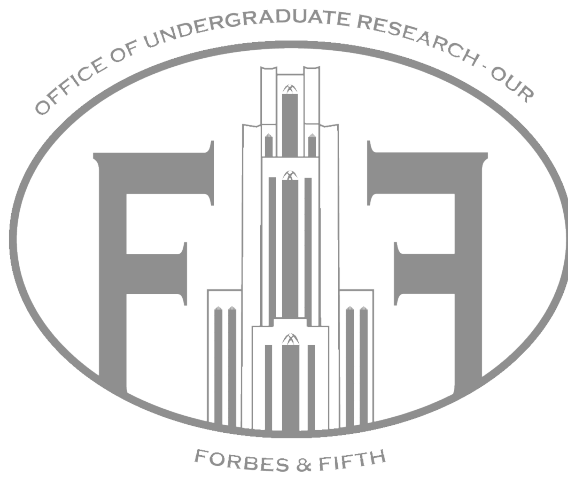


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Identity and the Narrative of Conflict

ABSTRACT:

The ongoing violence between Israelis and Palestinians has become a deeply rooted conflict that many believe is too deeply entrenched in historical discrepancy to be remedied. The history of the two groups has been intertwined since ancient times, and their subsequent development apart has created many tensions. However, through shared historical narratives and through common narratives of war and violence, it is possible to identify and utilize these common experiences to create a common ground. This research project aims to present the historical background of Israelis and Palestinians to uncover some of the discrepancies between how their two histories are written and re-written. Additionally, this project will look at how narratives of war and conflict are created and re-created over time, while lastly looking to see if processes employed by certain organizations can further change these narratives from narratives of violence to narratives of peace and co-existence.

INTRODUCTION:

The research question that this project seeks to address is the following: In historically entrenched conflict between two groups, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, how do respective narratives change over time? What factors influence the creation and re-creation of these narratives? The objective of this analytical paper is to uncover some of the tensions and factors that influence narrative creation among Israelis and Palestinians, and to see if they have changed over time. A related objective is to see if there are existing mechanisms that have been successful in changing the narrative of war and conflict among these two groups.

METHODS:

This project will go through the history of the development of the two groups as separate but intertwined entities. This research was

found primarily through historical texts written by Israeli, Palestinian, and European authors to eliminate as much bias as possible. For the portion of the research concerning competing and complementary narratives, the research was taken from both Israeli and Palestinian sources to maintain a balance between the two in order to make sure that both voices are being shown and analyzed equally.

Lastly, in order to look at possibilities for change using narrative, this project looks at several organizations that have made it their mission to use narratives as a means through which to foster healing and take a closer look at the differences between the two groups and where they stem from. Many of these organizations have offices and headquarters both in Israel and in Palestinian territories, and some have supplemental offices in countries around the world. Many of these organizations support each other in their endeavors and some even work together in terms of resources and joint projects.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:



Figure 1. New York Times, Syria. <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/syria/index.html>. 62 Map of Ottoman Empire: Table 1: “The Ottoman Empire: 1350 to 1918” [Map and Caption.] The Islam Project. Web. 25 Jan 2011.

A look at the history of the Israeli and Palestinian people uncovers many similarities and reveals the root of the subsequent differences between the two groups. It is important to note that both Jews and Arabs are Semitic people with plenty of similarities when it comes to their languages (Hebrew and Arabic), religions, and cultures.¹ They both had periods of political and cultural height as well as downfall, and they both consider the nineteenth century their period of reawakening, which can be seen by the emergence of both Zionism and Arab nationalism.²

Zionism, which has many strands and flavors, is defined in its most basic form as a nationalism that advocates for the creation of a Jewish nation state in the Land of Israel.³ This is particularly important because as an ethnic group that has been driven out and dispersed around the world, Jews have maintained a sense of nationhood to a particular geographic location that they strive to return to. Additionally, it is

important to note that Zionism did not originate in Israel but originated instead in the 1880s in Eastern Europe, where aspects of socialism were combined with much of Zionist theory to emphasize hard work with respect to the land and communitarian living.⁴ The waves of settlers entering the Palestine region throughout the beginning

