
Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security

An Imagined Unity, a Divided Reality: Identity, Perception and Coexistence Among Palestinian Youth Separated by the Green Line

By Casey Davison O'Brien*

Abstract: This paper focuses on the often uneasy and under-explored relationships between Palestinian youth who grow up in contrasting cultural, social, and political spaces across Israel and the West Bank. Their lives are divided by a security barrier, restrictions on movement imposed by the Israeli government, and their contrasting experiences of growing up either within a subjugated indigenous minority inside Israel or under the shadow of the occupation. However, evidence suggests that there are spaces that allow for dialogue and coexistence which can, in certain circumstances, produce tangible shifts in perception and understanding and the desire to forge lasting friendships. This article analyses the lived experience of relationship development between young Palestinian people in Israel and in the West Bank. It concludes that, although opportunities for relationship development are rare, they can allow for the identification of genuine common ground where historic and contemporary splits can be overcome.

Key words: Identity, Perception, Coexistence, Second Intifada, Israel, West Bank.

* Casey Davison O'Brien graduated with Distinction from Coventry University in 2014 with a Master of Arts in Peace and Reconciliation Studies and holds a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations from the University of Sussex. Casey has carried out research in Israel and the West Bank on notions of identity, perception, and coexistence among young Palestinians and their experiences of coming of age during the Second Intifada. Casey has worked for International Crisis Group and as a volunteer Research Manager for Beyond Violence and currently works for Cord – an international peacebuilding organization – as a Technical and Knowledge Management Advisor. Casey plans to study for a PhD in the future.

An Imagined Unity, a Divided Reality: Identity, Perception and Coexistence Among Palestinian Youth Separated by the Green Line

Introduction

The experiences of Palestinians at the time of the *Nakba* are widely understood to have played an important role in shaping their collective identity, both inside Israel and in the West Bank, not only in the immediate aftermath of the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, but also in the 69 years since.¹ Nevertheless, contrasting political, cultural, ideological, and socio-economic realities inside Israel and the West Bank during the same period, informed by experiences of military occupation, nationalism, discrimination, and dispossession, have nurtured competing narratives among Palestinians on either side of the Green Line. While the collective identity and experiences of Palestinians in Israel and in the West Bank are well documented, this paper responds to a gap in research which has left the health and status of contemporary relations between these two groups under-explored.

This article investigates the relationship between 21st-century Palestinian youth from Israel and the West Bank and positions it within the historical contexts created by the founding of the State of Israel (1948), the occupation by Israel of the West Bank (1967), and the Second Intifada (2000-2005). Coexistence as a social good and the rationale behind its desirability will be defined, and an in-depth analysis will be conducted of qualitative research carried out by the author in the West Bank in 2014. That research will be framed within the context of an earlier survey conducted into the formation of social ties between Palestinian youth across the wider region. This paper will illustrate the extent to which evidence exists of young West Bank Palestinian youth's prejudicial attitudes toward their Palestinian peers from inside Israel. It will be argued that, for Palestinian youth inside Israel and in the West Bank, their experience of coming of age in contrasting political and legal environments appears to carry greater consequences for the health of their relationship than the historical context which gives them a collective Palestinian identity. Their contemporary differences, it seems, undermine their ability to recognize all that they may hold in common.

Parallel lives: Palestinian youth in Israel and the West Bank

The collective identity of contemporary Palestinian youth who have grown up in Israel and the West Bank has been influenced by contrasting sets of personal, lived experiences as well as by salient elements of contemporary Palestinian history, specifically the *Nakba* and its consequences.

For Palestinian youth who have grown up in the West Bank, their contemporary points of reference have been heavily informed both by the events of the Second Intifada and by Israel's continued military occupation of this territory. Theirs is a narrative dominated by a profound sense of frustration and despair caused by the extensive, complex, and multilayered network of restrictions placed on them when they move within the West Bank or seek to travel beyond the territory's borders.² Their lack of freedom of movement is a direct consequence of the continued occupation and is made apparent by the ongoing presence of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), an unpredictable and mobile checkpoint infrastructure, and a security barrier first erected in 2002 which now runs the length of the Green Line.³



Kelly asserts that the imposition of a green ID card system for Palestinians, which restricts their freedom of movement to the West Bank and denies them the right to leave in the absence of a special permit, serves to highlight their status as West Bank residents rather than as citizens; it also reinforces their sense of entitlement to the rights afforded to those who are considered to belong to a sovereign State.⁴ Meanwhile, Palestinian youth inside Israel are issued with a blue Israeli ID card which allows them to travel into Jerusalem and overseas in the same ways and with the same freedom as their Jewish-Israeli peers.⁵ For Khalidi, the unpredictable use by the IDF of checkpoints and identity checks across the West Bank fuels a sense of insecurity among Palestinian youth whose national identity is repeatedly being called into question: they are effectively being treated as “suspect almost by definition”.⁶ The ongoing occupation serves as a ubiquitous and tangible reminder for Palestinian youth and their families of their profound sense of loss and dispossession from their own land, which Hammack argues represents a significant pillar of the Palestinian master narrative. Despite the harmful consequences of the occupation for the health of the Palestinian psyche, Hammack’s hypothesis also points to a second pillar, one which is characterized by more empowering sentiments of resistance, resilience, and survival.⁷ The narrative for Palestinian youth who have grown up inside Israel has been heavily informed by their experiences of living as seemingly second-class citizens in a country where the government and society largely perceives the Palestinian minority as an internal threat and enemy.⁸ Israel’s non-Jewish minority represents a significant 20 per cent of the country’s population, and yet systemic discrimination against Palestinian Citizens of Israel (PCI) and the subordination of their civil rights are widespread.⁹ While this non-Jewish minority consists of representatives from the Druze, Palestinian (including Arab), and other communities, this paper will focus solely on the Palestinian element within this larger minority group. Unequal resource allocation and discrimination in the areas of education, employment, and the justice system have lead Hammack to argue that the State of Israel is perceived to be, quite deliberately, endorsing a status quo whereby the country’s Palestinian minority is “guaranteed a lesser social position”.¹⁰

