Chapter 10

The Impact of Jewish–Arab Intercultural Encounters and the Discourse of the Holocaust on Mutual Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will focus on two main approaches connected to seeking to advance both Jewish-Arab relations in the State of Israel and between Israelis and Palestinians with emphasis on inter-religious and intercultural dimensions for dialogue and peace education. Based on both qualitative and quantitative assessments, these approaches focus: (1) on the impact of intercultural dialogue encounters between Israelis and Palestinians, and Arabs and Jews within Israel in a number of venues for mutual perception change; and (2) the possibilities of joint Jewish-Arab study of the European Jewish Holocaust and a visit to Holocaust memorial sites in Poland as a vehicle for dialogue and constructive relationship building. Based on both theory and case studies it will be contended that such inter-religious/intercultural encounters along with a focus on the discourse of the Holocaust, can if properly framed help to promote more positive Jewish-Arab mutual perceptions and advance efforts for peace education.

INTRODUCTION

The promotion of inter-group dialogue in Israel particularly between the Jewish and Arab sectors of the society is a vital challenge with the object of reducing social tensions and promoting greater cohesion within Israel today. Peace building between Israelis and Palestinians is an even more difficult effort.

Studies of such efforts have been appearing in the scholarly literature in recent years with different approaches to dialogue reported on (Abu-Nimer, 1999; Bar, 1995; Kelman, 1979; Kriesberg, 2000;

Maoz, 1997). In general though dialogue has revolved around either the dynamics of promoting purely interpersonal acquaintance between Arabs and Jews or has focused directly on hard political questions which have served to sharpen differences between the sides (Maoz, 1997, 2000, 2002, 2004).

This chapter will relate to intercultural and inter-religious motifs as a basis for dialogue and peace education which the two authors have been exploring over time. Both intercultural and inter-religious approaches to dialogue and peace building have been less well known than other forms of Jewish-Arab dialogue, which have tended to focus either on the "power/confrontation" model or that of more mild "co-existence" model heavily rooted in the contact hypothesis to foster positive intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Maoz, 2000).

Indeed while promising, only a minority of efforts have been aimed at promoting relationship building and mutual encounters through exposure to respective cultural narratives which are often religiously based (Abu-Nimer, 2001; Appleby, Bekerman, 2002; Gopin, 2000; Bekerman, 2002; Lederach 1997; Little, 2007; Smock, 2002). These two researchers have previously reported on the efficacy of the culturally oriented, often religiously based, dialogue between both Arabs and Jews within the State of Israel and between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs (Mollov & Lavie, 2001, 2006; Mollov, Schwartz, Steinberg, & Lavie, 2001; Mollov, Lavie, Cheshin, & Springman, 2004).

Furthermore the possibility of joint study of the Holocaust by Arabs and Jews in Israel, have been advanced in a number of efforts over the past years which has also contributed to the endeavor of peace education, insofar as it can also be an avenue towards promoting a "culture of peace" (Salomon & Cairns, 2010).

In this chapter a number of educational case studies will be presented and evaluated which have focused on inter-religious motifs, that have been organized primarily by an important Israeli NGO the Interfaith Encounter Association (IEA); and also either at or under the auspices of Bar-Ilan University, a Jewish Religious University including a joint Jewish-Arab mission to Poland and Jewish Communal and Holocaust sites which emanated from one of the educational case studies that will be described, and which also included inter-religious motifs.

It will be suggested that the intercultural/inter-religious approach to dialogue and peace education have the advantages of advancing both important aspects of interpersonal ties and foster more positive inter-group attitudes, based on the conditions for positive contact, along with discovering commonalities (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969: Rokeach, 1960) in the spirit of the co-existence model; while also addressing the deeper roots of the Arab-Jewish, Israeli/Palestinian conflict that is ultimately based on a clash of conflicting narratives (Garlinkle, 1991; Ross, 2010; Rotberg, 2006; [Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict], in a more constructive and non-confrontational framework (Tange, 2010).

In the next subsection a brief overview of the importance of religion and culture for conflict resolution efforts in larger global perspective will be presented.

The Relevance of Religion and Culture for Conflict Management and Peace Education

In recent years there has been a growing awareness of the importance of religion and culture for conflict management efforts. Literature in the realm of conflict management and political science reflects this growing trend and the vital importance of understanding religious dynamics as underlying both causes of conflict and as a means of bridging such conflict (Albright, 2006; Appleby, 2000; Avruch, 1998; Gopin, 2000, 20002; Fox & Sandler, 2006; LeBaron, 2003; Reitner, 2010; Smock, 2002; Thomas, 2005). Such

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