

Appendix 9: The Anti-Normalization Discourse in the Context of Israeli-Palestinian Peacebuilding (Walid Salem)

1. Introduction

In the Palestinian context, “normalization” (*tatbie’a* in Arabic) has been defined as “the process of building open and reciprocal relations with Israel in all fields, including the political economic, social, cultural, and educational, legal, and security fields.”¹ Not all Palestinians have the same stance toward normalization, however, and differ even in their willingness to use the word. Some Palestinians say the word *tatbie’a* must not be used because it refers to conducting normal relations with Israel, a current impossibility. Others refuse to use the word because it has bad connotations in the colloquial language, referring to animals.**

The process of normalization is considered to be positive from the point of view of the “normalizers,” because, in their view, it represents the beginning of a process to transform the relationship with Israel from an abnormal one into a normal one that will allow Israel to integrate into the Arab region instead of continuing to look westward and seeking to be part of Europe. Its opponents argue that normalization is a process that Arab countries can have with countries that have not attacked and occupied Arab lands. Israel, however, was built at the expense of the Palestinian people, most of whom were evacuated from their homeland in 1948 by Jewish military groups. Therefore, the opponents ask, how can it be possible to normalize with Israel while it builds its existence at the expense of others, who live either as refugees scattered around the world, under Israeli occupation in West Bank and Gaza Strip, or as unequal citizens within Israel?

For the purpose of this paper, anti-normalization positions will be defined as those positions which do not accept the Other, either as an individual, a group, or a nation. The search for anti-normalization positions will be conducted in both societies, and conclusions regarding

¹Walid Salem “Ishkaliat Muwajahat Attatbie’a Kan’an Magazine, volume 56, September 1994, p 15-20. A Palestinian anti-normalization academic defined normalization to be the process of building an “ordinary (or looking to be ordinary) relationship between two sides who have different powers, in a way that the weaker will be acting on the service of the stronger.” The writer differentiates between “natural” and “ordinary,” stating that the “unnatural” might become ordinary, but it will never become “natural.” The author also turns to the cultural heritage of Great Syria, to show that normalization is a form of domestication, meaning that “the newly emerging behavior will become acceptable by the lord, or the side in power” (Abdel-Sattar Qasim: *Tatbie’a Al-Akadimiyyien*, 2 pages, no date).

what can be done will include suggestions for the two peoples across the divide. However, the paper will begin with an attempt to analyze the different anti-normalization positions within the Arab world in general and within Palestine in particular, to be followed briefly by the issue of normalization within the civil society arena. The paper will then discuss the contradictions within the anti-normalization positions and the social and cultural problems they express, and will end with a discussion of anti-normalization in Israel and the peace movement's strategy regarding this issue.

This paper shows how the anti-normalization discourse sometimes overlaps with, and sometime contradicts the peacebuilding process, especially since an anti-normalization stance does not always mean a rejection of all relations. On the contrary, an anti-normalization position might reject normalcy now, but accept it after the achievement of peace, or it might reject normalcy but accept negotiations (on the official level), or dialogue (on the popular level). The main aim of this paper is to unravel some of this complexity, and to develop some recommendations for the peace movements regarding how to deal with the anti-normalization discourse.

2. Arab anti-normalization positions

The anti-normalization positions in the Arab World fall into four main categories: Islam, Arab Marxism, Arab nationalism, and a mix of different ideological groups who all agree on the importance of resisting so-called "cultural normalization."

The roots of the Islamic anti-normalization position comes from their belief that Palestine is an Islamic waqf (endowment), and that Jews have no rights at all in it. Consequently, Israel's existence is not legitimate, and therefore it is not possible to recognize it.² The stance of Palestinian Islamists is more moderate than this. From the beginning of 1994, the Hamas position was to accept coexistence with Israel without recognition, and without normal relations.³

The Marxist position on normalization is inherited from their anti-imperialist stance; therefore, they speak against normalizing with Israel as a part of their anti-normalization towards Imperialism. This Marxist anti-normalization propaganda was strong in the Arab World during

² For this position, see for instance: Ghassan Hamdan, Attatbe'a: Istratigiet Al-IKhtiraq Assahioni, Al-Aman publishing house, Beirut, 1989.