In contemporary Israel, PCI youth are educated separately from their Jewish-Israeli counterparts, while PCI communities live lives that are largely separate from Jewish-Israeli communities. Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis who do work together often do so in environments where Jewish-Israelis are in greater positions of authority than their PCI counterparts.¹¹ Despite the lack of meaningful engagement between PCI and Jewish-Israeli communities, government departments, media, and society in Israel commonly refer to Palestinian citizens of Israel as Arab-Israeli, Israeli-Arab, or Palestinian-Israeli. Hammack argues that these hyphenated forms of identification impose upon PCI communities an obligation to privately and publicly negotiate between their civic responsibilities as citizens of Israel on the one hand and their national or cultural identification as Palestinians on the other.¹² For many male and female PCI youth, this hyphenated form of identity undermines and overshadows the Palestinian nature of their identity.

Smootha argues that the alienation that these communities experience leads individuals to choose one of two paths: either radicalization or accommodation. While radicalization can take forms such as public protest, the alienation experienced by Israel’s Palestinians has elsewhere resulted in the emergence of an accommodation of Palestinian and Israeli forms of collective identity. A number of members of PCI communities in Israel remain committed to the path of radicalization, as framed by Smootha, in light of their ongoing and widespread frustration at the status quo in Israel. However, in parallel, a significant number of PCI communities are broadly committed to striving for equality in terms of their status and rights. They seek full acceptance by Israel of their self-identification either as Arabs or Palestinians, and they work *with* the Israeli State and society rather than *against* it using a broad strategy of acquiescence. Smootha argues that PCI communities are, by and large, now committed to resisting overt, public association with those across the Green Line or inside Israel who are committed to radical approaches to resistance.¹³



Coexistence across the Green Line

This paper will now address the question of the nature of the relationship between PCI communities and West Bank Palestinians, with a particular focus on the post-1967 period. In order that the experiences of coexistence between Palestinians from either side of the Green Line can be effectively critiqued and understood, it is important first to assess the value of coexistence as a concept that carries with it an implication of a desirable social good. If coexistence reflects a commitment to “exist together (in time or place) and to exist in mutual tolerance” and to “interact with a commitment to tolerance, mutual respect, and the agreement to settle conflicts without recourse to violence”, its value in any context where the emergence of conflict is possible can be easily understood.¹⁴ Khaminwa goes beyond this simple definition to assert that coexistence represents a deliberate approach to mitigating the likelihood that social differences – based on class, ethnicity, gender, and other social groupings, for example – will create, escalate, or consolidate conflict.¹⁵ Coser’s response, which also reflects on the works of Charles H. Cooley, suggests that the concepts of conflict and cooperation should in fact be considered as phases of the same process of coexistence.¹⁶ Given that conflict can be considered to be a ubiquitous and everyday part of life and is often expressed in nonviolent ways, an escalation of conflict can be understood to generate a mutual realization not only of the differences but the commonalities that exist between two social groups; in this sense, conflict is a process that can serve to facilitate more inclusive, long-term collaboration and shared actions that can enable social change. When this possibility is considered in relation to Palestinian youth inside Israel and the West Bank, it is important to question the purpose and value of achieving a meaningful and committed form of long-term coexistence for these two groups. The Badil Resource Centre for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights (Badil) argues that the fostering of social ties among Palestinian youth from the West Bank and Israel, in addition to other locations, would allow them to share their perspectives on how best to achieve their common struggle for self-determination. Such experiences of coexistence would, according to Badil, allow Palestinian youth to negotiate between them a position of unity, both in relation to their articulation of a vision for a future Palestinian State and their views on whether this State should or should not only be located only within the borders of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.¹⁷ An important consideration from this perspective is the extent to which the interests, grievances, and future prospects of PCI communities have featured as a significant concern in the context of ongoing negotiations between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah. Al Haj argues that the Oslo Accords failed to respond to the needs and experiences specific to PCI communities, whose members, in recent years, have felt that they have had no place within the wider peace process and are effectively excluded from the Palestinian nationalist movement, which itself is committed to the achievement of a Palestinian State that may or may not accommodate the needs and interests of Palestinians in Israel.¹⁸ Given that there is some doubt concerning the existence of a common vision for the future among Palestinian youth dispersed across the region, it is important to reflect on recent history and on existing experiences of coexistence among Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank which might be used to inspire plans for the future.

Between 1948 and the Six-Day War in 1967, Palestinians on either side of the Green Line were kept entirely separate from one another, and this separation rendered communication between those who obtained a form of citizenship in Israel and those living on land annexed by Jordan in the West Bank almost non-existent.¹⁹ Al Haj asserts that, following Israel’s military occupation of the West Bank and its victory over its neighbours after the Six-Day War, the initial experience of shared encounter between Palestinians separated by the Green Line after an interval of almost 20 years was challenging.²⁰ PCI communities in Israel were disappointed that Egypt, Syria, and Jordan were not able to achieve a military victory over Israel, an outcome that resulted in the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. Meanwhile, as thousands of West Bank Palestinians sought temporary work inside Israel owing to more



plentiful job opportunities and comparatively higher wages there, their willingness to work for a lower wage than PCI workers had a negative impact on the average wage for all Palestinian workers in Israel and created a sense of resentment among PCI labourers.²¹

