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Zvi Bekerman and Michalinos Zembylas
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Part I

Introduction and theoretical underpinnings

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1 Introduction

It would be really nice if *conflict* was a "thing" that, given the proper conditions, could be overcome or even erased. It would be even nicer if *peace* was also a "thing" that, given the proper conditions, could be reached. If one looks at what is occasionally suggested in the fields of peace studies and conflict resolution, one might get the impression that indeed peace and conflict are reachable and/or erasable "things." These representations of peace and conflict have certain *consequences* in terms of our (in)ability to envision and enact particular solutions as responses to conflict – not only in society but also in educational settings. Ultimately, it is this that we want to talk about in the present book.

The prime aim of this book is to offer a social and anthropological perspective on the theoretical underpinnings and practical implications of peace education efforts in troubled societies, that is, societies in which there is some form of conflict (armed, political, cultural and so on). This book raises questions about the psychologized grounding of many peace education interventions within a nation-state framework that is taken for granted. It explores how our framing of the "problem" limits our vision for "solutions" to conflict. Central to our analysis are the ways in which notions of identity, memory and reconciliation are entangled and perpetuate or challenge the depth of attachment to essentialist ideas about peace and conflict.

More specifically, we question whether – given the present emphasis that conflict and post-conflict societies put on identity, be this religious, cultural, ethnic, national or other, and/or the ways in which they nourish memories – there is any real possibility for reconciliation efforts to be nurtured. We inquire into the challenges confronted by educational institutions, mostly in the shape of schools and educators/teachers, when trying to negotiate between their understanding of the students' needs, their personal commitments and their commitments to the larger society within which they are asked to educate.

We also consider the many difficulties encountered by teachers when confronting contested issues as these relate to their immediate national

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contexts and learning experiences. Most importantly, we focus on daily classroom practices and events. We show classroom topics being invaded by the wider sociocultural and political context, either unexpectedly or intentionally. We show that teachers – who bear their own internal struggles, concerns and ambivalences – are not always successful in their efforts to overcome these challenges and support open dialogue between children coming from conflicting groups. Yet, we argue that there is a lot we can learn from these unsuccessful efforts. Lastly, we offer some hints at possible openings which, if followed, might help us change the world a little bit.

The purpose of this book

When we started planning for this book we had a rather easy job in mind. We had published many papers in academic journals which we thought that if put together could end up being an interesting volume. We ended up writing a different product, one which tries to overcome constraints of academic writing with its codes and norms, but without giving up on its guiding principles of consistency and systematization. We have used materials published in our academic journal publications, but we have organized them differently and have contextualized them in ways they might become relevant to both academics and practitioners. Having been able to show them successfully refereed, we are trying now to make them somewhat successfully relevant.

We have worked – theorized, researched and lived – in our own countries, Cyprus and Israel. We have worked with each other thinking through our contexts, comparing and trying to learn from each other's research theorizing living experience. We have also individually and as a team worked with scholars in other countries – Northern Ireland, South Africa, Croatia, Australia and more. With them we have also theorized, compared and dialogued. From these experiences and others reported in the multiple places where studies on education and conflict are published, we have learned that, though each of our contexts is special, they all share some universals (with a small "u") in that they all are inhabited by humans who at the very least share a biology fundamental to their progress and development. Our book, then, is not about places. The data come from identifiable places, Israel and Cyprus, but the book is about *issues*. The book is about what gets done in educational settings in countries which suffer from intense conflicts regarding the presence/voicing/telling of historical narratives, the creation and negotiation of identity, and the maintenance of memory. The book is also about how these tellings become intertwined with public mourning and historical

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trauma, and are organized to produce, or not, peaceful coexistence and reconciliation.

We hope the reader will be engaged with the challenging questions with which we struggle in this book: How do hegemonic historical narratives shape perceptions of identity and memory? What can be done pedagogically to weaken the powerful influence of such narratives? What is the potential benefit or harm of emphasizing identity in educational settings? In what ways do students' and teachers' responses to historical trauma via mourning constitute (in)surmountable obstacles to promoting peaceful coexistence and reconciliation? How can teaching contesting narratives, despite the immense complexities, become a productive pedagogical intervention?