“It is important to note that Zionism did not originate in Israel but originated instead in the 1880s in Eastern Europe, where aspects of socialism were combined with much of Zionist theory to emphasize hard work with respect to the land and communitarian living.”

of the twentieth century brought with them Zionism as well as a vow to never again live through the tortures they experienced throughout Europe. Parallel to this was the birth of Arab nationalism, which was centered in the largest and most influential cultural centers of the Arab world, namely in Syria and in Egypt.⁵ The definition of Arab nationalism is less complicated than the definition of Zionism, mostly because it emphasizes the cultural achievements of Arab culture and history and calls for increased unity among all Arabs in the world.⁶ Unity is a major focus among the Arabs of the Middle East because of the European colonial influence, mostly from Britain and France, that they feel has warped much of their cultural achievement. Despite its more loose nationalism, Arab nationalism has clearly continued to be a strong unifying force among Arabs since its inception, as can be seen in the creation

of the union between Egypt and Syria in what was known as the United Arab Republic from 1958 through 1961 and in the events of the recent Arab Spring.

As Jewish settlers were flocking to then Palestine, foreign powers began to make demarcations of the future mandates, which they anticipated before the end of World War I due to the Ottoman Empire's inevitable demise. In 1916, France and Great Britain charted the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which marked the beginning of the mandate period in the Middle East. This granted France control over Syria and Lebanon, where they were mostly interested in an outlet to the Mediterranean via Beirut, as well as control over the Christian minorities in the region. Great Britain gained control over Iraq and Transjordan (now modern day Israel), Palestinian territories, and Jordan, because these lands created a gateway from its prized colonial possession – India – to the Mediterranean.⁷ Apart from that, Great Britain did not have any particular desires for Iraq or Transjordan. Soon after Sykes-Picot, the United Kingdom signed the Balfour Agreement of 1917, which stated:

“His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”⁸

This agreement and the premature demarcation of their respective mandates shows that European colonial powers were very much involved in the shaping of the Middle East after World War I and the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire. Although Great Britain’s vow in the Balfour Agreement was not necessarily backed by any kind of explicit government aid, the agreement did show that the country was willing to, in some sense, aid Jews in their Zionist push toward Israel. It is also important to note that Great Britain agrees not to prejudice “the civil and religious rights” of the already present populations, but makes no mention of their rights as a political entity.

The Jewish structural presence in the region increased signif-

icantly as migration to Palestine increased in the years leading up to World War II. The first several waves of migration, or *aliyas*, brought mostly peasants land workers from Eastern Europe, but the later *aliyas* brought more modern and less religious Jewish groups from other parts of Europe.⁹ These later groups came in much larger numbers and helped to modernize Zionism from its traditional form to an adjusted form that stressed political unity among Jews the world over, and emphasized political independence as well as an increased interest in military security. With the influx of more middle class Jews came a steady rise in Jewish infrastructure and political organization, as can be seen by the creation of the following agencies: the Hagana (the Jewish defense force that was established in 1920), the Histradut (the Jewish workers union that was also established in 1920), the Anglo-Palestine Banking Company (established in 1907), the Knesset (the Israeli parliamentary body that was recognized by the British government in 1921), as well as various religious institutions and a variety of political parties that were all officially under the umbrella of the Zionist Organization.¹⁰ The rise of a complex and diverse system of government and resource allocation made the Jewish population in Palestine well equipped to cater to the needs of its people, as well as to carry out its own agenda.

