab Society Coordinator Reda Jaber. The working group has met regularly throughout 2012, establishing a pair of

sub-committees on Public Order and Youth. The author was invited to observe a July 2013 meeting, at which council representatives and police commanders tackled three issues: 1) “At risk” local youth engaged in disruptive behavior on summer nights; 2) Anarchic parking leading to traffic jams, accidents and arguments, particularly outside mosques during prayer times; 3) Protecting children walking to and from school. All small town issues par excellence – yet all rooted in decades of government neglect that has left a legacy of substandard infrastructure, a lack of communal, educational and recreational facilities, and bred local contempt toward authority and public space.

In the meeting, nonetheless, police and community representatives appeared quite familiar with each other, with the issues concerned and with the personalities referenced. At one point, as community reps engaged in a West Side Story-style debate over the character of at-risk youth, the police officers praised the work of local youth NGO activists, citing them by name. When the discussion shifted to the parking problem, local reps petitioned the police for vigorous enforcement, stating bluntly that nothing would change until a sense of deterrence and consequence was established. The officers, in turn, expressed concern that by abruptly stepping up activity in the middle of Ramadan, they would offend sensibilities by issuing tickets to worshipers, and increasing the visibility of “this uniform” on the streets. “We are past that,” one council member insisted in response – “we are really past that.” Given the scope of rioting in the Wadi ‘Ara region in October 2000, and the lethal force employed by police then and on subsequent occasions, this kind of constructive communication between uniformed officers and local representatives, including elected officials and citizen activists, can hardly be taken for granted.

Nonetheless, initiative directors Naor and Jaber are cautious in assessing impact, even at the local level. If community-police relations are in fact “past that” in Kafr Qara, they are far from it elsewhere – particularly in the Negev desert region, where a government proposal to relocate tens of thousands of Bedouin Arab citizens from their homes and traditional lands has generated protest and amplified existing tensions.²⁸

Jaber sees the “Praver Plan,” which has won the first of three necessary approval votes in the Knesset, as a looming trial-by-fire of his initiative’s fragile, hard-won achievements in the field. He stated, however, that Wadi ‘Ara police, at least, had handled a recent wave of protests over the issue very differently than in previous years.

When Palestinian citizens in Wadi ‘Ara protested by blocking the local highway, Route 65, the police refrained from using force to re-open the road – avoiding a reprise of the fatal events of October 2000. Instead, the police negotiated a tacit understanding, allowing protesters to close the road for a limited time in order to express grievances and draw press coverage, after which the demonstrators allowed the road to re-open. This played out on three separate occasions, according to Jaber – setting a new precedent. It remains to be seen whether the new approach will endure, as protests multiply in the coming months.

While Kafr ‘Qara is the first pilot for TAFI’s “Community Station” program, Naor and Jaber have identified an avenue for rapidly “scaling up” the program to include additional communities. Israel’s Ministry of Internal Security is currently implementing a “City Without Violence” program in 120 municipalities across the country. The program is a partnership of the Ministry and local government officials, jointly budgeted and administrated, and coordinated in the field by an appointed coordinator for each locality and an enforcement committee. TAFI leads a program of additional trainings for police implementing “City Without Violence” in Arab communities. “We don’t want to reinvent the wheel,” explains Naor, “we want to complement the existing program, in the Arab communities, by helping with the problem of trust.” In the Negev, she explains, Bedouin municipalities have been receptive, but the police reluctant. Nonetheless, the Southern district commander joined a recent TAFI Forum on violence in Bedouin society, after police came under fire for failing to respond to Bedouin women’s calls for help, and TAFI directors have raised the issue in meetings with the General Commander of the police.²⁹

Challenges

None of the above should give a false impression of “smooth sailing.” The achievements detailed above are hard-won and fragile, contingent upon perpetual negotiation with institutions often ambivalent toward TAFI’s objectives and their own responsibilities of service provision where Arab citizens are concerned. Both policing and education programs have faced crippling crises. The Policing initiative was frozen for three months due to a lawsuit by a right-wing Israeli, NGO alleging violations of tax-exempt status policy. In 2012, the Ministry of Education briefly suspended Ya Salam cultural activities, in response to a teacher assigning a story by a Palestinian author of controversial political affiliation at one participating school.

Educational Director Dadi Komem described round-the-clock negotiations with the Ministry to defuse the crisis and continue the program. Nonetheless, in each case, TAFI’s responses to crises have yielded productive results, ultimately strengthening the programs’ institutional recognition and buffering them against future issues of the same kind. As a result of the Policing program lawsuit, TAFI was granted a special status in Israeli law, as a “supplier of unique content,” that will protect against future challenges on tax grounds. The Ya Salam crisis was resolved without substantial impact on programming, and in the process precedents and mediation mechanisms were established with for future incidents regarding educational content – which in work of this nature, are nothing short of inevitable. According to co-director Amnon Beerli-Sulitzaneau, “both of these programs have always been in a terrible period. But they achieve huge growth through constant instability. You are always on the edge, but it’s a good place to be.”

TAFI appears not only on the edge of confrontations with the institutions and policies they are contesting – but on the leading edge of strategic innovation in the peacebuilding field, in terms of generating tangible results and bringing models to scale. In a distinctly different sector, the environmental peacebuilding approach pioneered by Friends of the Earth Middle East has produced similar strategies of engagement and signs of larger-scale, concrete impact.



Arab-Jewish hike along a FOEME “Neighbors’ Path” in Battir, West Bank. Photo: Fakhira Haloun.

Stopping the Wall with the Logic of Hydrology

There are few more polarizing symbols than the “Separation Barrier,” the sprawling maze of fortifications that Israel has erected between and around Palestinian population areas traversing the West Bank, beginning in 2003 and still under construction today. For Palestinians, the Barrier’s concrete monoliths and barbed wire coils represent the ultimate entrenchment of Israeli control over Palestinian land and resources and confinement of powerless Palestinian subjects into isolated enclaves. For many Israeli Jews, the Barrier is a symbol of the extraordinary measures necessary to maintain their basic existential security; it is largely credited with halting the onslaught of suicide bombing attacks launched by Palestinian militant groups during the second intifada, which killed hundreds of Israelis.³¹

In neither case have questions of the Barrier’s environmental impact been prioritized in public debate; the Barrier, much like the larger conflict, is predominantly framed in terms of territory, security and fundamental human rights. Yet in recent years, Friends

of the Earth Middle East (FOEME) has organized thousands of Palestinian and Israeli citizens in successful campaigns to force this environmental aspect onto the official agenda. In the process, this small NGO and its citizen supporters have brought construction of the Barrier to a halt in several sensitive locations.³² This is a rare, if not wholly unique achievement. The Barrier has also famously been re-routed by citizen action in a pair of Palestinian villages, Bil’in and Budrus, whose prolonged protest campaigns and sacrifices of life and limb have inspired international solidarity movements, prizewinning documentary films, and similar struggles in other parts of the West Bank.³³

As an environmental peacebuilding organization, FOEME’s approach is different. They have persistently confronted the military/government position in legal, political, and media forums, and their campaigners march jointly along “Neighbors’ Paths” in order to highlight the environmental value of lands in the proposed path of the Barrier – but they do not deliberately confront troops in the field.

Rather than civil disobedience or social movement activism, FOEME is geared toward the more mundane work of shaping sewage policy and upgrading water infrastructure, mitigating pollution and promoting environmental education. As Israeli Director Gidon Bromberg explains, “We stopped the Wall with the logic of hydrology.”

Even FOEME’s peacebuilding aspect, its directors insist, is secondary to its environmental mission. Working jointly is necessary, they explain, because air, soil, water, wildlife – and contamination – cannot be contained within political boundaries. On these issues, in any political framework, Israelis and Palestinians are and will remain inextricably interdependent. FOEME’s campaigns to block the Barrier are thus unintended consequences of their larger objectives – yet the results speak for themselves. FOEME’s work may be more prosaic, less heroic than that of protest movements present and past; in these instances, it has been no less effective. In the post-Oslo era, a “perfect storm” of factors has all but stymied the traditional change strategies of the political “peace camp”; environmental policy, by contrast, represents an unexpected – and unexpectedly promising – entry point.

Environmental Peacebuilding: Concrete Change, Common Interests

Two key elements of FOEME’s environmental peacebuilding approach are worthy of note for peacebuilding strategists in other ongoing conflict situations. First, the organization tackles concrete issues, whose connection to the fulfillment of basic communal needs is as clear as the water in your tap – or, as the case may be, as clearly polluted. As Bromberg emphasizes, “Our partner communities have shared groundwater and often shared surface water that cuts through them. That’s important, because it’s visual – you speak to the needs, something that’s tangible.” Second, FOEME frames these issues convincingly in terms of shared interest and common concern – defying the zero-sum, relative gains framework that typically defines Israeli-Palestinian interaction. As Bromberg contends, “In the current situation, no one is winning. Palestinians everywhere don’t get enough water, and Israel gets Palestine’s untreated sewerage.”

There is an element of paradox at play in FOEME’s framing. On the one hand, Palestinian director Nader Khatib asserts, “You must identify the self-interest from

the outset. Otherwise, you’re gonna fail.” Yet recognizing this type of self-interest necessarily entails recognition of ecological interdependence. As Bromberg explains, “This is a shared landscape, it crosses the border. You can’t protect it on one side – if the nature is lost on one side, the nature is lost.” The environmental frame, in this aspect, is a microcosm of what scholars have long identified as the paradoxical interdependence of the larger conflict dynamic, in the Israeli-Palestinian situation and its analogues.³⁴

The visceral nature of FOEME’s work, at the same time, grants it a persuasive power in terms of proving its relevance to the broader public; no meditations on the moral imagination are required to explain the value of access to safe drinking water. As Khatib argues, “You have to enable a resident, a schoolteacher, a mayor, to explain why they choose to work with the other side... Because we deal with concrete issues, we enable someone to defend their actions – they can convince people. And that’s how to be a peacemaker.” To bolster the arguments of these local peacemakers, Bromberg asserts that FOEME has allocated approximately \$400 million of investment into local capacity and infrastructure since 2001.