³ See: Abdel Nasser Asha'er: Amaliet Alsallam-Alfelestiniyyah-Al-esraeliyyah. Center of Palestine Research Studies, Nablus March 1999

the 1970s and 1980s, when they practiced their anti-normalization positions through anti-normalization committees such as the Committee for the Defense of the Arab National Culture in Egypt.⁴ With the collapse of most of the Arab Marxist groups, the Marxist anti-normalization trend has continued in groups of intellectuals who reject normalization within the broader framework of rejecting both social and cultural consumerism. One such intellectual, for example, wrote that “Amina Rashid (an Egyptian anti-normalization Marxist) is defending Palestine because she is defending Egypt. She reads the cultural independence in the curriculum through the way that foreign languages are taught..... The aim of foreign language education is not to read Rousseau Voltaire, Sartre, and Aragon, but the fulfillment of the need of foreign trade agencies, this is for the simple reason that the dominant cultural policy is dictated and initiated by the Market, and not by an authority that unites practically between the language and the daily needs.”⁵ The Marxists’ argument begins with the premise that consumerism is the product of the market economy; this consumerism finds its way into school curricula and all aspects of a citizen’s daily life. To continue with this line of thinking, the Marxists add that consumerism is a product of imperialism, just as Israel is a product of imperialism, and therefore the struggle against consumerism is at the same time against both Israel and imperialism.

The third anti-normalization position is that of the Arab nationalists, whose position towards Israel has passed through two stages. In the first stage, which lasted until the 1970s, the Arab nationalists considered Israel (which they called ‘the Zionist entity’) to be a threat to Arab national unity, because it geographically separated the Arab East from the Arab West. In the 1970s the Arab nationalists divided into two groups differing in their stance towards normalization. The official Arab position was expressed in a readiness to participate in negotiations with Israel through an international peace conference in Geneva as early as 1973. A second position, held by Arab nationalist intellectuals, rejected negotiations with Israel, even if they did not lead to recognizing--and establishing a normal relationship with--Israel. Arab nationalists viewed Palestine as Arab land, part of the Arab nation, and therefore they saw normalization as a process giving undue rights to Israel.⁶ Arab nationalists also considered normalization to be an act forgiving Israel for its crimes; a process that beautified the face of

⁴ Look the references to see their publications

⁵ Faisal Darraj, “Lajnet Addifa’a An Al-thaqafah Al-Qawmiyyah Fi-Maraya Mahdoudah”, Al-Hadaf volume 1181, 13/3/1994, p.34-35

⁶ For instance, Jamal Abdel Nasser, previous President of Egypt, described the 1917 Balfour Declaration to be, “A promise given from those who did not possess, to those who did not deserve.”

Israel while severely damaging Palestinian rights and national memory. From their point of view, normalization permits spying and collaboration, gives Israel legitimacy in the Arab world, and abolishes the Arab right to self defense against Israel.⁷

It must be noted that even those Arab nationalists who have taken part in official negotiations with Israel, such as the Syrian regime, differentiate between *negotiating* with Israel and *normalizing* with Israel. When the Syrian regime accepted negotiations with Israel after the beginning of Madrid process, they wanted to maintain only minimal, official relations with Israel with the occasional meeting. Syria wanted to preserve the Arab identity of the region, feeling threatened by the concept of “neighboring nations,” as called by Dr. Hamed Khalil, living parallel to each other rather than united together. This Arab nationalist perspective—that of minimal relations with Israel—is supported by the UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on Palestine and the Israeli-Arab conflict, which, despite Israel’s desire, do not call for normalization between Israel and the Arab countries.