The most meaningful example of coexistence between Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank between the Six-Day War and the Second Intifada can be found in the approximately 130,000 cross-border marital relationships that were initiated after the opening of the Green Line in 1967.²² In 2003, Israel introduced amendments to the Citizenship and Entry Law that heavily restricted West Bank Palestinians from joining their PCI spouses and securing permits to enter Israel, and this resulted in the separation of many thousands of married couples and their families.²³ Although it was first announced as a temporary measure, this legislation has been renewed at regular intervals in the intervening years.²⁴ In a damning report published in 2004, Amnesty International argued that the Citizenship and Entry Law had a number of damaging consequences: firstly, it served to further institutionalize racial discrimination at the expense of Palestinians in Israel; secondly, it generated widespread fear and anxiety among Palestinian citizens in Israel and residents of Jerusalem whose spouses lived with them illegally; and thirdly, it resulted in these families leaving the communities where they had made their homes.²⁵ Amnesty argued that the legislation represented just one element of a longer-term policy by the State of Israel to restrict its Palestinian population.²⁶

Commerce has also represented an important opportunity for Palestinians to interact across the Green Line. During the 1980s, significant numbers of PCI women from the Galilee visited Jenin where, despite widespread local perceptions that these women flaunted their relative wealth and wore clothing typically associated with Israeli culture, long-term friendships were formed between PCI women and West Bank Palestinian shopkeepers through encounters at local markets.²⁷ In the first years of the Second Intifada, these same Palestinian women inside Israel worked to maintain contact with West Bank Palestinian businesses which had lost their PCI customers due to the conflict, speaking on the telephone, and sending packages of money, food, and clothing to West Bank families. Since the period of the Second Intifada, Israeli law has explicitly prohibited the entry of citizens of Israel – both Jewish and otherwise – into the West Bank as civilians.²⁸ Despite these travel restrictions, PCI individuals and families continue to travel into the West Bank on a regular basis for brief family visits and shopping trips. However, over the past 15 years, the frequency of these visits has dropped. Levels of interrogation, searches, and ID checks at border crossings such as the crossing at Jalameh in the north of the West Bank fluctuate unpredictably and deter visitors while reducing opportunities for both informal and more meaningful encounters between PCI visitors and local West Bank Palestinians.²⁹

Perceptions about social ties and the lived experience of coexistence

There is a fundamental shortage of opportunities for Palestinian youth inside Israel and in the West Bank to build and sustain meaningful relationships with one another as friends, colleagues, or even as married couples.³⁰ It is clear that a combination of strict border controls, travel permits, and work permits has resulted in relatively few Palestinian youth crossing the Green Line. Given the relative scarcity of analysis regarding the condition and health of relationships and the challenges of coexistence between Palestinian youth in Israel and the West Bank, I took the decision to engage in a period of qualitative, primary, field-based research in May 2014. The research involved me asking a fixed set of 10 qualitative questions during the course of individual and group interviews, and the aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of Palestinian youth in relation to their lived experiences in the specific locations where they were growing up. The interviewees were questioned on topics that related both to their perceptions of Palestinian youth from the side of the Green Line opposite to where they grew up and to their experiences of interacting with them.

A university was chosen as the most appropriate location in which to approach potential research candidates because it offered access to educated and intellectually engaged youth.



As institutions intended to foster “the process of national integration of the Palestinian people”, the university environment appeared highly appropriate.³¹ The Arab American University of Jenin (AAUJ) was selected as the location for the majority of the field-based research. The university attracts 2,700 Palestinian students from Israel, more than a quarter of the entire university student body, and so, in proportional terms, it is the West Bank university that has the largest intake of Palestinian students that are normally resident in Israel.³² A total of 13 students from the West Bank and 11 from inside Israel were interviewed; one of the interviews was conducted with a PCI student at the University of Haifa inside Israel; and a gender balance was sought and achieved. The relatively small number of students interviewed meant that the data produced should only be considered indicative as opposed to representative.

In order to be able to draw a useful comparative analysis between this period of research and a larger, more representative data set, the results of this analysis will be framed against the outcomes of a survey published in December 2012 by the Badil Resource Centre for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, an independent, human rights non-profit organization committed to the protection and promotion of the rights of Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons. Based in Bethlehem in the West Bank, the organization develops campaigns and conducts advocacy in relation to the legal and civil rights of Palestinians. The aim of the 2012 study, entitled *One People United: A Deterritorialized Palestinian Identity (Survey of Palestinian Youth on Identity and Social Ties)*,³³ was to generate insight into how Palestinian youth in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jerusalem, Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon self-identify, and the significance that they attach to the fostering of social ties with Palestinian youth who have heritage different from their own. From October 2011 to March 2012, Badil and its partners conducted approximately 600 interviews in each of their seven target areas. The project resulted in the collection of up to 4,000 surveys in total, with each survey response consisting of answers to 33 questions.³⁴ This paper will go on to focus on the fostering of social ties and the significance attributed to it by Palestinian youth interviewed at AAUJ and elsewhere in May 2014 compared to the Palestinian youth surveyed by Badil in December 2012.