In tandem with the increased sophistication of the Jewish governing body was a rise in Arab organization and mobilization. It is important to note that the British government played a big role in the power structure of the Arabs and Jews since they struck deals with both groups. As mentioned previously, the British government essentially told the Zionists that they would not stand in the way of nation building in Palestine. To the Arabs however, the British played a larger role in that they pitted different Arab elites against each other, thereby keeping the Arab coalition weak and self-interested while clearing the way for the Zionists to further cement their existence in Palestine. The Arab population was also growing during the time of Jewish migration to the region, which gave the Arabs power in numbers, though the division among the elites proved to be crippling to their cause.¹¹ Two families were largely in control over the majority of the Arab population in Palestine at the time: the Husayni family and the Nashashibi family. Initially, the British backed the Husayni family as the primary representatives of the Arabs in Palestine and struck a deal to give the heads of the family legiti-

mate government control after the Ottoman Empire was to be divided into mandates. However, after the British blamed the Husayni clan for several Arab uprisings the British switched their allegiance to the Nashashibi clan, further deepening the rivalry between the two families and dividing the power structure.¹²

In addition to these issues at the top of the power structure, there were several key issues that did not help the mobilization of the Arab people in response to the increased Jewish presence. Firstly, worldwide economic recession coupled with a lack of modernization resulted in increasingly rising unemployment rates not only among Arabs, but among the Jewish population as well. However, the Arab population did not benefit from the kind of international capital flow that the Zionists benefited from, so the Arabs were significantly weaker financially.¹³ The Arab elites were not as interested in creating cross-class coalitions within their society to further strengthen their ability to combat British and Jewish pressure.¹⁴ The elites maintained a distance from the poorer, less-educated sections of the population, which created an Arab population that suffered from a divided and disconnected elite.

These existing dividing factors created an environment of serious tension after the end of the World War II. Diplomatic activity resumed almost immediately after the war, possibly nudged along by the increased amount of terrorist activities on both sides aimed at each other and the British government.¹⁵ Failure on the part of the British government to come up with a solution led to the taking over of the peace process by the United Nations, the new successor to the League of Nations. The majority proposal contained several provisions: 1) Palestine would be divided into three regions, one for each group, with Jerusalem under permanent trusteeship; 2) a geopolitical drawing of the map where the provinces snaked through each other; and 3) a suggestion that the two states establish an economic union via treaty that would be signed by both parties.¹⁶ The Arabs rejected this proposal, on the grounds that they had the same right to their historical homeland, if not more of one, than the Jews who under the proposal would be allocated 56% of the territory.¹⁷ They also claimed “that the Western world was seeking to salve its conscience for the atrocities of the war and was paying its own debt to the Jewish people with someone else’s land.”¹⁸ The Zionists, on the other hand, agreed to this proposal, which was put into effect in May

1948 when the British officially let go of their mandate on the region. Violence broke out almost immediately with the Palestinians being aided by armies from Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, but it ended almost as quickly as it started in 1949 when the combined Arab armies were defeated by the relatively advanced Israeli armies.¹⁹ The newly created Israeli state signed armistice agreements with its Arab neighbors and lay official claim to the lands it gained during the war, thereby acquiring more land than was initially granted to Israel during the UN partition.²⁰

It goes without saying that the Palestinians were deeply angered by the results of the 1948 war, especially since their army coalition was comprised of several national armies that were all defeated by the newly formed army of the Israeli state. Henceforth, Israel naturally believed that it was in danger from all sides, and many historians have found evidence that Israel was planning on conducting an attack on Syria in

“The [1967] war was over in a grand total of six days, which led the Israelis to refer to the war as the Six Day War; Arabs call it the June War, so as not to draw attention to the rapidity of the loss.”