The last trend consists of a mixture of groups that all call for the rejection of cultural normalization. Those working against cultural normalization include different religious, national, and Marxist orientations, some of whom believe that fighting against political and economic normalization is not likely to succeed. Therefore, they believe, it is better to concentrate on preserving the last and most important “garrison”: Arabic culture. In demonstrating the threat to Arab culture, some of these intellectuals examine the use of concepts such as “realism,” “international changes,” and “flexibility in a way that supports normalization.”⁸ One of these intellectuals wrote even that “What determines the nature of cultural normalization is its function on settling Israel in the area, and making the Arab mentality accept its existence as a natural phenomenon.”⁹ Another writer went even further, saying that “European Protestant Christianity adopted the concept of the land of Israel and God’s chosen people, and Catholics were obliged in the mid-20th century to declare that Jews are innocent from the blood of Jesus Christ and to recognize Israel. Now it is the turn of the Arabs and the Eastern Churches.”¹⁰

⁷ Look for Instance: Dr. Hamed Khalil (The Dean of Arts in Damascus University), “Thaqafat Al-Muwajahah wa-thaqafat Attatbie’a”, Al-Hadaf, volume 1196, 24/7*1996,p.32-35

⁸ Hamade Khalil, Ibid.

⁹ Muhamad Jamal Baroot, “Atatbie’a Athaqafi wa Al-Isti’amar Addakhili”, Al-Hadaf, volume 1176 20/1/1994, p.34-35

¹⁰ Usama Al-Hindi “Hal Yumkin Al-Fasl Bayn Attaswiyah Wattatbie’a?” Al-Hadaf volume 1187, 8/5/1994, p. 20-21

3. Palestinian anti-normalization positions

Relatively different from the Islamists in the Arab world, the Palestinian Hamas is willing to accept the existence of Israel following the full Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem. The Islamic Jihad has also held this position since the beginning of 2004. Furthermore, Hamas is not completely against any dialogue with Israelis. In fact, some Hamas members (who later split from the group), along with people who are close to Hamas (from the Muslim brotherhood), participated in religious dialogues with Israelis. These individuals include Sheikh Jamil Hamami from the West Bank and Sheikh Imad Falougi from Gaza Strip.

Palestinian radical Marxists (mainly the PFLP) are only willing to consider normalization with the Jewish anti-Zionist groups inside Israel. During the 1970s the PFLP built relations with the Israeli Trotskyist organization Matzpen, and later on developed minimal ties with the Israeli Communist Party. Other Palestinian Marxists (The Palestinian Communist Party, The Palestinian Democratic Union [FIDA], and the DFLP) were more flexible than the PFLP, and accepted normalization not only with the Israeli Communist Party, but also with Israeli peace groups who believed in a two-state solution and who supported the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

The Arab nationalists in Palestine, who represent a minority of Ba'athists, the PFLP General Command, and individual Arab nationalists, have rejected all kinds of normalization with Israel including its political, social, economic, and cultural forms. In 1994 this group formulated the so-called "Committee Against Normalization" in cooperation with some people from the PFLP. This committee tried to confront all aspects of normalization; however, its contradictory agendas led to its collapse less than six months after its formation. These contradictions were not unique to the Palestinian group, it should be noted. Rather, the problems they faced were shared by all the anti-normalization groups in the Arab World¹¹ (see later).

Palestine, unlike Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Morocco, did not have a strong group confronting cultural normalization. These latter four countries have always been centers for Arab culture; thus, anti-cultural normalization was strong there. Palestine does not have as rich a cultural history, and therefore its contribution to the anti-cultural normalization was modest, represented by a few individual writers and intellectuals. However, the writings of some

¹¹ See the story of this committee on: Walid Salem "Ishkaliat Muwajahat Attatbie'a" Kan'an Magazine, volume 56. September 1994, p15-20