In terms of overall change strategy, FOEME echoes elements of the TAFI approach described above – working synergetically on grassroots, civil society and official levels, and “scaling up” successful pilot programs for broader impact.

Peacebuilding Across the “Tracks”

As with TAFI, the violent escalation of the early 21st century led to a dramatic shift in FOEME’s strategic orientation. In this case, the organization moved from offices into – and below – the streets, evolving from traditional advocacy and lobbying to a multi-track approach. Khatib explains the strategic paradigm shift:

“The year 2000, or 2001, is the big change in the organization. Until [then], our work was very much based on advocacy... top-down advocacy. Writing a position paper – but Israeli, Palestinians, Jordanians writing it together, and advocating to all of their governments. That was effective, but not enough. It went through the Ministers and the media, but it failed to touch the hearts and minds of the people. We needed to diversify our strategies – not just top-down, but bottom-up.

That's when we started working with communities in the three countries – we work with youth, with the schools, with the adults – and still the decision makers – the two approaches became parallel now."

The "bottom-up" approach proved salient during the chaotic intifada era; FOEME trained local Palestinian staff for specific areas, who were knowledgeable of local needs and able to work in their hometowns even when curfews and checkpoints prevented movement anywhere else. The organization's joint umbrella continued, via internet, to provide support for local problem solving. Khatib recalls that, "During curfew, during the intifada, water was a hot issue. Water tanks were shot, infrastructure was destroyed. When I was under curfew for 40 days, I did not stop working with Gidon to repair the water tanks on roofs, raising money, some of it even came from Israeli civilians – we advertised in Haaretz."

This strategy remained relevant during the rebuilding that followed the eventual de-escalation, as FOEME became liaison and advocate for marginalized communities to the Israeli and Palestinian authorities – as Khatib explains, "Working with marginal, poor, rural communities, with poor infrastructure. They don't know how to convey their messages to the central governments, to take their case – and they have trust in us to help them. We managed to make a big difference in their lives."

The erection of the Separation Barrier led to urgent applications of FOEME's multi-track strategy. In the Northwest corner of the West Bank, the Palestinian town of Baqa A-Sharqiya was slated initially to be walled in on four sides, isolating from the neighboring Arab city of Baqa Al-Gharbiya in Israel.³⁵ FOEME coordinated the two towns and nearby Israeli communities, all partners in the Good Water Neighbors program, in a holistic campaign to build a joint water and sewage system – and to prevent the total enclosure of the Palestinian town. Bromberg describes the results:

"We identified a joint solution for dealing with the sewerage – on the Israeli side also. Although Israel is thought of as a world leader, in some parts it's not a world leader. In Baka Al-Gharbiya, only 10% of the population had sewerage. And it goes right into Hadera stream. We worked with the mayors and the government, to build a sewage treatment plant for that city of 40,000 people. Now, it doesn't make sense that two separate sewerage systems be built for 5,000 people in Baqa A-Sharqiyya. And we got it approved – the joint sewerage system for the two

communities. And 5000 Palestinians, instead of being dependent on the well, now have water – in every house."

Beginning in 2006, FOEME orchestrated a successful anti-Barrier campaign pairing the communities of Tzur Hadassah in Israel, and the neighboring West Bank town of Wadi Fuqin, on the southwest periphery of Jerusalem. Petitions signed by the majority of residents of both communities contributed to saving the local spring, a water source in continuous use since biblical times.³⁶ A third campaign is currently underway in the nearby Palestinian community of Battir, where months of grassroots organizing, legal advocacy and lobbying have led Israel's Supreme Court to order a temporary halt to construction of the Separation Barrier across a spectacular hillside featuring agricultural terraces dating to Roman times – a UNESCO World Heritage site.³⁷

Scaling up

In another analogue to TAFI, FOEME is working to obtain Ministry of Education adoption of a successful pilot training leading high school students to use GPS technology to map environmental hazards around their school, and compare with students maps from adjoining "enemy" communities:

"On the Israeli side, on the Palestinian side. Give them a GPS – we take the kids out of class, they love it – they map 50 hazards around the school. The kids map how it might impact water – their own shared water. We put on layers. One school, with 50 hazards – another school with 50 hazards – they map it separately, but they look at it together on the map. We bring them together, and you see the coin drop. I'm doing that not as a favor, it's in my interest."

The similarity extends to results – and rhetoric. FOEME's Good Water Neighbors program, for example, has grown from 11 to 28 communities engaged in truly multi-dimensional, locally tailored programs of infrastructure and capacity building, environmental education and joint problem solving.³⁸ This is only the beginning, however, according to Bromberg, who echoes the "laboratory" metaphor articulated by TAFI directors, saying, "Our focus is no longer the 28 communities – but to train 1,000 teachers in all countries, that are not from our communities. We speak to the experience developed in the 28 communities. They are the laboratories that show people that things work. We are confident in the success of our laboratory."



The Hand-in-Hand “Bridge Over the Wadi” School, Kafr Qara, Israel. The Arabic/Hebrew inscription reads, “We must be the change we wish to see in the world.”

4. Who’s Afraid of Cognitive Dissonance? Confronting the Cultural Core of the Conflict

If peacebuilding initiatives are a social change “laboratory,” then there can be no more ambitious experiments than the Hand-in-Hand (HiH) program’s network of bilingual integrated schools in Israel, and the community of bereaved Israelis and Palestinians known as the Parents Circle Families Forum (PCFF). Both of these initiatives, by nature, defy deep-seated assumptions underlying policy choices and social structure – that Jews and Arabs in Israel must be schooled separately, or that families of fallen Palestinians and Israelis seek redemption through retributive justice rather than peace. The mere fact of their cross-conflict composition, given their particular social and cultural positions, constitutes a symbolic challenge to the dominant identity politics of either side.³⁹ These two groups implicitly send powerful messages just by being who they are.

This report, however, comes to emphasize the potent content of what they are doing. Critiques of “people-to-people” work often argue that dialogical or educational approaches attempt to airbrush the harsh realities of the conflict. Yet contrary to this common caricature, both of these

prominent “people-to-people” programs have pioneered methodologies for explicitly engaging with the psycho-cultural core of the conflict: the parallel calendars replete with solemn days of national mourning, the mutually exclusive Arab and Jewish historical narratives.

A panoply of analysts have cited the inevitable clash of competing cultural and historical frameworks, each laden with “chosen traumas” and litanies of grievances, as an almost insurmountable obstacle to Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation.⁴⁰ Yet quite undaunted by this sort of scholarly opinion, the teachers, parents and students of HiH schools, and the bereaved families of the Forum, are modeling methods for making “teachable moments” out of the conflict’s inherent cognitive dissonance. They do so, moreover, out of recognition - born of experience - that a substantive reckoning with divergent perspectives on the past is the sine qua non of any clear vision for a shared future. The following section will outline these approaches to inspiring cultural change amidst intractable conflict.

Hand-in-Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel

In September 2012, a group of young parents gathered to celebrate the opening of a modest, one-floor pre-school in the Israeli coastal city of Haifa. They greeted each other warmly, making heroic efforts to carry out adult social conversation, interspersing fragments of Arabic and Hebrew small talk while their children scurried between a small sandbox, a series of plastic playstations, and repeated rounds of forceful tugging on parental limbs. Various authority figures attempted to mark the occasion with speeches, again alternating Hebrew and Arabic - all of which proved poorly tailored to three and four year-old attention spans, in any language.

The scene might be mistaken for an everyday event at any preschool anywhere in Israel, excepting the equal presence of both of Israel's official languages, mirrored inside the schoolroom by season's greetings posted on the bulletin board side-by-side in both Semitic scripts. This humble facility had become the first baby step towards the addition of a Haifa campus to the network of bilingual, integrated schools operated by Hand-in-Hand: The Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel.

Jaundiced observers would no doubt dismiss the scene – the youthfulness of parents and children, the lofty aspirations expressed in linguistic *mélange* – as classic “the children are our future”-type naiveté. Indeed, both parents and program would not be wrongfully accused of harboring quantities of hope and high ideals – clearly combined with determination to make things happen on the ground. In this case, a dedicated set of parents successfully lobbied HiH to bypass a reluctant Haifa municipality and independently establish a vehicle for their visions of educating their children together. The Haifa preschool – now expanded to kindergarten and slated to grow apace with its first wave of students – will be guided by the organization's field experience, accumulated through fifteen years of struggle to invent and improve integrated education in this deeply divided society.

The fruits of that labor were on prominent display in July 2013, at the third annual HiH national teacher's conference. This conference brought together all of the organization's staff – teachers and principals from its three established schools, community organizers from five regional community programs, and the organizational administrative, developmental and educational staff and directors from HQ in Jerusalem -

120 people working to build bilingual, integrated schools and vibrant, shared communities around them.

They gathered for intensive discussions centered around a new draft pedagogical vision document, authored jointly by the principals of all HiH schools and HiH Education Director Inas Deeb. Through two days of workshops and conversations, the HiH professional community engaged in sharing dilemmas, lessons learned and best practices – elucidating what it means to educate Arabs and Jews together, in defiance of all previous precedent. As HiH Executive Director Shuli Dichter explained in an interview, “We are building something for which there is no blueprint – we are creating a possibility that a critical mass of citizens want, but it has to be built from the ground up – the plans, the curriculum, the answers to our questions, are not available in advance.”