Of the PCI youth surveyed by Badil, only 33 per cent stated that they felt it was important to strengthen social ties with their West Bank Palestinian counterparts.³⁵ Meanwhile, 45 per cent of this cohort agreed when they were asked the same question in relation to developing social ties with Palestinians in Jerusalem.³⁶ Among the West Bank Palestinian youth surveyed, close to 37 per cent reported that, from their perspectives, the building of social ties with PCI youth was important, with nearly 27 per cent of respondents claiming that such social ties were extremely important to them; a mere nine per cent of PCI youth shared the same sentiment in relation to their peers in the West Bank.³⁷ Moreover, nearly 40 per cent of the PCI youth surveyed expressed the view that the fostering of social ties with West Bank Palestinian youth is unimportant, a devastating result given that only around eight per cent of West Bank Palestinian youth surveyed felt the same way towards their PCI counterparts.³⁸

How are we to rationalize and reconcile the very different ways in which Palestinian youth in Israel and the West Bank perceive the value of social ties? For Smooha, the answer can be found in the extensive sense of alienation experienced by PCI communities within Israeli society. The almost complete absence of any representation of Palestinian culture and history within symbols of the Israeli State, such as the country’s national anthem and flag, has served to secure the dominance of the Zionist narrative in the teachings of the history of Israel and Palestine to both Jewish and Palestinian youth in Israel.³⁹ Rouhana argues that, due to their struggle to achieve equal status with Jewish-Israelis, Palestinians in Israel – while they maintain the “integrity of their national identity” – are neither fully Israeli nor fully Palestinian and are instead positioned on the margins of society, both in Israel and the West Bank.⁴⁰ It is this sense of alienation that leaves PCI communities deciding between whether to “radicalize” and publicly express their rejection of the Israeli State through public protest and



other means of resistance or “accommodate”, taking every step possible to secure the best position for themselves in Israeli society, possibly at the expense of their connection and association with Palestinians in the West Bank and the wider occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). In this way the radicalization and accommodation dichotomy that PCI communities are confronted with is symptomatic of the fundamental hybridity of their collective consciousness, echoing Hammack’s own hypothesis concerning the hyphenation of the public identification of PCI communities. Arguably, it is the realization among PCI youth that these are their options as a minority in Israel that has led many to disassociate themselves from their peers in the West Bank. The step represents, for many of them, an act of self-preservation and it also indicates PCI youth’s realization that, in order to achieve greater acceptance and equal civic rights inside Israel, they must make clear their refusal to participate in the kinds of strikes and demonstrations that antagonize the Israeli government and lead it to threaten the expulsion of PCI communities to an eventual Palestinian State.⁴¹

For Palestinian youth in the West Bank, their relative eagerness to forge social ties with PCI peers can in part be explained by the fact that they have very little to lose by publicly announcing this interest. In contrast, PCI youth are not able to easily or freely express either their grievances with the State of Israel or their felt need for a clearer institutional structure through which to express their national and cultural identity.⁴² In its survey report, Badil hypothesizes that a significant number of PCI youth feel that it is unimportant to foster social ties with their West Bank Palestinian counterparts because of the relative ease of access to this area of the oPt. However, this argument is premised on the assumption that, when Palestinians in Israel are able to travel to the West Bank, they do indeed do so, and on a sufficiently regular basis for them to come into regular contact with peers with whom they will then be able to forge connections. Badil also assumes that its survey respondents based their responses on current scenarios rather than future, aspirational ones. It assumes, for example, that the PCI youth respondents in this particular context are already in contact with their peers in the West Bank, and that therefore there is no reason for them to aspire to foster *further* social ties with West Bank Palestinian youth over and above those that theoretically already exist. It is unclear whether or not Badil attributes significance to the possibility that when PCI respondents reflected on the importance of fostering social ties with their West Bank counterparts their views might be based on their perception of that social group and its values with respect to their own, irrespective of the level of contact they have actually had with youth in the West Bank.

Gross Stein uses a social psychology approach to argue that processes of social differentiation, categorization, and comparison are widespread in situations in which individuals are prone to group identification, and she notes that these processes risk producing social conflict and the formation of stereotypes and enemy images.⁴³ Even when differentiated groups hold historical, cultural, or social characteristics in common, she argues, rival processes of group identification in contexts of social conflict can easily emerge where such groups are exposed to contrasting social, cultural, political, or economic structures organized on the basis of identity. The State of Israel’s hegemonic narrative about its foundation rests on its conceptualization as a Jewish State and homeland which enables its Jewish-Israeli majority to benefit from full cultural representation and freedom. The country’s indigenous Palestinian minority also seeks validation of its rights to enjoy this kind of cultural representation and freedom and, while these rights are consistently denied, PCI youth nevertheless come to maturity within social, cultural, and political structures which are very much organized on the basis of identity. This generates a commitment among many PCI youth to the pursuit of processes of group identification as a means of both challenging the status quo that they face inside Israel, and forging for themselves a meaningful form of collective identity. This pursuit of a form of group identification in response to the dominance of Israel’s hegemonic narrative has arguably taken place at the expense of opportunities that might otherwise have existed for PCI youth to pursue and nurture forms of group identification shared with their peers in the West Bank.



A significant number of PCI youth feel it is unimportant to foster social ties with Palestinian youth in the West Bank, when they feel a more pressing need to develop their own forms of group identification relative to the collective identity of Jewish-Israelis. This attitude is likely to have arisen because they have only a distant sense of the values and aspirations of West Bank Palestinians as a social group with which they have little experience of interacting, rather than because they already have a good relationship with them that obviates the need to foster further social ties. This hypothesis is supported by the results of a survey conducted by Smootha in 1985 into the frequency of journeys made by Palestinians in Israel into the West Bank; as many as 60 per cent of the surveyed sample explained that they had never travelled to the West Bank.⁴⁴ Given that the period after the Second Intifada has seen Israeli legislation change in a way that makes travel between Israel and the West Bank harder rather than easier than it was when Smootha's survey was conducted, it would be reasonable to argue that just as many, if not more, youth would respond in 2016 by confirming that they have never travelled to the West Bank. Arguably then, those Palestinian youth who consider it important or extremely important to foster social ties with peers in other separate locations – regardless of those locations' accessibility – reflect how closely they see their own futures tied with the future of Palestinian youth in other places within the Middle East. For those surveyed, the reality of the physical separation of Palestinian youth means that there is in fact a great need "to forge social ties in order to nourish this [Palestinian] identity".⁴⁵

The series of interviews I conducted with university students at AAUJ in 2014 provide a means to test some of the findings and assumptions posited by Badil within its survey. They also introduce additional avenues for exploration within the context of the often complex array of perceptions and attitudes toward coexistence held by Palestinian youth from Israel and the West Bank who study together at AAUJ. The results from the research carried out at AAUJ suggest that a slight majority of PCI students choose to attend university in the West Bank for purely pragmatic, academic reasons rather than because they are inspired by a commitment to fostering social relations with their peers in the West Bank. Six of the 11 PCI students interviewed at AAUJ explained that their main reason for coming there to study was because they did not attain the grades in their chosen subjects that would have allowed them to continue their studies inside Israel.⁴⁶ Their reasons for choosing to study in the West Bank were almost purely grounded in their need to complete their higher education, and the opportunity to forge closer connections with their West Bank contemporaries scarcely influenced their decision to study at AAUJ.