Palestinian supporters of cultural normalization were easily used by anti-normalization groups to give credence to their own position. There are hundreds of examples where Palestinian normalizers overstated their point, and were therefore easily attacked by their opponents. For instance, Ali Al-Challis, former editor-in-chief of Al-Ajar newspaper, wrote in 1991 that, “the Palestinian journalist needs a revolution in the terminology. I become hesitant to use the terms of revolution, justice, and rights, and prefer to use expressions such as: reciprocal relationships, joint interests, and memorandums of understanding.”¹² Al-Khalili certainly does not have to surrender justice and rights for the sake of understanding and joint interests. On the contrary, joint interests and understanding must be built on justice and equal rights for all parties concerned. Regardless of what Al-Khalili said, it is worth noting that Palestinians have taken a relatively more flexible position vis-à-vis normalization with Israel. This may be attributed to the fact that the Palestinians, unlike most Arabs, deal with Israelis on a daily basis, albeit on different levels and by different means.

These four Arab trends have an impact on Palestine, but an important fifth position, that of the Palestinian nationalists, plays a unique role. Although the Palestinian nationalists—led by the main PLO faction of Fatah—are not necessarily against Arab nationalism, they maintain that the liberation of Palestine is primarily a Palestinian responsibility, and that Arab countries should support the Palestinians in their struggle by providing geographical and humanitarian depth. Fatah worked to promote Palestinian interests, which sometimes coincided—and sometimes conflicted—with the interests of the Arab countries. Working for the Palestinian interest led Fatah to work with Israeli groups whenever Fatah felt it would further their goals. Therefore, as a pragmatic movement, Fatah began a normalization process with Israel (both on the official and popular levels), mainly through its upper and middle rank leaders. Fatah’s process towards normalization developed in three stages: The process began during the 1970s via meetings with the Israeli Communist Party, then developed in the 1980s through ‘contacts’ and meetings with the Israeli peace movement, and then peaked with negotiations and the signing of the Oslo Declaration of Principles.¹³

Although Fatah leaders and middle rank cadres participated in this normalization process, this position was not uniformly shared within the Fatah ranks. Immediately after the

¹² Alhayat Newspaper, 25/9/1991

¹³ You can find details of Fatah position on contacts with the Israeli in: Abu Mazen. Lematha hadhehe Al-It - tessallat

Oslo Accords were signed, Fatah members participated in joint projects and dialogue with the youth groups of both the Labor and the Likud party. These projects even continued, albeit at a reduced level, after the failure of the President Clinton-sponsored Camp David talks between Barak and Arafat. All contact collapsed, however, following the siege of Arafat's compound, when, according to one of Fatah Youth member, "we asked our colleagues in the Labor Party to show support for our President; [but] they abstained and this was a complete shock for us, one that led us to stop the contacts with them."¹⁴

After this collapse, some Fatah members have re-evaluated their stance toward Israeli partnerships. Although some middle rank cadres of Fatah are active in the Ayalon-Nusseibeh initiative and the Geneva initiative, members in the lower ranks see the process of developing contacts with Israelis not as one of normalization with Israel, but rather as a process to examine Israeli positions on key issues. This, they say, is important in order to develop Palestinian responses should there be a return to negotiations. These younger Fatah members also provide an alternate interpretation of the past. First, they note that the dialogue was one between 'enemies,' and therefore was not normalization. Second, negotiation by itself is not a normalization process, and will only lead to normalization if an agreement is reached by both sides. Regardless of how one chooses to define 'normalization,' Fatah members are not currently ready to continue their previous joint projects with the Labor and the Likud youth. In addition, a minority within the Fatah leadership views normalization through joint projects as harmful to Palestinian interests, although they approve of negotiations with Israel. In their view, engaging in joint activity prior to arriving at a political agreement might create the false impression that the situation is normal, which might lead to reduced international pressure on Israel for the sake of the Palestinian rights. Palestinians emphasize that this anti-normalization stance is not meant as a personal affront to those in the Israeli peace movement, but that if Palestinians continue to meet with the Israeli peace movement, it might be seen as if the situation is satisfactory and there is no need to rush a peace agreement. Of course, many Israelis disagree with this perspective, and their stance will be dealt with in the coming sections. It should be noted, however, that even this new position does not support severing the relationship with those

¹⁴ Meeting on Hussein Ashiekh office (one of Fatah leaders). 15/7/2003

Israeli Solidarity groups who honestly and sincerely join the Palestinians in what they together view as a shared struggle for justice and human rights.*.