Table X. The Hand-in-Hand School Network in Israel

<i>SCHOOL/ FOUNDING</i>	<i>LOCATION</i>	<i>2013 ENROLL- MENT</i>	<i>GRADES</i>
<i>Max Rayne, 1998</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>	<i>590</i>	<i>K-12</i>
<i>Galilee, 1998</i>	<i>Misgav/ Sakhnin</i>	<i>170</i>	<i>1-9</i>
<i>Bridge over the Wadi, 2004</i>	<i>Kafr Qara</i>	<i>230</i>	<i>K-6</i>
<i>Haifa, 2012</i>	<i>Haifa</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>Pre-K, K</i>
<i>Tel Aviv/ Jaffa, 2013</i>	<i>Tel Aviv/ Jaffa</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>Pre-K, K</i>

“National Days”: Mutual Historical Recognition

One issue in particular – the equal observance of both Israeli and Palestinian “national days” – reveals the depth of the pedagogical challenge that HiH has embraced. As fate would have it, the intersection of Israeli and Palestinian national calendars ushers in Spring with a series of historically charged commemorations: Israel’s Holocaust Remembrance Day, Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terror, and Independence Day, each observed according to their Hebrew calendar dates, all typically bookended by the Palestinian observances of Land Day on March 30th and Nakba (Catastrophe) Day on May 15th. The latter Palestinian observance, commemorating the destruction of Arab communities and dispersion of refugees beyond the borders of the nascent State of Israel in the 1948 War, has become a lightning rod in the political discourse of contemporary Israel. In 2011, the Knesset enacted legislation to ban institutions from using state funding to sponsor public commemoration of the Nakba; right-wing parties regularly propose harsher measures unlikely to survive Supreme Court scrutiny should they succeed in garnering parliamentary approval.⁴¹ On the Palestinian side, the Hamas government in Gaza has banned teaching about the Holocaust, while the PNA Ministry of Education avoids any substantial engagement with the topic – in both cases reflecting norms which treat acknowledgment of Jewish historical suffering or Israeli national legitimacy as tantamount to betrayals of the national ethos. Among Palestinian citizens of Israel, there are more examples of empathic recognition of the Jewish and Israeli historical experiences, but these are still partial and controversial.⁴²

HiH schools, by contrast, are committed to equally observe, respect and teach all of the above markers of collective memory. There is no sweeping the painful history of either people under the rug. Yet here, they are truly going where few, if any, have gone before.⁴³ One workshop at the teacher’s conference provided a space for teachers to reflect on the dilemmas created by this approach of mutual historical and symbolic recognition. In this session, a group of two dozen teachers and principals, Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel, contemplated the materials they would post – images, literature and symbols – in hallway exhibits for their schools’ annual commemorations of the Israeli and Palestinian “national days.” For an exercise, the facilitators, both teachers at HiH’s May Rayne bilingual school in Jerusalem, scattered laminated photos of pre-1948 Palestinian villages, freighted symbols such as the refugee’s key

to a lost home, and verses from Palestinian poetry on the floor. The faculty immersed themselves – together – in the task of picking up the pieces and building a new story out of the debris of history. There was neither denial nor hesitancy; on the contrary, the participants displayed a profound level of awareness of the tragedy and the need to recognize it, to engage with it, to teach it to students and to represent it openly. One Jewish teacher presented a Hebrew sign that read, “The nakba is the tragedy of the Palestinians, but it is part of the history of all of us. Together, we are talking about this.” The question was never whether, but rather how, this can be taught – with recognition, born of experience, of all the complexity and controversy entailed.

Teachers at the workshop remarked not only on the difficulties not only of teaching Palestinian history in an Israeli school, but equally on the challenges – and epiphanies – of relating the Holocaust and Israeli Memorial and Independence Days to their Arab students. One Jewish teacher recalled the visceral validation that she felt upon overhearing a Palestinian colleague teaching a Holocaust survivor’s story to a group of students: “I had never heard someone tell my story, our story, with so much empathy – in Arabic.” As numerous participants remarked, what was happening in the workshop, and their classrooms, stood in stark contrast to the omission of the other historical perspective that is standard practice in the mainstream educational system. And nonetheless, in the exceptional case of HiH, this is happening in schools recognized by Israel’s Ministry of Education.

This conscious commitment to teaching both Jewish/Israeli and Arab/Palestinian perspectives on the conflict – indeed, to engaging substantively with the conflict at all – should not be taken for granted. In other divided societies, integrated schools have studiously avoided potential Pandora’s Boxes in the form of holidays and history. Comparative studies have contrasted HiH’s candid approach to conflict content with integrated schools in Northern Ireland, which are described as teaching a technical curriculum devoid of conflictual reference, and discouraging expressions of sectarian identity in school.⁴⁴ In Bosnia-Herzegovina, students of different ethnicities in integrated schools have been separated for religion and history lessons – in extreme cases even attending school in the same building, but at different hours altogether.

Remarkably, HiH schools are employing their open approach to identity and narrative in a context of ongoing, unresolved conflict; Northern Ireland and Bosnia are typically classified as post-conflict societies.

What has been the impact of this unique pedagogy of mutual historical recognition, implemented in a unique cross-cultural, cross-conflict milieu? Preliminary studies of HiH schools have pointed to a significant outcome in terms of students' views of identity. Scholars have found that HiH students are more explicitly conscious of identity/ethnicity than peers in mainstream schools, yet less likely to "essentialize" or stereotype members of other ethnic groups. A 2011 article asserts that "interethnic exposure [at HiH] alleviated children's essentialist bias towards ethnicity and did so via making children aware of, rather than blind to, ethnic categories."⁴⁵ Anthropologist Zvi Bekerman of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who has closely studied HiH schools, asserts that HiH students "talk about identity, their own and of the other group, in a much more articulate, nuanced way than their peers in mainstream schools. . . The schools show that kids can understand profoundly complexity, and have no trouble living with it."⁴⁶

Bekerman asserts that teachers are perhaps the most deeply affected by HiH's open engagement with identities in conflict. The faculty is comprised of teachers with mainstream Ministry of Education training and diverse political views, hired for subject proficiency rather than any ideological commitment; they are not a "self-selecting" group. At the teachers' conference, a spirit of candor prevailed in discussions, which alternated between Hebrew and Arabic, the languages often interspersed in a single sentence, the noise and energy levels buoyant throughout. Instructors repeatedly shared stories of the evolution of their own views since first arriving at HiH, of their internal struggles with representing both perspectives, and of their encounters with reluctance or resistance, from students or parents, to the organization's values. Above all, the teachers seemed eager to outline the struggle playing out in their classrooms, between the egalitarian aspirations of HiH and the dissonant reality that surrounds them.

Challenges: Implementing an Integrated Vision in Separate Societies

At the conference, teachers were asked to provide feedback on a new mission statement, jointly composed over a yearlong process by all HiH principals and Education Director Dr. Deeb. The document sets

bilingualism not as the schools' primary goal, but as a pedagogical foundation for a substantively bicultural, critical, egalitarian education. In their responses, teachers overwhelmingly identified with the value-orientation of the vision document, while emphasizing the gaps between vision and contemporary reality in terms of the deep-seated social-structural imbalances between Arabic and Hebrew, Arabs and Jews.

Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel have, from the founding of the State in 1948, lived largely in separate and unequal spheres, with structural asymmetry a pervasive feature of social and economic life. In Israel's six decades of independence, the second Rabin administration (1992-95) is the only government credited with taking meaningful legislative and political steps toward narrowing the socioeconomic gaps between Arab and Jewish citizens, products of institutionalized discrimination in resource allocation and government service provision.⁴⁷

The effects of this asymmetry are manifested at HiH schools primarily in terms of

a) a majority-minority linguistic imbalance that prevents full bilingualism, b) different motivations for choosing HiH and pedagogical priorities between Arab and Jewish families, and c) challenges to post-elementary retention of Jewish students, leading to demographically imbalanced middle and, in Jerusalem, secondary schools. d) Language: Outside the walls of HiH schools, Israel is a unilaterally bilingual country. As an economically embattled minority in a Hebrew-speaking society, Israel's Arab citizens are typically conversant and literate in both Arabic and Hebrew. Among Jewish-Israelis, by contrast, proficient Arabic speakers are few and far between. Israel's Jewish citizens have no analogous socioeconomic incentives for learning Arabic, and the antipathy generated by protracted conflict has long served to discourage Jewish students from learning the language effectively.⁴⁸

For HiH, this reality has prevented the schools from establishing fully bilingual environments. As the directors and faculty universally acknowledge, while Arab teachers all speak Hebrew, few Jewish teachers speak Arabic, and the same dynamic prevails at every level - among administrators, parents, and students. At the conference, participants in one discussion counted the number of Jewish HiH teachers they knew to be fluent in Arabic - on one hand.

HiH schools offer Arabic and Hebrew language classes for staff and community members after hours, and some Jewish teachers take advantage of these – but such weekly evening lessons are not sufficient to engender any rapid improvement in the overall imbalance. Hebrew is therefore the administrative lingua franca of the school and of parents’ meetings, thereby inadvertently reinforcing majority-minority asymmetry. Among students, the formal fus’ha (Modern Standard) Arabic is taught separately, according to students’ abilities and needs – as a first language for the Arab students, as a second language for the Jews.

There is widespread recognition, among Arab and Jewish faculty, of this gap and its effect on aspirations to bilingual and bicultural equality. This issue was discussed openly and repeatedly at the conference, with hopes expressed that the situation will move closer to equal linguistic facility over time, and suggestion of potential proactive steps in that direction. At the same time, instructors emphasized the qualitative difference between HiH schools, in which Arab and Jewish teachers teach together and the languages are on equal public display throughout school facilities, in contrast to unilingual mainstream educational settings. At HiH, Arabic is much more prominent than in any other school environment with large numbers of Jewish-Israeli students.

The linguistic imbalance appeared to be a prime concern of HiH faculty. It does not, however, appear to alienate a significant number of Arab parents. Indeed, equipping their children with fluent Hebrew is cited as a primary motivator for many Arab parents to choose HiH schools – symptomatic of a second salient point of difference.

b) Divergent Parental Motivations: According to HiH administrators, Arab and Jewish families exhibit

substantial differences in terms of motivations for choosing HiH schools and priorities for their children’s education, especially at the elementary level.

According to this characterization, Arab parents typically cite academic excellence and Hebrew fluency as the primary factors for choosing HiH – in order to prepare their children to compete and succeed economically in Israeli society. Structural asymmetry underlies this rationale, as the only other option available to upwardly mobile Arab families unable to pay private school tuition – the Arabic language Israeli school system

– is widely acknowledged as inferior. Jewish parents, often facing no analogous structural deficits, are more likely to cite the ideals of integrated education, a desire for their children to learn with Arab children, to break down social barriers and to embody a peaceful future as motivating factors.