1967, which was confirmed by faulty intelligence from the Soviet Union.²¹ Gamal Nasser, the Arab nationalist leader of Egypt at the time, saw this as an imminent threat to its historical ally, and decided to block Israeli shipping from the Strait of Tiran and boost

Egyptian military presence in Sinai.²² This military preemption resulted in the Israeli army’s attack on Egypt, and its subsequent attacks on Syria and Jordan. The war was over in a grand total of six days, which led the Israelis to refer to the war as the Six Day War; Arabs call it the June War, so as not to draw attention to the rapidity of the loss. The important aspect of this war was less its speed but more so the vast amount of the land that the Israeli government acquired afterward: all of Sinai, the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights.²³

Once again, the Arab combined forces were not organized enough to effectively combat the Israeli army. As observed by the careful planning and coordination of the attacks on Israel by Egypt and Syria in the Yom Kippur War of 1973 (called the Ramadan War by the Arabs), the Arab nations had learned their lesson. Not only was there a significantly increased effort in planning, but “Arab fortunes were significantly

enhanced by the failure of Israeli intelligence to give advance warning and, in some instances, by the complacency and inadequate organization that characterized Israel's forward bases."²⁴ Israel lost land both in the Golan Heights and in the Sinai Peninsula, which were a great source of pride for the two countries and a source of embarrassment for the highly regarded Israeli army.²⁵ These events show that Palestine and its neighboring Arab countries were becoming more organized, but they were also becoming more coordinated with increased levels of communication and planning. Another source of this increased strength is the rise of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which was founded in 1964 but only gained serious strength in the 1960s and gained legitimacy after the success of the 1973 War.²⁶ The rise of an organized governing body on the Palestinian end served to boost the later peace processes.

Although the rise of the PLO was seen as an institutional and structural asset for the relationship between the Palestinian and Israeli governments, terrorist attacks from both sides continued to increase throughout the 1980s.²⁷ With the election of Yitzhak Rabin as Israel's prime minister in 1992, the climate for mediation changed. Soon after his election, Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat began exchanging correspondence and moved toward the Oslo Accord peace process in 1993.²⁸ This first set of accords contained many provisions, most important of which was a declaration to put an end to the years of violence and conflict: an interim government period through which the Palestinians will eventually establish a legitimate governing body presence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and there will be democratic elections in Palestine.²⁹ The Declaration of Principles contains details about the mechanisms for these provisions; for example, the declaration defines what the interim agreement will entail and which institutional bodies will be created in order to maintain peace and prosperity for both groups. The issue with this interim agreement is that the details were not outlined sufficiently, with no timeline or third party to ensure that the process was in fact progressing.³⁰ Therefore, during the Camp David summit in 2000, there were many issues that needed to be addressed, notably how to in fact create a mechanism through which a two-state solution can be actualized. Israeli's new Prime Minister Ehud Barak decided that the Israeli government would present the PLO and Arafat with an all or

nothing approach: either accept the Israeli proposal concerning the disputed territories, increasing settlement programs, Jerusalem, and detainment of prisoners of war or there is no agreement.³¹ This all or nothing approach to peace created an adversarial environment in which sustainable peace was unlikely.

Since the failure of these last peace negotiations, there have been two major intifadas, or uprisings, that were initiated by the Palestinians against Israelis. The First Intifada began in 1987 and ended in 1993, while the Second Intifada, also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, lasted from 2000 through 2005.³² Both of these intifadas were long, drawn out periods of violence that resulted in significant loss of life on both sides, with larger losses reported from the Palestinians. The number of reported casualties differs on both sides, with the Palestinian reports often being three times as large as the Israeli numbers.³³

NARRATIVES:

In creating conflicted and intertwined narratives, both sides have created a collective memory that has transformed over time to become more rigid in its differences. After all, “the narrative of past events... not only undergoes major revisions to suit present day needs but is often invented years after the events have actually taken place.”³⁴ The creation of these narratives in retrospect provides room for the revisionists to create what they wish, and in turn what may benefit them the most. This layering of historical fact, personal stories, and stories that have been passed around through generations and across geographical areas transform into “historical memories the longer the conflict lasts...they exert a powerful force in shaping present-day attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors.”³⁵ Not only does this layering distort the truth, but in layering over historical facts that in some cases portray one group more negatively than the other and vice versa, the constant creation of this collective memory pool ends up being a method of self-justification, self-glorification, and self-praise.³⁶ It is often much easier to forget the atrocities that one’s own group has placed on another

“In creating conflicted and intertwined narratives, both sides have created a collective memory that has transformed over time to become more rigid in its differences.”

and boost the ego of the collective memory by making one's own group the historical victim.