In responding to these questions, our principal concern is to establish the nexus among identity, memory, reconciliation and contested narratives, as all of those are evinced within educational practice. What is explored, then, is an understanding of how various manifestations of "identity" and "memory" are produced and reproduced within and through historical narratives in schools, and how those might be experienced by students, teachers and communities and prevent or promote reconciliation and/or forgiveness. Addressing historical narratives in educational settings is both a political and an emotional act that involves endless "landmines" while engaging with reconciliatory ideas and practices. One of the landmines that we confront in this book is how to reconceptualize identity and memory as non-dividing constructs.

Another landmine is how to deal with the multiple ways that historical narratives enter public spaces and educational settings, creating hegemonies that oppose reconciliatory ideas and practices. In reality, reconciliatory ideas and practices often impose tremendous demands on traumatized and mourning communities. However, understanding these demands and finding ways to address them pedagogically are extremely valuable for teachers and schools in troubled societies. Exploring the productive forms of pedagogical engagement with historical narratives aims to dismantle the view of identity and memory as dividing constructs. The purpose of this book, then, is not only to acknowledge the complexities of teaching contested narratives and negotiating identity, but also to highlight productive openings through providing examples of *hopeful* pedagogical interventions with teachers and students.

By providing opportunities to critically analyze contested narratives in classrooms, students and teachers are invited to inhabit renewed learning spaces and form alternative emotional communities. Alternative options, in general, are enabled and invigorated by efforts that do not remain stuck in taken-for-granted assumptions about peace education

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interventions. Although transformations are not always achieved in the examples we offer in this book, it is important to reflect on both the failures and the successes of the efforts that are undertaken. This book, then, does not simply describe the complexities of teaching contested narratives and their intricate relations to identity-building and memoralization substantiated through and sustained by cultural essentialist perspectives; it also shows how under some circumstances these complexities may indeed create opportunities for alternative understandings of identity and memory – understandings that are not bounded in the limitations imposed by the nation state, psychologized perspectives or Western epistemological assumptions. (We return to these important issues in Chapter 2.)

It is now time to introduce the reader to the sociopolitical, historical and educational realities of the settings we come from and in which we have conducted our research. Needless to say, serious introductions to these issues would entail writing a couple of volumes: in the following we offer just the bare essentials to hopefully allow you, the reader, to consider the context as you read our account.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian[1] conflict can be traced to the beginning of the Zionist colonization of Palestine, claimed by Jews as the land of their birthright, towards the end of the nineteenth century. The seemingly intractable conflict resulted from at least two dominant ideological discourses (one Jewish, one Palestinian) on the control of the land and recognition of group sovereignty. Historically the region was never autonomously controlled, having a long history of colonial and imperial rule (Khalidi, 1997; Morris, 1987). Two major historical events prior to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 – the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, which had controlled Palestine for four centuries, and

[1] For political reasons we have chosen to refer to as Palestinians those who are regularly called by the Israeli Jewish hegemony Arab Israelis. We believe this is the term they prefer, or so it is stated by the majority of their leadership. This choice creates some difficulties, for Palestinians are also those who inhabit the conquered (since the war of 1967) territories and the recently created Palestinian Authority. These Palestinians are the ones with whom Israel has sustained an armed conflict since 1967, and these are the ones about whom we do not speak in this book. The bilingual schools from which our Israeli data are taken serve for the most part Palestinian citizens of Israel. These Palestinians clearly see their destiny as strongly connected to that of the Palestinians in the conquered territories and the Palestinian Authority, and politically struggle for the creation of a Palestinian state, but do not see themselves other than as Palestinian citizens of Israel and struggle in Israel for their full (still negated) equal rights. This book deals only with these Palestinians and not with those in the Palestinian Authority.

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the rise of anti-Semitism, culminating in the Holocaust in World War II – serve to position the conflict in its wider international context. The 1948 war, called the "War of Independence" by the Israelis and the "Nakba" (the Catastrophe) by the Palestinians, was the first open military clash between the Zionist and Palestinian nationalist movements. Palestinians in Israel are an indigenous minority who formed the majority in Palestine (two-thirds of the population) until 1947.