Meanwhile, among the 13 West Bank Palestinian students interviewed at AAUJ in 2014, it transpired that their geographic origin played an important factor in shaping their level of willingness to engage in shared encounters with peers from the opposite side of the Green Line. During the course of the research, a prevalent narrative emerged which saw PCI youth who had grown up in villages and towns close to the Green Line, or in the "Arab Triangle" in central Israel, expressing stronger ties with Palestinian collective identity than those who had grown up in larger towns and cities closer to the coast, such as Haifa, Acre, or Jaffa, where Jewish-Israelis and PCI communities live in closer proximity.⁴⁷ This narrative hinges on the assumption that when Palestinian youth grow up in close proximity to Jewish-Israeli communities, and the further they are located from the Green Line, the more prone they are to becoming influenced by Israeli society and culture. Four of the 13 West Bank Palestinian students interviewed at AAUJ spoke openly about this issue alongside three PCI students, with one West Bank student arguing that "Palestinians in Israeli cities forget they are Palestinians sometimes... but those in villages, they are more like traditional Palestinians".⁴⁸ When a PCI student who grew up close to the Green Line near Um el Fahem was interviewed alongside his friend from Jenin, he explained, with reference to Israel's coastal cities, that "culture in my village is not so different from the culture in Jenin... [I]n the cities it's more Jewish Israeli culture".⁴⁹ The interpretation drawn from this period of research at AAUJ was that the more PCI youth are influenced by Israeli society and culture, the less willing some



West Bank Palestinian students are to socialize with them. Meanwhile, when Palestinian students from the West Bank and towns such as Um el Fahem in Israel's Arab Triangle do share encounters, their friendships appear to flourish and allow them to interact effectively in classroom situations and as friends on and off campus. The bonds that they form are at least partly predicated on their mutual sense of appreciation for the level of disassociation they have expressed with mainstream Israeli culture and society in their young lives and on their commitment to the form of quiet conservatism prevalent in Jenin and towns nearby. It appears that the largely negative perceptions that West Bank Palestinian youth hold about their PCI counterparts who have grown up beyond the Arab Triangle and toward Israel's coast have a direct impact on the reality and health of their coexistence. In this way, according to Hammack's analysis, Palestinian youth from the West Bank have manifested a collective delegitimization of the concept of Israeli identity, framing as illegitimate the direct association of many PCI youth with Israeli culture and society.⁵⁰

The students interviewed in 2014 made it clear that considerations of gender and culture also played an important role in the nature of the coexistence of Palestinian youth from either side of the Green Line. According to Kevorkian, the wearing of the hijab by Palestinian women in Jenin and nearby towns and villages is symbolic of women's responsibility to safeguard their sexuality against the interest of male strangers.⁵¹ Growing up inside Israel, young PCI Muslim women face discrimination in response to public expressions of their Islamic faith,⁵² yet the interviews at AAUJ suggest that in Jenin the opposite is true and an expectation prevails that Muslim women will wear the hijab when in public. Three out of the seven female PCI students interviewed at AAUJ explained that, because they dressed less conservatively than many local women in Jenin, they have received negative comments from local men. One young PCI woman explained that she only wore a hijab when in the West Bank and not in Israel out of respect for the local culture but also in recognition of the need to secure her own integration into local society. Two other female Muslim PCI students described the repercussions they faced for having decided not to wear the hijab in either Israel or the West Bank. One student explained that "if we try to go out late sometimes in Jenin, local men start to say stuff... they abuse us with words, not good for girls.... [W]e're scared to go out late".⁵³ The same student added that "when they see us without hijabs... they think we are more like Jewish [women]".⁵⁴

Among the PCI youth interviewed at AAUJ in 2014, many interviewees commented on local assumptions that they come from an affluent background. A 2012 survey which focused on the ways that Palestinian communities inside Israel and those in the West Bank see each other indicated that a popular perspective among West Bank Palestinians is that, in exchange for their relative affluence, PCI communities have chosen to associate their loyalty more assertively with the Israeli State than with Palestinians in the West Bank.⁵⁵ For two PCI students, their concern was that "some West Bank students don't seem to have been educated about the history of the Palestine 1948 people... some people here see us as Jewish".⁵⁶ The experiences of another student reinforced this argument. The student noted that "I get told I'm rich by shopkeepers in Jenin because I'm from '48, but I'm not... [T]hey think we have it easy in Israel".⁵⁷ This last observation reveals an ingrained perception that West Bank Palestinian students, as well as the wider community in Jenin, hold prejudicial attitudes in relation to PCI youth and their communities, concerning their collective identity as well as their social standing and level of economic prosperity. The implication is that PCI youth are perceived, along with their wider communities, to have easily and somewhat seamlessly integrated into Israeli society, when in fact the opposite is true. Meanwhile, another student explained that he had been warned by friends that "West Bank Palestinians are jealous of Arab-Israelis because of their lifestyle", while two separate students commented that "people in Jenin and at AAUJ can tell where we're from because of our clothes, our accent".⁵⁸