There are several points of tension in the narratives of Palestinians and Israelis which this research seeks to uncover. These tensions concern who started the ongoing conflict, who prolonged the violence, whether the violence is considered war or ethnic cleansing, and who halted the precarious peace process. Most historians accept that the conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis began just prior to the 1948 war, shortly after the UN General Assembly Partition plan was revealed to divide Palestine into two regions for the two respective groups. The Palestinians rejected this plan, so historians attribute this first rejection of a two-state solution as the beginning of the conflict, for which the Arabs are blamed for.³⁷ However, it is important to look more closely at the events of November 30, 1947, the day after the UN decision was announced. On that day, there were Palestinian attacks on buses containing Israeli civilians, which many saw as a clear act of violence by one group on another. It is important to note:

“Israeli narrative presents the perpetrators who opened fire on the two buses as one criminal group. It is therefore extremely telling to notice that the Israelis, who had a network of Arab collaborators during the 1948 war, do not provide any information about the gang supposedly responsible for the start of the war that cost the lives of 6,000 Israelis and tens of thousands of Arabs.”³⁸

Israeli military intelligence has a reputation around the world for being highly sophisticated, so it is only natural that they would have obtained more complex information than what was released to the public. And it is not just Arab historians that believe that there was more to the attacks than what the Israeli government released. Several Israeli historians believe that the Arab uprising on November 30 was just a response to the Jewish attacks on Palestinians that occurred before the Partition was even announced.³⁹

These historical details are not always written in history books, however, and their omission skews history and actual events for the benefit of the victor. In the decade prior to the war of 1948, Hebrew textbooks hardly mentioned or explained the history of the neighbor-

ing Arabs, let alone of their culture, religion, or traditions. “The Arab language was taught, but with little emphasis” and there were no youth field trips into the country side where the majority of the Palestinian population lived.⁴⁰ The minimal interaction and limited cross-education between the two groups resulted in an environment where the two groups developed separately and unaware of each other’s presence in a sense. As Shapira writes, “before the 1948 war, Arabs played a marginal role in the public eye, ‘not hated, not loved, not taken into consideration- part of the landscape.’”⁴¹ This relative unawareness of the other group made for an environment where, in large, there was little interaction between the two, and the cases where relationships were forged across communities were limited.

Another serious point of tension among Jews and Arabs concerns which let the violence continue and who prolonged it. Clearly Jewish historians, of which there are more of, point to the Palestinians as the main perpetrators of the increase in violence after the 1948 war and the subsequent partition. These historians claim that organized groups of Palestinians systematically targeted Jewish civilians in blatant acts of violence due to their ethnic makeup. However, other historians and officials have come to different conclusions about the perpetrators of the violence immediately after 1948. For example, Sir Alan Cunningham who was the British Commissioner for Palestine at the time came to the conclusion that the outbreaks from the Arab camp were actually just a response to the partition and not targeted at Jews.⁴² Additionally, his report stated that in their protests, the Palestinians used sticks and stones, and it was the Jewish response to these protests that began the use of firearms.⁴³ The Arab elite at the time wholeheartedly supported the protestors because they too did not support partition; however, they and the Mufti (Islamic religious and legal authority) in particular were not in favor of such violent outbreaks.⁴⁴