These asymmetrical motivations have led to differing attitudes toward pedagogical approaches at the elementary level, which are likely also influenced by widespread cultural differences

in terms of formality, attitudes toward authority, etc. According to Dr. Deeb, Jewish parents at the elementary level often prefer a non-competitive, non-coercive learning environment without primary emphasis on excellence or achievement; Arab parents are described as frequently desiring more achievement-oriented learning environments throughout their children’s development.⁴⁹

As children approach junior high, however, the Jewish parents are described as likewise becoming more oriented towards achievement and preparation for future success – thereby decreasing their motivation for remaining in HiH schools, and leading to the program’s most difficult challenge.



HiH faculty in a workshop at the 3rd annual teacher’s conference. Jerusalem, July 2013.

c) Recruitment and Retention: In its early years, HiH's Max Rayne Bilingual School in Jerusalem was strictly an elementary school, and strictly balanced in terms of Arab-Jewish demographics. It expanded to junior high school in 2005, and added a secondary program in 2008, which graduated its first senior class in 2011. This process of expansion, however, inadvertently triggered a crisis for the organization. Beginning at the transition between elementary and middle school, Jewish students began leaving en masse, opting to enroll in various elite magnet and private school options available to them in the Jerusalem area. For its first few years of operation, the HiH Jerusalem high school student body was almost entirely Arab. One Arab parent called the flight of the Jewish students "a trauma that has not healed" for her children; HiH administrators described the issue as "an existential challenge" and a "sword hanging over our heads." Similar dynamics surfaced at Galilee and Wadi'Ara campuses as their first classes of students grew beyond elementary age.

HiH leadership cite a pair of social-structural asymmetries as underlying the phenomenon. First, achievement-minded Jewish parents have a plethora of excellent secondary schooling options available in the Jerusalem area, with specialized programs and prestigious reputations. Second, many Jewish parents connected their post-elementary withdrawal from HiH to concerns about their children's post-secondary military service – a motivation rooted simultaneously in social ethos and concern over future economic prospects. Neither the military issue, of course, nor the prestigious schooling alternatives are relevant for most Arab families. Thus, while HiH remains an ideal secondary school in terms of Arab parents' primary motivating factors, it is less than ideal in terms of primary concerns and aspirations of many Jewish families beyond the elementary level.

In response to the crisis, Dr. Deeb described HiH schools as undertaking intensive recruitment and retention campaigns, which have successfully turned the tide in at least two cases. The Jerusalem junior high is now fully integrated in terms of Arab and Jewish enrollment, and the program is working proactively to maintain that balance throughout high school. The "Bridge Over the Wadi" school in Kafr 'Qara – the only place in Israel in which Jewish students attend school in an Arab town – has recently achieved equal Jewish and Arab enrollment and maximum capacity; the school now has to turn away applications from both Jewish and Arab families.

The schools have demonstrated remarkable resilience in overcoming their structurally driven demographic crisis.

These are not the only straits HiH has navigated in fifteen years of operation. Profound external pressures precipitated a period of internal turmoil and turnover in the mid-late 2000s, during which the former Be'er Sheva campus declared its independence of the organization. The future of HiH, as a curriculum, a pedagogy, a movement, a united network of schools - appeared quite uncertain. After several years of attrition, the Board of Directors attempted to "hit the reset button" and stage a second beginning. In 2010, an entirely new HiH organizational staff set out to rebuild fraying relationships with and between campuses, and to establish a coherent vision for successful schools that would, in time, be more than just successful schools.

A "Civic Power": HiH Schools as Catalysts of Shared Community

There is ample evidence that HiH's 2010 reset has generated a renaissance. Jerusalem and Wadi'Ara schools have resolved their recruitment issues and now face surpluses of applicants. Local demand has inspired the establishment of Haifa and Tel Aviv-Jaffa kindergartens. Dr. Deeb has facilitated processes of community-building and curricular alignment across campuses, through the annual teacher's conferences and the collaborative drafting of HiH's new pedagogical vision.

The organization has garnered increasing public recognition in recent years. Palestinian-Israeli satirist Sayyed Kashua provides HiH with a great deal of free publicity through his popular Friday Haaretz column, which often remarks – albeit facetiously – on his daughter's experiences at the Jerusalem school. In the past year, Spanish author Antonio Muñoz Molina donated the proceeds of his Israel Prize for Literature to the organization, Jewish and Palestinian-Israeli singers Achinoam Nini and Mira Awad performed together at the Wadi'Ara campus, and Dr. Deeb was awarded the Van Leer Institute's Matanel Prize for Education. The Jerusalem school's adult men's basketball team even won the local intramural league title, going undefeated against a slew of ethnically homogeneous opponents, to great acclaim.

These achievements derive primarily from the work of HiH schools as schools. Yet for Executive Director Shuli Dichter, HiH schools exist within larger communities – and can serve to inform discourse and transform relations beyond the classroom. “I want to see the local [campus] experience raised to the national [network] level, as a first stage,” he explains, “All the campuses cooperating to gain encouragement, strength, power.” For Dichter, this is a first step towards broader social impact – necessary but not sufficient. In the near future, he envisions this network of thriving HiH schools serving the wider community as “intercommunal shared spaces, bases for joint living.” According to this vision, each campus will foster an engaged cadre of Arab and Jewish citizens advocating jointly for the political changes necessary to foster genuine Arab-Jewish equality and integration of Arab citizens in Israel. HiH will not itself become a social movement, but “will educate, inspire, and sustain the citizens and the public consciousness that support such a movement. This inter-communal organization will bring the voice of shared life, of shared communities, to the Knesset, to the media. We are building here, bottom-up, a civic power.”

The vehicle for this vision is HiH’s “Shared Communities” project, designed to transform HiH schools into community centers involving wider circles, beyond students and families, in bi-cultural learning experiences and network building. In its inaugural year, the Shared Communities program has placed full-time community organizers at each HiH site, and all campuses are currently sponsoring programs for the wider community, including Arabic and Hebrew language classes, Arab-Jewish sports teams, joint holiday gatherings, dialogue groups, concerts, joint study programs and social action/educational event committees. As they gain momentum, Dichter also expects the communities “to catalyze moves in the city hall... I expect the communities to become a source of power for better sharing of resources – local, regional, and thereafter on the state level. We approach this as a social change act, not a service-oriented act.”

Over the last school year, several incidents in Jerusalem emphasized the importance – and the difficulty – of mobilizing support in the communities in which its schools are situated. In February 2012, extremists scrawled anti-Arab and anti-Leftist graffiti and threats on the walls of the Jerusalem campus, in what is termed a “price tag” attack; on other occasions, youth from the surrounding neighborhood threw stones over the walls of the school.⁵⁰ In January 2013, a group of Palestinian HiH students were verbally and physically attacked on a city

bus, while the driver and other passengers looked on passively.⁵¹ HiH schools remain a tiny, exceptional minority within the mainstream educational system and broader society – such that proactive community building and persistent public advocacy are not extracurricular activities, but existential necessities.⁵²

Yet so far, HiH students, parents, staff and nascent community groups are undeterred by displays of hostility and intolerance. The schools, the communities, and their public footprints are visibly growing. The “Shared Communities” program proudly marked its first anniversary in July 2013 with a “Ramadan Nights” iftar celebration. 650 community members from HiH’s five regional programs gathered outdoors together at sunset in the Arab town of Arara, near HiH’s Wadi Ara campus. The evening featured an eclectic menu of entertainment; an interfaith clerical panel expounding on the meaning of fasting; amateur acrobatic performances by the Galilee Jewish-Arab Circus, and defiant speeches extolling equality and denouncing the Praver Plan by Dichter and HiH Board of Directors co-Chair Dr. Thabet Abu Ras.⁵³

After a festive dinner, children crowded around tables laden with crayons and water tattoos, while their parents indulged in gossip about school events and teachers. Their quotidian conversations, rendered exceptional only by the rare blend of Israel’s primary languages and identities, evoked the implicit power of this unconventional community. As Executive Director, Dichter balances his emphasis on action and advocacy with appreciation of HiH’s unique status as a year-round, full-immersion context for Arab and Jewish Israeli families to simply “be” together:

“Here, we are also building the being, not only the doing – we are building the structure for the sustainability of the doing. We are human beings. We are not only here as tools in the hands of somebody. We are here to be together. With all the complexity – with gossip, rumors, debates, who came to this and didn’t come to that – that’s the level of being. Being goes along with the local community. The ultimate achievement in the level of the community is to be.”

After a closing concert by an Arab classical ensemble, the HiH guests departed for a leisurely “Ramadan Nights” walking tour of the neighboring city of Um El-Fahem. Simply “being” together en masse after dark in that city, which has been painted in the Hebrew tabloid press as an Islamist stronghold, conveys an inclusive vision of Israel that is radical for its time.

In recent years, figures as prominent as former Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman have advocated redrawing the border to exclude Um El-Fahem and its 40,000 Arab residents from Israel in any two-state agreement.⁵⁴ The HiH community, by contrast, affirmed Um El-Fahem, on that Ramadan night, as an integral part of the fabric of the country that they share.

According to Dichter, the HiH vision of shared community ultimately implies no less than “reinventing the notion of citizenship in the State of Israel.” While participation in his vision still encompasses only a sliver of Israel’s school system and society, Dichter is confident that “we’re talking about something very viable... a critical mass of Israeli citizens, Jews and Arabs, are willing to engage in joint communal frameworks.”⁵⁵ When asked to estimate the proportions of the phenomenon, Dichter responds, “If I were a researcher, I would give you footnotes for everything, to support what I am saying. Here, I give you the schools, the batei midrash (joint study programs), the groups, the communities – I refer you to action, not

research.” The ambitious experiments of HiH schools and communities are in fact providing the peacebuilding field with intriguing examples of both.