Forté's analysis of the experiences of women travelling into the West Bank from the Galilee in the 1990s to shop at markets in Jenin provides a useful context for the situations PCI youth



experience when they travel into the West Bank to continue their educations. PCI students in 2014 were reportedly perceived as having embraced liberal and Western values common in Israel because they wore fashionable clothing popular among Jewish-Israelis and Europeans and at times rejected the use of the hijab (in the case of female PCI students) and more modest, conservative clothing. These moves were considered insensitive and out of step with the more conservative local culture in Jenin, and this placed the students in a similar predicament to that faced by some of the PCI women who visited Jenin in the 1990s.⁵⁹ If PCI youth visiting or studying in the West Bank express themselves in ways that reveal aspects of their identity that bear the hallmarks of Israeli society and culture, they become exposed to the risk of discrimination by West Bank Palestinian peers, in ways that are comparable to the discrimination PCI youth normally experience inside Israel. In order for the complex nature of the collective identity of PCI youth to be broadly accepted and tolerated by their peers in the West Bank, it seems it is necessary for PCI youth to engage in a process of accommodation which resembles but essentially reverses the kind of accommodation process Smootha describes as being at work in Israel. In this sense, then, it seems that PCI youth, whether they are inside Israel or in the West Bank, are involved in a process that requires them to continually readjust their internal and external expressions of collective identity if they are to avoid or at least reduce incidences of discrimination. Their experience of what Hammack calls “double marginality” has had a significant effect on PCI students, and particularly on female students. Their willingness, confidence, and ability to engage meaningfully with West Bank Palestinians both on campus at AAUJ and in Jenin has been influenced by this kind of experience. It is notable, for example, that the three student interviewees who stated that they had not dressed as conservatively as their West Bank Palestinian peers at AAUJ and in Jenin also noted that their level of interest in spending time with West Bank Palestinian students was minimal.

During the course of the interviews, one of the most clearly communicated grievances expressed by West Bank Palestinian youth about their PCI peers was related to the use of Hebrew alongside Arabic by some PCI students at AAUJ when they engaged in conversation with their PCI peers on campus. It transpired that PCI youth have a tendency to interweave Hebrew words into their daily use of Arabic, given their exposure to the Hebrew language when in Israel. The PCI students’ use of Hebrew words at AAUJ was probably an indicator of their habitual use of phrases and language that they are most familiar using with peers inside Israel. Krauss and Chiu argue that, irrespective of what we actually say, our speech – in its dialect and accent in particular – betrays both our geographic origin and socio-economic status.⁶⁰ In the context of the interviews at AAUJ, the use of Hebrew by PCI students was revealing of the environment in which they had grown up and the influence of Israeli culture on their lives. A significant majority of the West Bank Palestinian students interviewed appeared somewhat offended due to the perceived insensitivity shown by PCI students in their use of Hebrew while in the West Bank, a factor that was serving to drive a wedge between these PCI and West Bank Palestinian youth.⁶¹

The attitudes and perceptions of Palestinian youth towards their peers inside Israel are clearly shaped by the military occupation of the West Bank. Gross Stein’s application of social psychology theory offers significant insights that help to explain the impact of contrasting environmental factors on youth’s sense of identity and their perceptions of their own groups and of other Palestinian youth. It holds therefore that in practical terms, a process of de-categorization of one social group by another initially requires the re-framing of a group member on the basis of individual, rather than social group characteristics. This represents a necessary precursor to the members of prescribed social groups – whether from the West Bank and Israel or elsewhere – being positioned to engage in meaningful dialogue that might allow them to identify common ground and to establish a platform from which positive relationships can be established, based on values of mutual respect, tolerance, and empathy. The de-categorization of Palestinian youth, would, in this context, represent an important first



step in reconciling the differences between PCI and West Bank Palestinian youth, irrespective of their use of Hebrew or their decision to wear clothing considered fashionable among Jewish-Israeli peers.

Although the evidence suggests that coexistence between PCI and West Bank Palestinian youth at AAUJ is riddled with experiences of marginalization and categorization on the basis of cultural expression, a small group of students interviewed at the university (four out of 13 West Bank Palestinian students and one PCI student from 11) reached a consensus on the broad notion that, regardless of where they are from, they considered each student at AAUJ to be Palestinian. They identified this element of their collective identity, alongside the conceptualization of Israel as the common enemy to overcome, as a means of facilitating a sense of unity and common ground. One West Bank Palestinian student explained that “students from Palestine 1948 are happier in the West Bank, because they are among Palestinians and where they belong – we feel better too because we are meeting our Palestinian brothers and sisters from different areas too”.⁶² Moreover, as many as 13 out of 24 of the students interviewed at AAUJ openly spoke of having friends there from the opposite side of the Green Line to their own. Only a small number of students felt inclined to speak to the merits of coexistence in the context of their comments regarding the importance of facilitating unity and common ground. Far more students seemed happy to refer more generally to their experiences of friendship with their peers from across the Green Line, perhaps indicating that these friendships were considered as pleasant short-term arrangements rather than as the first steps toward longer-term interaction and relationship development. One student from near Um el Fahem explained that, for West Bank Palestinian students, “once they get to know us, and realize we’re not as bad as they thought, it gets easier.... Their attitudes change”.⁶³ As cited in Hammack’s “Narrative and the Politics of Identity”, Allport’s Contact Theory suggests that contact between individuals who belong to contrasting social groups can play a transformative role in situations of conflict that are defined by physical segregation and can contribute toward a mutual reduction in the prejudices that shape people’s perceptions of each other.⁶⁴ Allport argues that this contact produces a process of “de-categorisation and personalisation” whereby face-to-face interaction with the other for the first time leads to personal acquaintances being developed; common needs, grievances, and interests being realized; and the gradual disconfirmation of prejudices.⁶⁵ Grievances and negative perceptions held by parties to a conflict can be mitigated through the experience of contact which can help to enable the elimination of stereotypes and negative categories.⁶⁶