A major dispute between the two sides regards the definition of the ongoing conflict: whether it can be considered a war or an ethnic cleansing. As the historical background shows, the Israeli narrative is dominated by the idea that the nation of Israel was attacked first and that the Israeli Defense Forces were acting in self-defense and in the defense of Israeli citizens. On the other hand, the Arab narrative focuses instead on the Israeli settlement programs that systematically cleared Palestin-

ian villages to make way for housing for Israeli citizens, which they consider a form of ethnic cleansing. Also, the Arab narrative “rejects Israeli allegations that Arab leaders ordered Palestinians to evacuate their villages, even if, in some cases, residues of this myth remain in popular discourse.”⁴⁵ These allegations have maintained their primacy in popular discourse on both sides because of the prevalence of Israeli-sponsored Arab language radio, which was a form of propaganda, intended to reshape how the Palestinian population felt toward the Israeli state.⁴⁶ The settlement programs are an issue of serious contention between the two groups as well as at an international level, because it is questionable whether or not the Israeli government is initiating these programs in an entirely legal manner. Oftentimes, the courts will condemn the settlement initiatives but either no further action is taken or Palestinian land is simply destroyed, as portrayed in the documentary titled “Five Broken Cameras.” If the settlement programs are indeed to be considered a method of ethnic cleansing, international human rights violations may also be considered as a form of violence against the Palestinian people.

Moreover, there is a discrepancy among Israelis and Palestinians regarding who is to blame for the failure of the peace process. Historically, several Arab leaders have come forward to negotiate with the Israeli government. Arafat aside, King Abdullah of Transjordan engaged in secret talks with notable Zionist leaders in 1949 to come up with a resolution for peace between Transjordan and Israel.⁴⁷ Even more interesting is that when the king understood that these negotiations were not leading to a viable solution, he proposed a nonaggression pact between Transjordan and Israel that would last five years.⁴⁸ Historians and analysts that claim that the Arabs have never been initiators of peace or negotiation are therefore not correct. Moreover, the Palestinian concerns about UN Resolution 242, which was adopted by the UN Security Council in November 1967 and states that the Israeli Defense Forces must withdraw from occupied territories gained in the 1967 War as well as forego all claims for future territory gain, were about upholding the UN Resolution in order to subsequently meet at a negotiation table. The Palestinians wanted what they were granted by an international institution, which they saw as the first step toward a peace process and their recognition of the state of Israel.⁴⁹ The state of Israel also accepted the

UN Resolution 242, but they believed that peace and recognition should come before withdrawal, which they contended did not mean to pre-war borders.⁵⁰ The most recent failed peace processes serve as a recurrent theme in these failed negotiations.

MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE:

Historical background and an analysis of the constantly changing and evolving narratives between Israelis and Palestinians leaves us with the same questions as before: How can this violence and conflict be stopped? This research has focused on presenting the current state of affairs and how it got to this point, but this information is virtually useless unless it is put in action. This analysis will now focus on several international organizations that use various tools to bridge the gap between Israelis and Palestinians to forge peaceful relations on a grassroots level.

The Parents Circle Families Forum

Of the plethora of organizations surveyed, The Parents Circle Families Forum is perhaps the best organized. Begun in 1995 by several bereaved family members who had lost loved ones due to the prolonged conflict, the organization is a joint enterprise by Palestinian and Israeli families who conduct bereavement circles and share stories of war and conflict and loss. Although the circle was begun in Israel, the chapter quickly extended to Gaza in 1998, but this connection has since unfortunately been terminated since the Al Aqsa Intifada began in 2000. Since then, the PCFF has instead focused on forging ties with Palestinian families in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, with emphasis on maintaining an evenly-mixed staff and two working offices, one in El'ram near Jerusalem and one in Ramat Ef'al, Tel Aviv. According to their mission statement, the organization has no position on the conflict situation, but "most of its members agree that the solution must be based on free negotiations between the leadership of both sides to ensure basic human rights, the establishment of two states for two peoples, and the signing of a peace treaty."⁵¹

The main projects of this organization involve facilitated dialogue between students and bereaved family members where stories of

their family histories are recounted and historical facts are discussed. These dialogue groups target specific sections of Israeli and Palestinian society like undergraduate and graduate students from various univer-

“All of [The Parents Circle Families Forum’s] dialogue groups focus on common narratives and common experiences on both sides of enemy lines to build common ground and understanding.”

sities in Israel, Israeli and Palestinian women, and bereaved families in general. All of these dialogue groups focus on common narratives and common experiences on both sides of enemy lines to build common ground and understanding. Perhaps what is most striking

about the organization is that it publishes people’s written stories on its website, stories which range from personal family histories to tragic accounts of personal loss and suffering. Some of those that have lost loved ones lost them in direct combat, while others lost loved ones in events as random and shocking as sniper attacks and leftover military weaponry that detonated after being touched. After reading several of these stories, it becomes painfully obvious that the reader soon forgets the nationality of the author because the suffering is the same.