The HiH network is growing, but still encompasses only a fraction of the Israeli population. In mainstream schools, it is bereaved Israeli and Palestinian members of the Parents Circle Families Forum (PCFF) who provide a poignant illustration of the possibility of reconciliation. Their joint presentations, delivered annually in hundreds of schools, are often the only such example Israeli Jewish teenagers encounter before enlisting for compulsory military service upon graduation.

The Medium and the Message: Parents Circle Families Forum

In a dimly lit corner of Sapir College in Sderot, Israel – a desert town known primarily as the target of crude missile barrages from the neighboring Gaza Strip – Bas-sam Aramin and Ben Kfir unstack tables and chairs.



PCFF members Ben Kfir and Bassam Aramin arrive to deliver a lecture in a bomb shelter/classroom at Sapir College in Sderot, Israel. The Hebrew signs read “no exit.”

The two middle-aged men, a Palestinian from the East Jerusalem favela of Anata, and an Israeli from the coastal city of Ashkelon, configure a circle of seats as students trickle in to the bunkerlike classroom, which doubles as a bomb shelter. An audience of roughly two dozen assembles; Ben and Bassam sit facing them, side-by-side. Each, in turn, relives the day his daughter died. Ben recounts his last phone conversation with his daughter Yael, who was killed while doing an additional year of IDF service, at her commander's request. He last heard her voice three hours before a Palestinian suicide bomber killed her and eight other Israelis at a bus stop adjacent to her base near Tel Aviv, in September 2003.

Bassam recalls a piece of candy, still wrapped, that was found with his ten year-old daughter Abir after her death. She had purchased it with friends after finishing an exam, minutes before an Israeli Border Patrol officer shot her in the head, just outside her East Jerusalem school in January 2007.

This is the third group with which they've shared their harrowing stories on the same January 2013 day. "It's like opening a wound again and again," Ben admits when asked by a student how he can go on speaking about his tragedy. "But before joining the Forum, I had nothing left to live for. It gives me a reason to continue to live." Ben recalled his skepticism when Hagit, a PCFF member, first invited him to meet with bereaved Palestinians: "Who do you want me to make peace with? The people who murdered my daughter?" Nonetheless, her persistence pushed him to attend. "I saw people who lost everything, just like me," he recalled. "The first Palestinian I spoke to said, 'this gives me a reason to get up in the morning.'" Reserved by nature, Ben had never once spoken to an audience before joining the Forum; he has proudly made hundreds of public presentations since.

Bassam, by contrast, was already an activist before his daughter was born, and a peace advocate before she was killed. He spent seven years in prison for throwing stun grenades at a Border Patrol jeep in the first Palestinian intifada, then became convinced of the futility of violence while in prison. In 2002, he co-founded a joint Israeli-Palestinian initiative called "Combatants for Peace." Joining the Forum after Abir's death, nonetheless, inspired yet greater motivation. Bassam awoke at five a.m. and traveled several hours in each direction to Sderot that day. He had given a pair of presentations in a different Israeli city the day before, and would depart on an international speaking tour for the Forum the next week. "I don't care if

I travel five hours and speak five times a day," he told me on the ride back to Jerusalem. "If I change one person's life, then it is worth it – and I know that we change many."

This is the timeless message delivered time and again by the PCFF – since its founding by a handful of bereaved Israeli parents in 1994, amplified and multiplied since its transformation into a jointly managed bi-national organization of 600 Israeli and Palestinian bereaved families in 2006.⁵⁶ Like Hand-in-Hand, the mere fact of the Forum's existence constitutes an implicit challenge to deep-seated cultural assumptions, in this case regarding bereavement, retribution and the im/possibility of reconciliation - on both sides of the conflict. The gravity, the perseverance, the emotional force of their message are all viscerally present in their sharing of grief, their counter-intuitive rejection of revenge, and their iconoclastic choice of cross-conflict partnership.

The Forum of 2013, nonetheless, appears singularly focused on "doing" rather than simply "being." Through our weeks of field research in preparation of this report, the PCFF calendar was full – the Forum appearing well on pace to hold nearly 1,000 events for a seventh consecutive year. Over two decades and multiple wars, the mission has lost none of its urgency. The Forum remains a restless organization, its members consumed with communicating their message to new audiences, in new ways. Founding Director Yitzhak Frankenthal framed their work as a lifesaving mission in the 2006 documentary *Encounter Point*, saying, "If, by our outcry, we manage to prevent a single death – then it has all been worth it for us."⁵⁷

From Rabin to Reconciliation: The Transformation of the Forum

In July 1994, Frankenthal's nineteen year-old son Arik was kidnapped and killed by a Hamas cell in the course of military service. Soon after, Frankenthal saw his son's image in a photo-montage poster for a group called the "terror victims organization," aimed at inciting opposition to then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's agreements with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). A strong supporter of the nascent peace process, Frankenthal proceeded to issue public statements in favor of peace with the Palestinians – an uncommon stance for someone in his position. As PCFF founding member Aharon Barnea writes, in an informal history of the organization:

"In the wake of the murder of his son, Frankenthal called for something different than what the public expected from a bereaved father with stereotypical associations – a knitted kippah, a man of the [modern Orthodox] national religious movement. Instead of joining his afflicted voice to the choir demanding a harsh hand against the Palestinians, calls for rage and revenge, the opponents of the Oslo Process, Frankenthal gave forth a call to strive for peace and reconciliation, as a method of eliminating terror, pain and bereavement from the homes of Israel."⁵⁸

Frankenthal's campaign catalyzed a group of veteran Israeli peace advocates who had themselves lost children in wars and militant attacks; they jointly established the "Bereaved Parents Circle" and set out to challenge the discursive mobilization of bereavement by forces opposed to peace. Frankenthal set the original name as "Parents Circle: Bereaved Parents for Democracy, Tolerance and Judaism," the latter term signifying Frankenthal's erstwhile hope to influence his own national-religious community. "Families Forum" was soon added to the title, as bereaved siblings and children – primarily secular Israelis - identified with the message and became actively involved.

From its original handful of Israeli peace advocates, the Forum has expanded and transformed into today's joint Israeli-Palestinian membership organization of 600 bereaved families, with equal, parallel governing bodies elected by members on both sides. From its initial focus on Track One political advocacy, the Forum gradually became dedicated to embodying a promoting grassroots reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. As Barnea explains, "today, our multi-faceted activities are all intended to prove to the broader public that reconciliation between the two peoples is possible."

In telling the story of the Forum, veteran members emphasize the increasing involvement of bereaved Palestinians as the driving force in the organization's evolution. The Israeli founders first met with a group of bereaved Palestinian families in 1998, in Gaza, a meeting coordinated with PA Minister of Prisoners Affairs Hisham Abdel Razek. As former Israeli co-Director Nir Oren recalls, "One of the first critiques on the Israeli side was, we respect you – but you won't find anyone on the other side who thinks like you. So they found bereaved parents who support this message, in Gaza." According to Barnea, "this was

something of a defiant declaration. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, this step determined that there is someone to talk to and we must talk to them." The meetings with the Gaza group continued, culminating in a widely publicized 1999 joint visit to the home of Israeli President Ezer Weizman.

The Gaza project was abruptly interrupted by the second intifada's eruption in 2000, but it foreshadowed fundamental changes. Barnea writes that, "The paradigm of dialogue, which is the basis for recognition... the first step on the long road to reconciliation and agreement, became and remains our central statement." As the conflict escalated and casualties multiplied in the first years of the 21st century, Palestinian families in East Jerusalem and the West Bank joined PCFF meetings and protests, and joint presentations by bereaved Palestinian and Israeli activists became the organization's signature mode of public engagement. In 2002, activist Khaled Abu Awwad became the PCFF's first Palestinian staff member, directing the organization's education and encounters programs.⁵⁹

The increasing Palestinian presence and escalating conflict triggered a profound, sometimes painful, process of restructuring and reorientation. In 2004, founder Yitzhak Frankenthal resigned as the Forum officially shifted its strategic objective from political advocacy in Israel to advancing Palestinian-Israeli reconciliation. A new leadership argued that reconciliation was a prerequisite to negotiations in the bleak post-intifada context. As Communications Director Robi Damelin explains, "The reconciliation process, which generally occurs after an agreement is signed between antagonists, cannot wait in our case.

The two populations need a degree of trust in the possibility of reconciliation in order to support the peace process."

Even as public opinion grew deeply skeptical toward peace initiatives, bereaved status granted Forum members legitimacy and a unique ability to challenge assumptions among mainstream audiences. As founding member Zvika Shahak asserts in *Encounter Point*, "If we, who have lost what is most precious in life, can sit together with the other side and talk and try to understand, then everyone else must do so."

Barnea writes that, "Bereaved families have an 'advantage' in their ability to break through emotional opposition, to convey to audiences the meaning of bereavement, and to awaken empathy toward the other."

As joint activism became a full-time endeavor, the Forum's Palestinian activists demanded equal participation in organizational governance – a campaign that some nicknamed "the little intifada."⁶⁰ "We were no longer satisfied to be Palestinians on a shelf," explained current Palestinian co-Director Mazen Faraj – "just take us off when you need to talk to an audience, then put us back."⁶¹ Barnea describes a growing awareness among Israeli members of the need to practice internally what they preached externally: "The message of reconciliation could not be understood other than as a message of equality and cooperation... The organization's bi-national character [had to be] expressed through equal management and the removal of all patronizing elements."

In 2006, the Forum officially became a cross-conflict partnership, with Israeli and Palestinian co-Directors and registered NGO status in both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Henceforth, all significant decisions require joint approval; as Faraj asserts, "every check needs two signatures." These changes of mission and structure were expressed in a new official name: "Parents Circle Families Forum: Palestinian and Israeli Bereaved Families Supporting Peace, Reconciliation and Tolerance." Nir Oren, the Israeli co-Director from 2010-2013, explained the change as augmenting the Forum's legitimacy and effectiveness:

"This wasn't just structural, this was strategic. We understood that this was our strength – joint Israeli-Palestinian partnership – that's how we can have much greater influence and effectiveness. We get much more acceptance and access, because we have both sides – and because we are bereaved. We would not get where we get – we would [only] have access to about 20% of the schools... [Instead], now we have Israeli Ministry of Education approval for our lectures."