4. The political context

The change in the positions of Fatah and other Palestinian peace movements reflected a change in the political environment. During the Oslo period (1993-2000), relations between Israeli and Palestinian activists were considered 'ordinary' by the peace groups in both societies. However, when the Camp David negotiations between Arafat and Barak collapsed, the relationship between the activists also collapsed; the Palestinian boycott returned, and both sides held the other responsible for the breakdown. The situation deteriorated into a new Intifada, and the National and Islamic leadership released an anti-normalization statement calling for January 28, 2001 to be a day "To call for resistance of normalization, the activation of activities in this direction, and the support to the popular conference against normalization held in Ramallah, and calling for holding similar conferences in other Governorates." In addition, February 2nd was allocated for Arabic and Islamic activities against normalization.¹⁵

Because relations between peace groups were 'ordinary' until the shift in the political situation, one can presume that if the situation changes for the better--on the political level and on the ground--it will likely be possible to return to normal relations between the peace activists from both sides. In this event, the Israeli and Palestinian peace movements can re-commence the process of developing relations between the two peoples.

5. The impact on civil society

* Thanks to Mary Schweitzer for this comment

¹⁵ Markaz Al-Ma'aloumat Al-Watani, <http://www.pnic.gov.ps/Arabic>

Palestinian civil society has operated, for the most part, on a parallel track to the official politicians. That is to say, that as Palestinian official political positions developed, civil society initiatives developed in similar manner: making contacts with Israelis, engaging in dialogue between enemies, conducting track II negotiations, and normalizing through joint projects. During the 1970s, fragile new civil society organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip adopted the PLO position regarding contact with the other side, while old civil society organizations (mainly the charitable societies, professional organizations and youth clubs) continued to consider themselves non-political. Consequently, these more established groups did not participate in any contact activities or dialogues until the latter part of the 1980s, whereas PLO civil society supporters were involved in these dialogues from the beginning, participating actively in track II initiatives, both before and during the Oslo negotiations.

However, when one examines these groups more closely, one finds that in the 1970s and 1980s Palestinian civil society organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were mostly appendices to Palestinian political parties, and therefore adopted the positions of their parties regarding relations with Israeli society. Put differently, during these two decades Palestinian civil society organizations followed the four main positions towards normalization: Islamic, Marxist, Arab national, and Palestinian national. It is worth noting here that the Marxist leftist position was the stronger in West Bank and Gaza in this period because Fatah was not yet concentrating on building grassroots support, whereas the left (mainly the Communists and DFLP) was. As a result, most civil society contact during that period was with Israeli communists, either through participation in voluntary work camps held in Nazareth, Lod, Kabul and other Palestinian cities inside Israel, or through joint youth activities. Some other minor contacts were made with Israeli Zionist peace movements in the same period. These activities paralleled the political meetings conducted between Israeli and Palestinian leftist political parties at that time.