Interfaith Encounter Association

The Interfaith Encounter Association is yet another organization that attempts to bridge the gap between Israelis and Palestinians, but this organization takes on the reconciliation process from a religious standpoint. Although many believe that religion is not the root of the problem between the two groups, religion can be used as a way to bring peoples of faith together. The IEA was established in Israel in the late 1950s, and although it has been functioning for a longer period of time, the organization has only reached a small group of individuals, perhaps due to its faith-based outlook. That being said, the IEA has an extensive network of similarly faith-based organizations around the world with whom it collaborates with on various projects. It is notable that this organization has three offices: one in Jerusalem, one in Chicago, and one in Italy; there is no office in the Palestinian territories.

Much of the activities of the IEA are similar to the PCFF in that they also conduct meetings where members of the community come together in dialogue and express their views on the conflict. The IEA

has separate “interfaith encounters” for women and for youth, and they are not limited to just Muslims and Jews but are open to Christians and Druze as well. The organization states that it is apolitical, but on its website it states that their Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue is set up with the “objective to build peace between the two nations on a people-to-people level,”⁵² which may suggest that the organization leans toward a two state solution, but this is just speculation. In addition to these programs, the organization also conducts Cross-Cultural Study Visits where participants travel to historical monuments and places of worship and learn about the culture and religion of the other. In this sense, the IEA uses its interfaith lens to not only promote religious tolerance and understanding, but cultural and historical education.

New Profile: Movement for the Demilitarization of Israeli Society

The last organization profiled for this research project is called New Profile, which focuses on the hyper militarization of Israeli society as the main cause of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. In a short presentation on their website, New Profile discusses the prevalence of militarism in Israeli society, as exemplified by constant visuals of Israeli soldiers in public places in full gear, the presence of military equipment as major monuments in Israeli cities, the existence of programs that bring soldiers into schools as teachers, and the emphasis on war and the military in the Israeli education system. Not only does the education system focus on the military, but society itself is encouraged to support the military by any means necessary because the military is what is keeping Israeli society safe from Arab threats of violence.

New Profile’s main objective is to combat this militarism by focusing on the youth, which it sees as the portion of society that is most affected by this militarism and has the ability to make the most change by refusing to take part in it. The organization focuses on educating youth groups about what life in the army is actually like and discusses the violence that the Israeli army perpetuates on innocent people in the Palestinian territories. As taken from their website,

“The purpose of the youth groups is providing tools for critical thinking, to raise questions related to the everyday political reality, to think about social change, what it means and

where all that [leaves] us?⁵³

Since the organization focuses on revealing the negatives of the Israeli army to Israeli youth, it makes sense that these groups meet in Haifa, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv with facilitators from New Profile. Despite the organization's positive intentions of education and critical thinking, perhaps it would be beneficial to include victims of violence by the Israeli Defense Force to provide insight and first hand perspectives.

FINDINGS:

Although this research project does minimal justice to the complexity of the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians, a few findings are worth mentioning. Firstly, it is important to keep in mind the parallel historical trajectories of the developments of Zionism and Arab nationalism. These two nationalisms clearly continue to play a large role in the politics of the Middle East and the conflict between the two groups, and the fact that they developed during similar times is interesting but difficult to fully assess because there are so many other factors that contribute to the tension. The similarities between the two nationalisms are remarkable, and the differences are more so. Zionism is a foreign invention whereas Arab nationalism is not; it did not originate in Palestine, but it is a construct of the Arab world. Zionism emphasizes the importance of a homeland in modern day Israel for the Jews of the world whereas Arab nationalism emphasizes the unity of the Arab people in a cultural union. It can be inferred that Zionism's focus on a homeland and a nation-state is the root of Israel's defense-oriented geopolitical strategy, while the union of all Arabs emphasizes a collective effort to help fellow Arab people in need.