Barnea, by contrast, describes the shift in normative terms, as bringing the organization into alignment with its principles: "working as a democratic system, and reflecting its ideological messages in its own internal governance."

In practice, the establishment and management of bi-national governance structures, in a context of ongoing occupation and power asymmetry, has been a complex and sometimes conflictual process – particularly on the Palestinian side. In its formative years, the Palestinian arm of the Forum has endured leadership turnover and sharply contested internal elections, recently shifting its organizational base and official title from the Al-Tariq organization to a new NGO entitled "Generations for Peace."⁶² In 2012, an Israeli Ministry of Education ruling sowed seeds of potential controversy between the two constituent organizations. The Ministry, responding to complaints from parents at one Israeli school, forbade the Forum to bring Palestinian speakers whose first-degree relatives had ever been on the Israeli security services' "Wanted" list – a policy which effectively barred leading Palestinian PCFF members from joint lecture presentations. After extended discussion, both groups grudgingly agreed to comply with the decree, in order to maintain access to student audiences at hundreds of mainstream institutions.

Through such dilemmas and debates, the model has held. Indeed, the intense internal contestation that has characterized the Forum's development testifies, among other things, to the depth of members' motivation and attachment. Throughout these processes, the PCFF has kept to a prolific pace. A review of the Forum's body of work indicates that these have been creative tensions.

Activist Repertoire: The Forum's Portfolio of Practice

The joint Israeli-Palestinian lecture presentation described above has long been the Forum's signature format. The Israeli and Palestinian representatives, in Barnea's description, "present their own and their families' experiences of loss, they expose students to a meeting with the "other," his/her reality, family, pain, suffering, dreams, ambitions – in a word, humanity." Israeli novelist and longtime peace advocate Amos Oz described PCFF presentations as generating an "emotional breakthrough," a conclusion supported in high percentages by participant surveys and preliminary evaluative research.

Former Israeli Directors Boaz Kitain and Nir Oren have tallied approximately 800-1000 annual joint lecture presentations delivered in (primarily Israeli) schools and universities alone every year since 2006; those figures do not include dozens of presentations to international audiences and in other local venues.

After years at this relentless pace of public appearances, chronicled in a number of documentary films, the Forum is today among the better-known joint Israeli-Palestinian peace initiatives in the Middle East and beyond; their work has been recognized in comments by world leaders, and earned numerous local and international awards.

At the same time, this public profile and resonant message may overshadow creative aspects of the Forum's prolific work that warrant attention from activists and scholars in the field - approaches potentially relevant beyond the Middle East. While persevering through conflict escalation, internal turmoil and organizational transformation, the PCFF has innovated in terms of methodology and programming. Over the years, the Forum has built a multi-dimensional repertoire for facilitating cross-conflict communication, and for broadcasting its singular message. Its portfolio of practice is reminiscent of Bach's Goldberg Variations - diverse meditations on a haunting core theme, each unique, yet all evocative of the original.

The ensuing section will present highlights of this body of work:

Creative Protest: The Forum has [always] joined the larger "peace camp" in traditional protest activities - maintaining a ubiquitous presence at peace rallies in Rabin Square in Tel Aviv, joining Palestinian-led marches opposing the construction of the Separation Barrier in areas adjacent to the homes of Palestinian PCFF members. However, the Forum has also staged provocative performances and public exhibitions designed to forcefully convey their unique message. In response to the escalating casualties of the second intifada, the PCFF staged a public exhibition of life-size coffins draped in Israeli and Palestinian flags, one for each person killed, which was exhibited outside the United Nations in New York in 2002. In 2005, the Forum staged performances of a mock Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the South African model, with testimonies from Israeli and Palestinian perpetrators and victims of violence. Actors portrayed the perpetrators, who read scripts composed from reports of human rights violations; Forum members told their true stories of victimization. In 2012, the Forum staged a public Israeli-Palestinian blood exchange - using IV's to viscerally illustrate their common humanity and the depth of their bond to each other. As Robi Damelin explains, "It's harder to kill someone when you know that your blood is in their veins."

Film: PCFF members and the work of the Forum have been chronicled in no fewer than seven documentary films, four of these premiering in the last two years alone. The films typically feature intimate portraits of individual Israeli and Palestinian PCFF members, highlighting their stories of bereavement, epiphanies that led them to join the Forum, their work together in the field, and the cross-conflict bonds that have developed between them. Several films have garnered critical acclaim and awards at international film festivals.

The two most recent productions - *Two-Sided Story* and *One Day After Peace* - move beyond the inspirational portrait frame, focusing in-depth on the complex dynamics and profound ethical and practical dilemmas of the work of reconciliation. *One Day After Peace* raises the controversial possibility of applying a South African-style Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) model to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The film follows PCFF activist Robi Damelin, an Israeli of South African origin, on an emotional return to her former country, her first in 45 years. The film alternates between footage of actual TRC proceedings and a series of searing conversations between Damelin and perpetrators and victims of apartheid-era atrocities.

The film eschews easy answers, presenting multiple and contradictory perspectives on acknowledgement, forgiveness and reconciliation. The sheer cathartic force of the process, however, is clear. Repeatedly, perpetrators present straight-faced testimony at the original TRC and in direct conversation with Damelin. They maintain masks of composure while describing the violence they committed, only to collapse in tears in response to being presented with a portrait of Damelin's late son David, killed by a Palestinian militant while on military service in 2002. These South African encounters, juxtaposed with footage from PCFF meetings in the Middle East, suggest that Israelis and Palestinians can one day acknowledge, face-to-face, the horrors of what they have done to each other - and that this will let them live. *Two-Sided Story* vividly documents the dynamics of a dialogue group between bereaved Israelis and Palestinians, facilitated by PCFF members through the Forum's unique "History Through the Human Eye" narrative process. The film's power is its honesty; it highlights thorny exchanges and displays of doubt, distrust and irreconcilable positioning alongside hard-won moments of acknowledgment, compassion and understanding.

The process is the true focus, and this is the film's contribution to the wider peace and conflict field – a uniquely authentic, detailed and compelling portrait of cross-conflict dialogue.

The films serve as vehicles for inviting wider audiences into the difficult conversations sparked by meaningful Israeli-Palestinian encounters – often audiences that would not participate in such encounters themselves. In a single month in 2013, for example, PCFF films screened in venues as disparate as the European Union Ambassador's residence in Herzlia, a Jerusalem high school known for students killed in wars and attacks, and two Palestinian localities in the southern West Bank, a rural village and a refugee camp, both reputed to be strongholds of militant movements opposed to recognition of Israel.

Media: Beyond film, the Forum has employed nearly every existing medium of mass communication – producing the 2011 television series "Good Intentions," aired on Israel Channel Two; weekly Arabic/Hebrew radio programs hosted on the Jerusalem-based online station All for Peace Radio; the "Hello-Shalom-Salaam" toll-free telephone line, via which Israelis and Palestinians sought "someone to talk to" on the other side during the height of the second intifada; billboard campaigns declaring "it won't end until we talk" and "the pain of peace is better than the agony of war" in Israel and the West Bank; and most recently, the thriving Arabic and Hebrew Facebook page entitled "Crack in the Wall," which serves as a news feed chronicling a steady stream of Forum events, public campaigns and perspectives, and a bilingually translated platform for online interaction between Israelis and Palestinians. During the 2012 Israeli elections, the site hosted a social media campaign through which hundreds of Forum members and supporters posted, tweeted, instagrammed and otherwise circulated photos of themselves with signs declaring, "I want to put peace back in the picture." With its real-time updating ability and grassroots accessibility, social media is perhaps the medium best able to keep pace with the PCFF.

Research: Since its shift of focus from short-term political change to long-term reconciliation, the Forum has established relationships with leading researchers in the field, to explore the theoretical assumptions and potential contributions of their work. This began with legal scholar and transitional justice expert Ofer Shinar, who helped formulate the Forum's new vision in 2004, and continued through evaluative research and a series of consultations

with local and international institutions and scholars. In 2010, the Forum established a "Reconciliation Center" under the leadership of Dr. Maya Kahanoff. The Center has recently published a "Reconciliation Paper" co-authored by Dr. Kahanoff and Dr. Mohammed Abu-Nimer, informed by PCFF members through a series of workshops. The Center is currently building an online library combining academic resources on reconciliation with chronicles of PCFF activity and publications, in an attempt to link theory and practice, to contribute to and learn from the academic field on an ongoing basis.

Dialogue and Cross-Conflict Engagement: Beginning with the fledgling Forum's 1998 meeting with families in Gaza, the PCFF has become a vehicle for an ever-increasing volume and variety of dialogues and face-to-face encounters. PCFF programming of this type has long been conducted along both uni-national and bi-national lines, formally and informally, and directed both internally – between Forum members – and externally. Internally speaking, the Forum has held semi-annual conferences open to all member families in addition to frequent local meetings, all of which marked the organization's turn toward grassroots activism; they also convene annual summer camps for the children of bereaved families, both PCFF members and others. Dozens of Forum activists have now served both as participants in "internal" dialogues between members, and as facilitators who share their personal stories of bereavement to inspire conversation among external groups.

In addition to building facilitation skills, experience has informed an organic process of internal capacity-building in response to dilemmas and deficits discovered through practice. The PCFF has resolved the inherent linguistic dilemma of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue by developing the rare capacity – perhaps unique at the grassroots NGO level – to provide real-time bilingual translation through radio headsets, in a manner analogous to the UN General Assembly. This method preserves the spontaneity and dynamism of conversation without limiting participation to elite English or Hebrew-speaking populations.⁶³

Seeking to increase the participation and profile of women members, particularly Palestinian women from religious/traditional backgrounds, the Forum established a women's group that has rapidly proven to be a source of creativity and productivity. In initial meetings, a

number of women articulated the desire to express themselves through means other than constant verbal back-and-forth. This intervention sparked a series of initiatives entitled “women create reconciliation,” courses blending dialogue with art, cooking, or photography, guided by experts in each field.