Conclusion

One of the ongoing effects of the Second Intifada is that travel by Palestinians into Israel has become increasingly restricted; meanwhile, there exists a more loosely administered prohibition on travel by PCI civilians into the West Bank. Given that movement into Israel is more heavily regulated than the journey for PCI youth into the West Bank, universities in the West Bank, such as AAUJ, represent one of the few known spaces where West Bank Palestinian and PCI youth can interact over a meaningful period of time. However, the outcome of Badil’s survey and the research conducted at AAUJ suggest that the restrictions on movement associated with formal citizenship status are less important in informing young Palestinians’ willingness and ability to interact with one another than are their perceptions about collective national and cultural identity. PCI youth study not just at AAUJ, but also at Bir Zeit University near Ramallah, and probably at other universities in the West Bank. However, their time spent at AAUJ yields relatively few case studies that would indicate a meeting of hearts and minds has occurred when West Bank and PCI youth have come together in the classroom. Parallel, justified grievances with the Israeli State expressed by youth from either side of the Green Line would suggest that a high degree of empathy and mutual understanding could be easily achieved between both parties. This is on the understanding that as Palestinian youth suffering the long-term repercussions of the Second Intifada, their



perceived and common enemy is the State of Israel. Instead, for some West Bank Palestinian youth, their sense of frustration at the restrictions imposed on them by Israel's military occupation has transformed into a feeling of resentment which is redirected towards young PCI youth from Israel's coast who they perceive to have benefited materially from their Israeli citizenship. The post-Second Intifada reality of heightened separation between Israel and the West Bank has served to accentuate such feelings of resentment. Many of the West Bank Palestinian youth interviewed seemed to lack insight into and understanding of the challenges and discrimination faced by their PCI peers in Israel and subscribed instead to a victimhood narrative informed by their own experiences of Israeli occupation and IDF incursions.

PCI youth seem to have a broad understanding that their peers in the West Bank have suffered as a result of the Second Intifada and continued occupation. However, the alien environment in which PCI youth find themselves when they spend time in the West Bank drives them, and PCI women and those from coastal Israel in particular, to interpret their West Bank Palestinian peers and their communities as embittered, conservative, and prejudiced. There is a telling contradiction between the viewpoints of the West Bank Palestinian youth surveyed by Badil, who are seemingly eager to foster social ties with their peers in Israel, and those interviewed at AAUJ, for whom their frustration with their circumstances obscures their ability to look beyond social categories and to embrace the lived experience of fostering these social ties. For the West Bank Palestinian youth surveyed by Badil, the hypothetical prospect of meeting with people who, on the surface, share national, cultural, ethnic, and social characteristics with you, but who have come of age in a very different political and legal climate to your own, is seen as highly appealing. In practice however, as the research at AAUJ demonstrates, for many West Bank Palestinian youth, the reality of these encounters involves very real, very immediate forms of interaction and coexistence that implicitly require those in attendance to confront a painful history, a challenging present, and an uncertain future.



Notes:

1. Khalidi, "Palestinian Identity", 10.
2. Ibid., 2.
3. OCHA-OPT, "West Bank Barrier", <https://www.ochaopt.org/theme/west-bank-barrier> (Accessed 3 July 2016).
4. Kelly, "Documented Lives", 94-95.
5. Tawil-Souri, "Colored Identity".
6. Khalidi, "Palestinian Identity", 2.
7. Hammack, "Narrative and the Politics of Identity", 160.
8. Smootha, "A Zionist State, a Binational State, and an In-Between Jewish and Democratic State", 214.
9. Badil, "One People United", 7.
10. Hammack, "Narrative and the Politics of Identity", 210.
11. Peleg et al., "Israel's Palestinians: The Conflict Within", 11.
12. Hammack, "Narrative and the Politics of Identity", 212.
13. Smootha, "A Zionist State, a Binational State", 214.
14. Khaminwa, "Coexistence", <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/coexistence> (Accessed 6 July 2016).
15. Ibid.
16. Coser, "The Functions of Social Conflict", 18.
17. Badil, "One People United", 42.
18. Al Haj, "Whither the Green Line", 195.
19. Ibid., 184.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 185.
22. Hadid, "Palestinian Israeli Couples", 12 June 2013, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinian-israeli-couples-tested-by-borders/> (Accessed 8 May 2016).
23. Smootha, "Arab Jewish Relations in Israel", 11.
24. Lis, "Knesset Set to Extend Law", 18 March 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.580463> (Accessed 8 May 2016).
25. Amnesty International, "Torn Apart", 12 July 2004, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/063/2004/en/> (Accessed 3 July 2016).
26. Ibid.
27. Forte, "Shopping in Jenin", 229.
28. COGAT, "FAQ: General Information - How can Israelis enter Judea and Samaria?", <http://www.cogat.idf.il/1068-en/Cogat.aspx> (Accessed 8 May 2016).
29. Cook, "Netanyahu's Substitute for Sovereignty", 15 July 2009, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/netanyahus-substitute-for-sovereignty> (Accessed 8 May 2016).
30. Ragovin, "Across a Troubled Divide", 24 January 2012, <http://now.tufts.edu/articles/across-troubled-palestinian-divide> (Accessed 3 July 2016).
31. Abu-Lughod, "Palestinian Higher Education: National Identity, Liberation, and Globalization", 83.