The foreign aspect of Zionism alludes to the primacy of the influence of outsiders on the state of affairs between the two groups, namely that of Great Britain. The secret deals, secret treaties, and the division of each side among lines of interest only benefited Great Britain in maintaining power over its mandate for as long as it could. Moreover, the eventual support of the Zionist cause created a situation where the Zionists had a large structural and financial advantage over the Arabs,

which led to such drastic military and territorial defeats. These defeats and divisions among the Palestinians made the peace process particularly difficult on their end due to the lack of leverage that they had, even when they were willing to negotiate a settlement. The Palestinians have attempted to combat, both violently and peacefully, the loss of territory both in past wars and in recent settlement programs through the peace process, but Israel's institutional advantage and its sheer amount of resources makes a negotiated settlement difficult to attain.

The history of narrative creation and re-creation among the two groups shows that revisionist history-making is a significant source of tension and conflict.

The constant layering of historical fact, historical fiction, and personal stories create a collective memory that is fraught with concrete details and myths that further perpetuate the divisions between Israelis and Palestinians. What makes this even more complex is that the constant layering and revision happens separately within both groups so that the competing narratives are constantly changing and in flux. To combat this constant process, it is imperative to bridge the gap between the two narratives by putting them in conversation with each other.

The organizations that were analyzed in this research project (PCFF, IEA, and New Profile), are all similar in that they stress education and dialogue as a means through which to achieve reconciliation and peace. None of these organizations specifically outline a political agenda, although coexistence is a major tenet of all. Only one of these organizations, PCFF, has two offices in both territories while the rest function in Israel and abroad. New Profile's objective is to educate Israeli youth, so it is logical that they only have a location in Israel, but IEA's objective is interfaith education which can and should be conducted in both territories to ensure a venue for all willing participants. Also, it is difficult to judge the success of these organizations with relation to each other because they are on a very grassroots level and there is not outside evidence, other than what they report, of their success. This makes it difficult to assess which method works best, although the fact

"The constant layering of historical fact, historical fiction, and personal stories create a collective memory that is fraught with concrete details and myths that further perpetuate the divisions between Israelis and Palestinians."

that they all utilize methods of dialogue and education shows that these two mechanisms are seen as primary ways to combat the negatives of revisionist history making.

CONCLUSION:

To address the initial research questions, it is evident that narratives among the Israelis and Palestinians have changed over time, as can be seen by their years of coexistence, the colonial presence of Great Britain and outside powers, the battles and violence, and the failed peace process. All of these historical incidents and their details have been contested and rewritten and therefore internalized differently over time. The study of narrative creation and re-creation shows that the process is ongoing, which gives hope to the idea that dialogue and education can be mechanisms through which narratives can be re-created for the better. The organizations that were analyzed do employ these mechanisms report success, but measuring this success is difficult because of self-reporting and the small-scale nature of their projects. It is likely that their activities are providing positive results on an individual-to-individual basis, or even group-to-group, but whether there has been an overall significant trend in positive inter-group relations since these organizations have become more prevalent is unknown.

Although measuring their success is challenging, it is evident that these organizations are imperative to the study of narratives and to the employment of narrative analysis as a means through which these “enemies” can learn more about each other through dialogue. The lack of significant state action on both sides to proceed with a viable peace process and the lack of state-sponsored peace-building programs shows that there is a need for community agency in creating a culture of peace in the region. Grassroots efforts are known for their small scale and their slow process, but in the absence of a state-sponsored mechanism, it seems that grassroots organizations are, for the time being, the only viable groups that can help promote sustainable peace between the Israeli and Palestinian populations