Each course combines internal/educational and external/advocacy elements – the internal processes of dialogue, empowerment and skill-building for participants culminating in public exhibitions of their work and its implicit and explicit messages. The cooking group is currently publishing a recipe book edited by Israel’s version of Julia Child, chef Gil Hovav; the art group has designed “life story” books for exhibit. The photography group compiled haunting montages evoking their everyday reminders of family members killed in the conflict – rooms converted to elegiac galleries, left precisely as they were on the last day, favorite outfits strewn across an empty bed, a tree planted by the door. Their work will be exhibited around the country and internationally; it premiered in September 2013 in Tel-Aviv, under the title “The Presence of the Void.”

Joint Israeli-Palestinian cultural projects of this sort invariably attract facile criticism as “normalization” or “hummus coexistence”; yet such labels are difficult to attach to these joint explorations of life in the shadow of loss. In these PCFF projects, cultural forms give voice through image and narrative to women’s stories of violent bereavement and permanent loss, of living under Israeli occupation as Palestinians, and living in fear as Palestinians and Israelis.

Scaling Up Narrative Practice: History through the Human Eye

These sobering personal narratives ensure that the human cost of the conflict – in Barnea’s words, “the price of no peace” – is omnipresent, implicitly framing every interface among Forum members or between PCFF speakers and the public. In the course of joint action and discussion, however, leading members began to feel that the “emotional breakthrough,” the humanizing effect of exchanging powerful personal stories, is not itself equivalent to genuine reconciliation. The Forum’s recent “History through the Human Eye” (HTHE) narrative dialogue methodology is designed to generate a parallel “intellectual breakthrough,” by explicitly linking personal stories of life and death in the conflict to the collective historical narratives in which they are embedded.

Designed and first implemented in 2010, the HTHE project emerged concurrently with increased scholarly emphasis on the role of historical narratives in framing the identity and political psychology of groups engaged in protracted conflict.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, the idea was inspired, as ever, by practical experience. Boaz Kitain explained the process:

“How was [HTHE] born? On one of the weekend workshops of the Forum – a Palestinian father... [said] tell me if this whole story that the Jews tell about the Holocaust, is not something that they have embellished, and used as an excuse to take our land? Something that is very acceptable in the Palestinian narrative.

The first respondent was Rami Elhanan, who was one of the leaders of the Forum, and very close to the Palestinian members politically. He, in fact, responded the most forcefully – he said, you know me, you know my opinions, but I am the son of a Holocaust survivor, and I want you to come to Yad Vashem [Israel’s Holocaust Memorial Museum] and see what this was, that this is not some story that we exaggerated. This was the origin – that the Palestinians will come, and will learn our narrative – and we will not make life easy for Israelis – we will go and see, and hear, and learn the story of the nakba, of the destroyed villages. That’s how the project came to be – from our own internal discussion.”

Forum members exchanged visits to Yad Vashem, to destroyed pre-1948 Palestinian villages, to Hebron and other nerve centers of respective collective memories, and invited Israeli and Palestinian historians to represent the past in their respective historical perspectives. Moved by a sense of profound new understanding – if sometimes painfully acquired – this PCFF pilot group sought to build their experiences into a new model of dialogue designed to surface the conflicting historical narratives and encourage recognition and acknowledgment – and the rest, as they say, is history.

With a grant from USAID’s Annual Program Statement Reconciliation Fund, Forum members consolidated the methodology, received facilitation training, and set about leading 17 HTHE “parallel narrative working groups” in the last two years.⁶⁵ Each group’s 20-30 participants completed a curriculum of 5 full-day sessions, including lectures by Israeli and Palestinian historians, joint visits to Yad Vashem and pre-1948 Palestinian villages, and dialogue sessions jointly facilitated by members of the Forum.

The first wave of HTHE participants was composed of activists from other joint peace initiatives, seeking to strengthen mutual understanding in the manner experienced by the PCFF pilot group. A second set was oriented along professional lines – media professionals, social activists, educators, students, and medical staff. PCFF Education Director Rakefet Enoch explains that the project has elicited more demand than current funding can meet: “This is a very successful project. We get surprising responsiveness, participation, on the Palestinian side especially, despite anti-normalization and the current atmosphere... When I advertised for a new educators group, with 15 places for each side, I got 70 applications.” Enoch adds that the Forum aspires to facilitate more politically controversial, strategically important groups – Jewish settler organizations, Palestinian militant groups – but that is not possible under their present funding guidelines.

The methodology evolved through experience, as Enoch explains: “We learned “by walking.” At the beginning, we had one meeting, plus a day in Lifta and Yad Vashem. Then we understood that wasn’t good enough... So we rebuilt the budget, schedule, added uni-national meetings and time. The project improved and developed.” Facilitators added a closing exercise, entitled “in the shoes of the other,” by which Israelis and Palestinians role-played representing the other’s perspective on historical and current controversies – first uni-nationally, and then together. In the film *Two-Sided Story*, this exercise generates initial moments of comic relief, followed by breakthrough moments of acknowledgment between Israeli and Palestinian participants.

The program’s mid-term and final evaluation reports provide strong endorsements of the HTHE model. According to the final report, 94% of participants rated the program “very interesting”; 87% rated it as “contributing to a great degree”; 80% reported greater willingness to work for peace; 77% reported increased belief in the possibility of reconciliation; 71% improved trust and empathy for the other; 68% increased levels of acknowledgment and knowledge about the other narrative.

According to evaluators Dr. Maya Kahanoff and Dr. Nabil Shibly, Israeli and Palestinian responses indicated distinct, but distinctly positive, experiences: “Israelis report a greater positive impact in the areas of knowledge and willingness to grant legitimacy to the other’s narrative; Palestinians report a greater impact on the emotional level in the sense that it increased trust and empathy towards the other and belief in the possibility of peace and reconciliation.”⁶⁶ One

Palestinian respondent testified to a profound learning process: “I have never been exposed to the Israeli narrative before; I had heard the short version and never dug deeper... we felt the human tragedy, and I would have liked it to be longer in order to know more.” An Israeli participant found the process enlightening, notwithstanding previous activism: “I left with essential, useful knowledge. One of the best, most powerful meetings... during all my years of [peace] activity, impact-wise.”⁶⁷

By all indications, the HTHE model carries potential for broader impact, if resources can be secured and capacity built to engage wider circles of Israelis and Palestinians. Moreover, it seems ripe for potential adaptation to other regions, in ongoing and post-conflict situations, where competing visions of the past complicate the work of reconciliation in the present.

5. Conclusion

Israeli-Palestinian grassroots and civil society organizations are too often treated as a unified entity, myriad initiatives bundled together for blanket assessment under labels like “peace NGOs” or “people-to-people programs.” As the above profiles illustrate, this is in fact a diverse and dynamic field. At the level of everyday operations, the four programs profiled here are busy with very different work. Over 15-20 years of experience, each has cultivated unique methodologies and distinct areas of expertise. At the organizational level, each has a unique ethos, history, strategic vision and structure. All of these elements, moreover, have evolved *sui generis* through practice, in response to the pressures of shifting internal and external contexts. Each organization today is substantially larger than, and substantially different from, its original incarnation.

When this diversity and dynamism is recognized, it becomes useful to ask what these four endeavors nonetheless have in common. On initial reflection, they share at least three elements: a) The meta-objective of contributing to long-term conflict transformation between Israeli Jews and Palestinians; b) Bi-national Israeli Jewish and Palestinian staff and participant populations; c) The challenges of working in a hostile environment – a volatile context of protracted violent conflict and military occupation, mutually exclusive historical narratives and asymmetries of culture and power. Moreover, there is broad agreement among Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders that the context

has become more challenging in recent years, as both publics have grown disillusioned with perennially stalled Track One negotiations and the chaotic aftermath of “Arab Spring” uprisings in the region.⁶⁸

Of course, the organizations profiled here share all of these macro-conditions with the entire Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding field. The current research points to a number of more specific elements, however, that are salient across all four cases. In conclusion, the report will review these points of similarity and their potential significance for the local and global peacebuilding fields.

1. Growth: All of the initiatives profiled here have expanded significantly over 15-20 years of work, in terms of organizational capacity, staffing and structure, diversified portfolios of practice, and size and scope of participant communities and populations, among other elements. Equally important, these initiatives have continued to grow in recent years, even as the political context has become ever more complex and challenging.

2. Results: All of the initiatives here have generated examples of meaningful impact, some in terms of social-structural change, others in terms of models for cultural/relational change. In two cases, the Abraham Fund Initiatives and Friends of the Earth-Middle East, projects have produced concrete outcomes and tangible changes, in the forms of improved infrastructure, investment and/or employment opportunities, mitigated environmental hazards, and reforms of institutional policy or practice. Moreover, a number of these projects have been successfully “scaled up” to reach broader constituencies.

In the cases of Hand in Hand and the Parents Circle Families Forum, impact is most notable – at this stage – for depth rather than breadth, its inspirational power evident at personal and local levels, among families and communities with critical masses of direct participants. They represent, at the same time, examples of sustained, grassroots cross-conflict dialogue of remarkable intensity, substance and duration - living illustrations of Harold Saunders’ vision of a “A Public Peace Process,” all the more remarkable given present political conditions.

These findings merit recognition and incorporation in future assessments of Middle East peacebuilding; the outcomes of grassroots and civil society initiatives should no longer be conflated with the track record of Track One.

The grassroots and civil society initiatives profiled here have not only survived severe escalation and prolonged stalemate, they have grown and generated positive impact in a hostile environment. Their work is worthy of recognition and study by peace practitioners and scholars focused on other contexts of ongoing conflict.