Two other groups played important--and relatively independent--roles in the development of Israeli-Palestinian contacts during this period. The first group, Palestinian Christians, developed contacts with Israelis in order to convince them of the possibility of a peaceful solution to the conflict. The second group, consisting of some Palestinian academics, confronted the official positions of their academic institutions, defied the boycott, and went on to participate in early track II activities. These discussions, which started in the mid-1970s, developed

formulas for a solution to the problem and presented these formulas to the Palestinian leadership for approval.¹⁶

With the advent of the 1990s, two contradictory developments took place in regard to the question of normalization in the civil society arena: one was the rise of the first Palestinian - Israeli political formula to legitimize normalization at both the political and the civil society levels. This formula can be discovered in the content of Oslo Declaration of Principles, which includes numerous articles encouraging civil society cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian organizations in all sectors.¹⁷ Most important for civil society cooperation were Appendix number 3, which established a protocol for Israeli-Palestinian cooperation in economic and development programs (including programs on water, electricity, energy, investment, transportation, trade, industry, social services, human resources development, and the environment), and Appendix number 4, which laid out a protocol for Israeli-Palestinian cooperation concerning regional development in the field of economic development, housing, and infrastructure.

While this first development was intended to keep civil society organizations under the patronage of Palestinian politicians, the second development--increased professionalism in the work of civil society organizations—led to their greater independence. Moreover, during this period civil society organizations began to better understand their role in establishing new policies and priorities, and worked to influence decision-makers. Thus, instead of being appendices to the political parties, Palestinian civil society organizations began to work with their Israeli counterparts on developing professional solutions to issues like the environment, energy, water, and electricity, and presented their proposed solutions to the political leadership.

Thus developed a new trend in Palestinian-Israeli normalization: one built not on political orientations, but rather upon professional ones. The actors involved in this shift included civil society organizations such as professional organizations, academics and journalists. The international donor community played a major role in this new approach, providing energy and financial support. As a result, there is some debate regarding whether the agenda of these professional groups was imposed from the outside, but that question lies outside the scope of this

¹⁶ See the results of these academic contacts in *Al-Shira'a Magazine*, volumes of 1980 to 1986

¹⁷ These articles include: Article 9 (joint review of the military), Article 10 (joint liaison committee), Article 11 (joint economic committee), Article 12 (cooperation with Egypt and Jordan), and Article 16 (cooperation on regional programs).

paper. A second criticism of this track arose out of fear that it might reach conclusions contradictory to political stances. Nevertheless, this professional approach provides alternative scenarios for the resolution of permanent status issues, for the inclusion of human rights and justice issues in the peace process, and for the joint use of water and energy resources.

6. Who are the Palestinian normalizers and with whom?

When asking who are the Palestinian normalizers, it is important to consider who are their counterparts on the Israeli side. The Islamists of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, for example, have political and faith-based connections with members of the Islamic movement in Israel who hold Israeli citizenship. The same is true regarding the PFLP, who still do not meet with the Zionists, but instead are ‘normalizing’ with Israeli anti-Zionist groups. These two kinds of relations, although they occur across the divide, do not represent normalization between the two peoples because they are built on ideological basis and therefore bring together brothers (in case of the Islamists) and comrades (in case of the Marxists).

The previous point raises a significant characteristic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: that every Palestinian group has its Israeli counterpart, and both together work against other groups which are also found in both societies. Therefore, the question is not who is in favor of normalization, and who is against normalization, but rather, who is normalizing with whom, and who are they working against? For example, the peace movements in both societies are normalizing together, and are working together against both Israeli and Palestinian extremist groups. It is very important to consider this dynamic in order to understand who are the allies and who are their opponents in order to counter the feeling of some Israeli Peaceniks who ask, “I am a peace activist, why they are boycotting me and refusing to coordinate with me?”

7. The contradictions of anti-normalization positions

Based on the above analysis, anti-normalization needs to be re-defined as the position which refuses any kind of normalization with Israeli Zionists--who represent the mainstream in Israel—whether for tactical reasons (until the end of the occupation and the signing of a peace agreement) or for strategic reasons (such as the minority fanatic belief that the conflict with

Israel is a religious or existential one). Based on the previous analysis, it seems clear that if Israel ends the occupation of those Palestinian territories which were occupied in 1967, most Palestinians will establish normal relations with Israel and the other minority will accept co-existence with Israel.