Four major wars have erupted since then, in 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982. In 1977 a peace agreement was signed between Israel and Egypt. The intifada outbreaks in 1987 and 2000, organized in the occupied territories under the flag of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), brought about even bloodier events which shattered the optimism for a peaceful solution that emerged after the Oslo agreements between the Israeli government and the PLO in 1993, and it remains to be seen whether the recent disengagement from the Gaza Strip holds any future promises; the 2006 Lebanon War, the recent takeover by Hamas of the Gaza area of the Palestinian Authority and the 2008 attack on Gaza by Israel leave little place for optimism.

The Jewish-Palestinian conflict remains the most potentially explosive of conflicts in Israel, placing the Jewish majority and the Palestinian (primarily Muslim) minority at perpetual odds. The reader should always bear in mind that in this book we are dealing with Palestinians living within the internationally recognized borders of Israel who do not discuss national separation but focus on the struggle for equal rights within the state. Though structurally there is a sharp asymmetry between both communities, in all that relates to the fair distribution of resources, they both maintain beliefs with regard to having a monopoly on objective truth regarding the conflict and the identity of the villain in it, thus undermining possibilities for conflict resolution (Bar-Tal, 1990b, 1998).

Israel, since its inception, and as is clearly stated in its Declaration of Independence, has been committed to full political and social equality for all its citizens, irrespective of their religion or ethnic affiliation. Yet, even the Israeli government agrees that it has not been fully successful in implementing this ideal and has, for the most part, implemented segregationist policies towards its non-Jewish minorities, policies which only relatively recently have begun to be challenged in the courts of justice (Gavison, 2000).

These separatist policies are most visible in residential and educational arrangements which are fully separated for both the Palestinian and the Jewish communities (Rouhana, 1997). Israeli Palestinians, though officially offered full rights as citizens, have chronically suffered as a putatively hostile minority, with little political representation and a debilitated

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social, economic and educational infrastructure (Ghanem, 1998). In general, the Israeli Palestinian population is geographically segregated and institutionally and legally discriminated against (Al-Haj, 1995a; Kretzmer, 1992).

In Palestine under the British mandate (1920–48), which sustained elements of the millet system under Ottoman political rule, education was divided into an Arab, mostly public, sector and a Hebrew, quasi-private, sector. The Hebrew sector was divided into a Zionist secular sector and an ultraorthodox non-Zionist sector. The Zionist branch was further divided into religious and non-religious sectors. During the period prior to the declaration of Israel's independence (1948) and in the period immediately following, the dominant secular Zionist establishment struggled to find ways to integrate the sectorial educational system into a state-sponsored system. These efforts incited a political crisis that came to an end only in 1953 with the adoption of the State Education Law (Zameret, 1997). This law aimed to institute an egalitarian and universal educational system, but ended up replicating old divisions (Zameret, 1997). Today, and still under the dictates of the 1953 law, the educational system in Israel is divided into two main branches: the Palestinian sector (called the Arab sector by the Israeli Jewish officialdom) and the Hebrew sector, with the latter being divided into secular and religious sectors. The ultraorthodox Jews, the Druze, and the kibbutzim[2] have autonomous enclaves. In this sense it can be said that the sociopolitical conflicts are reflected in the Israeli educational system (Sprinzak *et al.*, 2001).

Al-Haj (1996) demonstrates how educational policies are designed to secure Jewish cultural hegemony in line with Israel's self-definition as a Jewish state, while supporting the Zionist ethos among Jewish students and the inferiority of its Palestinian citizens, with the educational system serving as a mechanism of control (Mazawi, 1994). In spite of Israel's declared goals of offering equal opportunity to all its citizens through the educational system, the gap between the Jewish and Palestinian sectors remains. For example, in 1980 the rate at which Palestinian students attended high school was 0.64 the Jewish rate. In 1990 this figure increased to 0.69, and in 2002 the narrowing gap was evident as it reached 0.84 (Shye and Zion, 2003). An improvement is also evident in the rate of children who pass the matriculation examinations. In 1991, 45.4 percent of Palestinian and 67.3 percent of Jewish children earned a matriculation diploma, while in 2001 the figures increased to 59.1 and 69.7 percent respectively (State of Israel, 2002), showing that the gap between

[2] A kibbutz (Hebrew: קבוץ, קיבוץ, lit. "gathering, clustering"; plural kibbutzim) is a collective community in Israel traditionally based on agriculture.

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sectors remained. More recent data show the gap growing, with numbers published by the Ministry of Education showing for 2008 that the rate for Jewish students obtaining matriculation certificates (59.74 percent) is nearly double that of the Palestinian students (31.94 percent) (Jabareen and Agbaria, 2010).