3. Emergent Strategy - Context and Response: While these initiatives have all grown, the process has rarely resembled the linear progression of arrows and boxes neatly aligned on the average grant application’s logical framework chart. Development has instead been an extended struggle, characterized by learning through practice, trial and error, responding to unexpected challenges and opportunities, and adapting strategy and structure to remain relevant through shifts in the larger social and political context. As evaluation scholar Michael Quinn Patton emphasizes, the crucial factor has not been whether they have stuck to their original template, but their “emergent strategy” – the ability to assess and adapt after the collision of vision with reality.⁶⁹

Macro-events such as the collapse of the peace process, the second intifada, the October 2000 events, and the construction of the Separation Barrier, among others – occasioned sea changes in strategy and structure that often took years to crystallize and yield results. Evaluators and funders would do well to view strategic development as a long-term process, and adopt context-sensitive, developmental, longitudinal approaches to assessment in this and similarly volatile contexts.

4. The Organizational Level – Crisis and Resilience: For all four initiatives, the exogenous shocks of escalating conflict have had internal repercussions, generating turmoil and turnover of leadership and staff. These initiatives reinvented themselves, typically, after episodes of acute, costly and sometimes protracted organizational conflict. Peacebuilding organizations are clearly not immune to conflict – to the contrary, given the nature, contexts and short-term funding cycles of their work, they may be uniquely “at risk” in this regard. Conflictual internal processes undoubtedly influence the external impact sought by funders and practitioners; hence, this is an important frontier for research and practice in the field. The scope and dynamics of this type of organizational conflict are issues that merit scholarly attention; identifying and implementing best practices that contribute to organizational resilience are priorities that deserve funders’ support.

5. Addressing Asymmetry: As indicated above, joint peacebuilding initiatives cannot miraculously “transcend” the social contexts in which they are embedded. In these cases, organizational conflicts and strategic challenges were often connected to asymmetries of culture and power between Israelis and Palestinians and Arab and Jewish citizens in Israel. The good news is that, for all four organizations, this was not news. The leaders of all initiatives articulated keen awareness of structural asymmetry, and each organization has adapted strategy and structure in order to mitigate the effects of asymmetry on programming, public legitimacy and cross-conflict staff relations. This study echoes Gawerc’s 2010 finding, that in this context, explicit organizational strategies for addressing asymmetry, in programming and internal governance, contribute to resilience and long-term sustainability.⁷⁰

6. Engaging Government: All four of the above initiatives defy facile characterization as “insiders” or “outsiders” in terms of their relationship with Israeli and/or Palestinian government institutions. Each has a long record of pointed criticism and often public protest against policies on Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Jewish issues and their specific areas of focus; each has simultaneously sought and often achieved official recognition and cooperation from government institutions, in order to “scale up” successful programs. As FOEME director Gidon Bromberg explained, “I suggest not looking at [government relations] as binary matters, as an either/or situation. The challenge is to find partners, and form significant partnerships with them, and to challenge the state.”⁷¹

Ultimately, the key findings of this report must be these initiatives’ portfolio of practical models and longer-term strategies for grassroots and civil society peacebuilding in a context of unresolved conflict, all field-tested in the “laboratory” of Israeli-Palestinian reality. Their focal points – the mobilization of bereavement in conflict, the structure and content of education about “the other,” environmental interdependence, policing in a divided society – are issues present in myriad global conflict situations. Their strategic and programmatic insights should be equally salient for the broader peacebuilding field, in terms of “scaling up” successful programs, combining official, civil society and grassroots components to work “across the tracks,” and productively engaging with lightning rod controversies of identity and narrative in dialogical and educational settings.

In today’s world, there are multiple conflicts in which in which macro-level resolution remains an uncertain prospect, and reconciliation a long-term aspiration. The initiatives profiled here testify to the meaningful work that determined peacebuilders can do, even in ostensibly intractable conditions.

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41. See Jonathan Lis, "Revised 'Nakba Bill' to be Submitted Despite Knesset Legal Adviser's Objection," *Haaretz*, June 18, 2012.

42. Khaled Abu Toameh, " Hamas Opposes Holocaust Study at UNRWA Schools," *Jerusalem Post*, October 17, 2012; " Hamas Blasts Palestinian Authority Official's Visit to Auschwitz," Associated Press, August 2, 2012; Fuad Abu Hajla, "They Are Enemies," *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, May 27, 2013. For an example of acknowledgment, see Knesset member Ahmad Tibi's January 2010 speech - Jonathan Lis, "Arab MK Slams Holocaust Denial, Wins Praise from Jewish Colleagues," *Haaretz*, January 27, 2010.

43. Other organizations have undertaken substantial dual-narrative educational projects, most prominently the Peace Research Institute of the Middle East (PRIME), which has published dual-narrative history textbooks, and Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam, which has its own bilingual integrated primary school. Hand-in-Hand is the largest such endeavor, however, and unique in its observance of the Israeli and Palestinian "national days" within an official Ministry of Education setting. See Sami Adwan, Dan Bar-On and Eyal Naveh (eds.), *Side-by-Side: Parallel Histories of Israel and Palestine* (New York: The New Press, 2012); also Ned Lazarus, "Making Peace with the Duel of Narratives: Dual-Narrative Texts for Teaching the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Israel Studies Forum* 23 (1): 2008, 107-124.

44. Caitlin Donnelly and Joanne Hughes, "Contact, Culture and Context: Evidence from Mixed Faith Schools in Ireland and Israel," *Comparative Education* 42 (4): 2006, 493-516; Merav Ben-Nun, "The 3Rs of integration: respect, recognition and reconciliation; concepts and practices of integrated schools in Israel and Northern Ireland," *Journal of Peace Education* 10 (1): 2013, 1-20.

45. Inas Deeb, Gili Segall, Dana Birnbaum, Adar Ben-Eliyahu, Gil Diesendruck, "Seeing Isn't Believing: The Effect of Intergroup Exposure on Children's Essentialist Beliefs About Ethnic Categories" in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (online, November 2011).

46. Bekerman is, at the same time, dubious of what he describes as the pedagogical reification of Israeli and Palestinian ethno-national identities at HiH; he advocates a critical/deconstructive humanist approach in a number of articles. See Zvi Bekerman, "Identity Versus Peace: Identity Wins," *Harvard Educational Review* 79 (1): Spring 2009.

47. Ilan Peleg and Dov Waxman, *Israel's Palestinians: The Conflict Within* (Cambridge, 2011).

48. See Popper, "Teaching Arabic in Israel."

49. This should not be taken to indicate a preference of authoritarian pedagogy among Arab parents. To the contrary, a study of HiH parents quotes multiple Arab parents extolling the individualized attention and nurturing environment of the integrated schools - however, the parents praise these "progressive" teaching methods as generating superior results: greater confidence and subsequent long-term academic and financial success. See Siham Yahya, Zvi Bekerman, Shifra Sagy and Simon Boag, "When education meets conflict: Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli parental attitudes towards peace-promoting education," *Journal of Peace Education* 9 (3): 2012, 297-320.

50. Talila Neshet and Oz Rosenberg, "Jerusalem Monastery, Jewish-Arab School Defaced in Suspected 'Price Tag' Attack," *Haaretz*, February 7, 2012.

51. Nir Hasson, "Arab 6th-Graders: Passengers on Jerusalem Bus Harassed Us," *Haaretz*, 1.25.2013.

52. In December 2014, the Jerusalem campus suffered a combined graffiti and arson attack that burned the first-grade classroom. This incident mobilized a significant outpouring of public support, including solidarity marches and visits to the school from Israel's President Reuven Rivlin, Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, Education Minister Shay Piron and US Ambassador Dan Shapiro and many community members. See Joe Klein, "Burned Books in the Holy Land," *TIME*, December 4, 2014.

53. Dr. Abu-Ras has since become Co-Director of TAFI.

54. Lieberman made implicit reference to this idea in a 2010 speech before the United Nations General Assembly. See "Bibi Backs Away from Lieberman Plan," *New York Jewish Week*, 9.29.2010. For detail of the phenomenon see Shaul Arieli, Doubi Schwartz and Hadas Tagari, "Injustice and Folly: On the Proposals to Cede Arab Localities from Israel to Palestine," *Florsheimer Policy Studies* 3/48 (2006): http://www.fips.org.il/Site/p_publications/item_en.asp?doc=&iss=&iid=751.

55. o put this claim in proportion, Dichter states that, "parents of 50-100 children are a critical mass."

56. Michelle I. Gawerc, *Prefiguring Peace: Israeli-Palestinian Peacebuilding Partnerships* (New York: Lexington, 2012), 26.

57. Ronit Avni and Julia Bacha (directors), *Encounter Point* (Just Vision: 2006).

58. Aharon Barnea, "The Israeli-Palestinian Bereaved Families' Forum in Light of the Political Situation" (2009), "Whither the Families' Forum?" (2007) - unpublished papers shared with the author.

59. Gawerc, *Prefiguring Peace*, 26.

60. Gawerc, *Prefiguring Peace*.

61. Faraj used the phrase "Palestinians on the shelf" in an interview with the author. Palestinian PCFF member Aziz Abu Sara invokes the same phrase in Gawerc, *Prefiguring Peace*, p. 148.

62. Al-Tariq remains an active NGO engaged in projects and registered with the Palestinian Authority.

63. Palestinian PCFF Deputy Director Ahmad Jaafari coordinates translation, and serves himself as translator for many

such meetings. The translator switches back and forth from Arabic to Hebrew as necessary, and the translation circulates among participants over multi-channel headsets provided by a grant from the Japanese government in 2005.

64. See Bar-Tal, "Societal Beliefs"; Rotberg, *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict*; Lazarus, "Making Peace with the Duel of Narratives," Adwan et al., *Side-by-Side: Parallel Histories*.

65. In 2014, the Forum has initiated a new round of HTHE groups through a grant from the European Union's Partnership for Peace Fund.

66. Kahanoff and Shibly, *Final Evaluation Report*, 6.

67. *Ibid.*

68. See Lazarus, *Field Study: Israel/West Bank/Gaza APS* (USAID: 2014).

69. Michael Quinn Patton, *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use* (New York: Guilford, 2011).

70. Gawerc, *Prefiguring Peace*.

71. See Lazarus, *Field Study: Israel/West Bank/Gaza APS* (USAID: 2014).



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