32. AAUJ Staff Interview, 2014.
33. Badil, "One People United: A Deterritorialized Palestinian Identity", 8.
34. Ibid., 11.
35. Ibid., 19.
36. Ibid., 17.
37. Ibid., 19, 22.
38. Ibid.
39. Hammack, "Narrative and the Politics of Identity", 217.
40. Rouhana, "Outsiders' Identity", 62.
41. Peleg et al., "Israel's Palestinians: The Conflict Within", 10.
42. Khalidi, "Palestinian Identity", 20.
43. Stein, "Image, Identity, and the Resolution of Violent Conflict", 193-194.
44. Al Haj, "Whither the Green Line", 189.
45. Badil, "One People United", 43.
46. AAUJ Student Interview, 2014.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Hammack, "Narrative and the Politics of Identity", 161-173.
51. Kevorkian, "Fear of Sexual Harassment", 172.
52. Skop, "Israeli Teacher says she was Denied Jobs", 18 March 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.567234> (Accessed on 8 May 2016).
53. AAUJ Student Interview, 2014.
54. Ibid.
55. Prusher, "Study: Gap Grows between Israeli Arabs, Palestinians", 9 May 2012, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Study-Gap-grows-between-Israeli-Arabs-Palestinians> (Accessed 8 May 2016).
56. "Palestine 1948 is a term commonly used by a number of Palestinians on either side of the Green Line when referring to the lands upon which Israel was founded (minus the Occupied Palestinian Territory); AAUJ Student Interview 2014.
57. AAUJ Student Interview, 2014.
58. Ibid.
59. Forte, "Shopping in Jenin", 228.
60. Krauss et al., "Language and Social Behaviour", 32.
61. AAUJ Staff Interview, 2014.
62. Ibid.
63. AAUJ Student Interview, 2014.
64. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 1954, cited in Hammack, *Narrative and the Politics of Identity*, 36-37.
65. Hammack, "Narrative and the Politics of Identity", 37.
66. Ibid., 36-37.



References

- AAUJ Staff Interview, 2 interviews by C Davison O'Brien, May 2014.
- AAUJ Student Interview, 24 interviews by C Davison O'Brien, May 2014.
- Abu Lughod, I., "Palestinian Higher Education: National Identity, Liberation, and Globalization", *Boundary 2*, Vol. 27, No 1, 2000, p.75-95.
- Al Haj, M. "Whither the Green Line? Trends in the Orientation of the Palestinians in Israel and the Territories", *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 11, No 11, 2005, p.183-206.
- Allport, G., *The Nature of Prejudice*, 1954, cited in Hammack, P., *Narrative and the Politics of Identity: The Cultural Psychology of Israeli and Palestinian Youth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p.36-37.
- Amnesty International, "Torn Apart", 12 July 2004, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/063/2004/en/> (Accessed 3 July 2016).
- Badil, "One People United": *A Deterritorialized Palestinian Identity (Survey of Palestinian Youth on Identity and Social Ties*, Bethlehem, BADIL, 2012.
- Cook, J., "Netanyahu's Substitute for Sovereignty", 15 July 2009, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/netanyahus-substitute-for-sovereignty> (Accessed 8 May 2016).
- Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), "FAQ", <http://www.cogat.idf.il/1068-en/Cogat.aspx> (Accessed 30 July 2014).
- Coser, L., *The Functions of Social Conflict*, New York, The Free Press, 1956.
- Forte, T., "Shopping in Jenin: Women, Homes and Political Persons in the Galilee", *City and Society*, Vol. 13, No 2, 2001, p.211-243.
- Hammack, P., *Narrative and the Politics of Identity: The Cultural Psychology of Israeli and Palestinian Youth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Kelly, T., "Documented Lives: Fear and the Uncertainties of Law during the Second Palestinian Intifada," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 12, 2006, p.89-107.
- Kevorkian, N. S., "Fear of Sexual Harassment: Palestinian Adolescent Girls in the Intifada", Ebba Augustin (ed.), *Palestinian Women: Identity and Experience*, London, Zed Books, 1993, p.171-179.
- Khalidi, R., *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Khaminwa, A. N., "Coexistence", July 2003, <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/coexistence> (Accessed 27 October 2017).
- Krauss, R. M. and Chiu, C. Y., "Language and Social Behaviour", <http://www.columbia.edu/~rmk7/PDF/HSP.pdf> (Accessed 20 November 2017).
- Lis, J., "Knesset Set to Extend Law Prohibiting Reunification of Palestinian Families in Israel", 18 March 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.580463> (Accessed 8 May 2016).
- OCHA-OPT, "West Bank Barrier", 3 July 2016, <https://www.ochaopt.org/theme/west-bank-barrier> (Accessed 7 October 2017).
- Peleg, I. and Waxman, D., *Israel's Palestinians: The Conflict Within*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Pusher, I. "Study: Gap Grows between Israeli Arabs, Palestinians", 5 September 2012, <http://>



www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Study-Gap-grows-between-Israeli-Arabs-Palestinians
(Accessed 12 August 2014)

- Rouhana, N., "Outsiders' Identity: Are the Realities of 'Inside Palestinians' reconcilable?", *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 4/1, 2002, p.61-70.
- Skop, Y., "Israeli Teacher Says she was Denied Jobs because of her Hijab", 6 January 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/1.567234> (Accessed 8 May 2016).
- Smooha, S., "A Zionist State, a Binational State, and an In-Between Jewish and Democratic State", Shapira, A., Stern, Y. Z. (eds.), *Nationalism and Binationalism: The Perils of Perfect Structures*, Eastbourne, Sussex Academic Press, 2013, p.206-224.
- Stein, J. G., "Image, Identity, and the Resolution of Violent Conflict", Crocker, C. A., Hampson, F. O. and Aall, P. (eds.), *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2001, p.189-208.
- Tawil-Souri, H., "Colored Identity: The Politics and Materiality of ID cards in Palestine/Israel", *Social Text*, Vol. 29, No 2, 2011, p.67-97.