Not only are the school systems segregated, but so too are the curricula. Israel has no official multicultural educational policies. The Jewish curriculum focuses on national Jewish content and Jewish nation-building, and the Palestinian curriculum is sanitized of any national Palestinian content (Rouhana, 1997). While Jewish students are called on to engage in the collective Jewish national enterprise, Palestinian students are called on to accept the definition of Israel as a Jewish democratic state (Al-Haj, 2005; D. Gordon, 2005). They are not allowed to choose freely their own narratives concerning issues related to their cultural and national histories. The narrative of collective Palestinian identity is constructed primarily in response to Zionism and the assertion of Israeli identity itself (Khalidi, 1997). Lastly, it is worth mentioning some features of the Palestinian educational system in Israel which reflect the unique sociocultural background of this population (Abu-Nimer, 1999). Among these is an authoritarian model of student–teacher relationships, a very traditional frontal pedagogical approach and, for teachers, a sense of conflict regarding their loyalty towards their employer, the Ministry of Education, and their loyalty towards their Palestinian community. The security principle traditionally used by Israeli officialdom to restrict teacher appointments, by screening them for their political views, was canceled only in 1994, but it is still unofficially functional today (Kretzmer, 1990; Rouhana and Ghanem, 1998). All in all, the Palestinian educational system in Israel lacks the preferential support given by the government to the Jewish educational system, thus creating an enormous gap and leaving the Palestinian educational system behind.

The data for Israel we refer to in this book are taken from a long-standing ethnographic research effort at the bilingual integrated schools in Israel. Given the political realities of Israel, the idea of creating integrated Jewish-Palestinian education is a daring enterprise. In 1972 Fr. Bruno Hussar founded the first (and still only) intentionally mixed Palestinian-Jewish village in Israel. The aim was to set an example of coexistence in practice for groups living in what has come to be known as an area of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, 1999). The village's name is Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salam (Oasis of Peace) (Feuerverger, 2001). In 1984, three years after the first integrated Protestant-Catholic schools opened their doors in Northern Ireland (McGlynn, 2001), an integrated

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school started functioning in this village in Israel. The local population, even today, is rather small (totaling sixty families). The school was an exotic educational undertaking, serving an unusual mixed community, which never developed into an attempt to influence the wider, almost fully segregated educational system in Israel (Nir and Inbar, 2004). Fifteen years later and with no connection to these previous developments, two friends – a Palestinian (citizen of Israel) and an American Jew (also a citizen of Israel) – started what at that time seemed like an impossible (and, in the eyes of some experts consulted, undesirable) grassroots movement towards the creation of integrated bilingual schools in Israel. This time the objective was to serve the "regular" population and not those people who already had very clear ideological commitments towards cooperation and coexistence, such as the population in Neve Shalom. The two friends' determination brought about the creation of an NGO (at that time called the Center for Bilingual Education in Israel[3]) which became the institutional tool through which the Israeli schools discussed in this study developed.

In 1998 the Center established the first integrated school in Misgav. During this period of relative calm, following expectations of peace upon the signing of the Oslo agreements, perhaps the Jewish community, the minority in this area, sensed the need to strengthen and sustain good relations with the majority Palestinian community. In Misgav the Jewish population reflected rather liberal political inclinations and a sense that practice needs to support ideology. The Palestinian population reflected no less of an ideological commitment. Additionally, however, they had a deep understanding of the failures apparent in the segregated educational system Israel had created (Al-Haj, 1995b) for them, and they wished to provide their children with a better alternative. These became the forces behind what ultimately allowed for the creation of the first integrated school.

The second school opened its doors a year later in Jerusalem. During the first year the school functioned as a section (first and second grades) within the Experimental School, the bastion of liberal progressive education in Jerusalem and a school mostly attended by the children of the large academic community which populates Jerusalem. Within a year, the school moved out. The official reason offered by the committee from the Experimental School was that it believed two experiments (its own and the bilingual integrated project) were too much to be carried by one

[3] In 2003 the CBE changed its official name to "The Center for Arab Jewish Education in Israel," possibly reflecting the need to emphasize the initiative's attempt at educational integration and multiculturalism more than its bilingual goals.

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