Several other questions and contradictions have been raised regarding the Palestinian and Arab positions vis-à-vis normalization. These questions include:

- Is the peace process a form of normalization? And if so, is it possible to prevent the peace process from succeeding, or is it enough to demonstrate disagreement with it?
- Is it possible to work against all the aspects of normalization? Or should the focus be working against the cultural normalization since the struggle against political and economic normalization cannot succeed?
- Is it possible to separate between negotiations, a peace settlement, and normalization? Or do the meanings of these terms overlap?
- Is it possible to include the supporters of the Madrid process, and the Syrian-Israeli negotiations in the anti-normalization groups?
- Is it possible to work with Israeli anti-Zionists--along with Israeli peace groups--against normalization with Israel on the official level?¹⁸

In the 1990s, these questions led to a collapse, or at least a marginalization, of the anti-normalization groups in the Arab world. This process was aided by the social contradictions also present within the anti-normalization camp, such as the fact that most of the normalizers were supporters of the undemocratic Arab regimes, and therefore the opposition groups positioned themselves against these normalizers as a part of their stance against the Arab regimes. Another contradiction is the crisis of the intellectuals—both normalizers and anti-normalizers--in their relationship with the people. Those who support the Arab regimes are confronted by people who are against the regimes, those who have western orientations are confronted by peasants and the Bedouin, those professionals who do not fulfill their social responsibilities create a gap between themselves and needy people.

These same contradictions also face Palestinian academics and intellectuals to an extent. However, the Palestinian intellectuals who supported the peace process were not just agents of the Palestinian Authority, but also included independent academics who were deeply involved in the process of developing alternative scenarios for a peaceful solution. These professionals—Israeli as well as Palestinian--were paid well for the work they did, but they failed to influence

¹⁸ Walid Salem, Ibid

their respective decision-makers and public opinions. This lack of impact may reflect a deficit in social responsibility.

An additional dynamic that deserves mention here is the issue of Arab (and Palestinian) culture. Arabic culture was not defined clearly by the anti-normalization groups, although some of them based their conceptions on his/her Islamic, Marxist or nationalist orientations, thereby trying to impose their own ideologies on the definition of Arabic culture. Thus, one must keep in mind that the anti-normalization positions are just as culturally diverse as are the normalization positions. Furthermore, recognizing the right to be different might solve these social contradictions, and in the process increase the openness of Arab culture to universal values as well as to other cultures.

8. The Israeli positions on normalization

When discussing normalization, Israel is often represented as the side looking for peace and open relations with all the Arab countries, while anti-normalization is portrayed as an Arab-only position. This is simply untrue, as there is also deep opposition to normalization on the Israeli side. Outside of the current Israeli official positions, which are primary reasons for the failure to achieve peace with the Palestinians as well as with the Syrians, there are several Israeli anti-normalization positions that should be analyzed in greater depth.

The first position is related to the question of whether Israel considers itself part of the Middle East or part of the Western world. If Israel continues to see itself as a part of the Western world, it will fail to build normal relations with the Arabs of the Middle East. Ironically, this stance mirrors that of Arabs who refuse to integrate Israel into the region.

A second contradiction in Israel's position regarding normalization is that its government seeks normalization with the Arabs more as a means for joining the United States in its domination of the area than as a tool for integrating into the region. It is clear that this form of 'normalization' will not lead to Arab equality with Israel; rather, it would simply further the strategic relations between Israel and the U.S., and lead to the fruition of plans, like those of Shimon Peres, that combine cheap Arab labor with Israeli technology in order "to develop the Middle East to a Paradise."¹⁹ However, Arab states have not only failed to integrate Israel into

¹⁹ Shimon Peres, *The New Middle East*, New York: Holt, 1993.

the area, they have also failed to develop a formula for partnership (including economic partnership) with Israel, as an alternative to Israeli-U.S. dominance.

A third contradiction noted by some Arab anti-normalization groups is that Israel wants the Arab countries to establish stronger relations with Israel than those existing between the Arab states. Several writers have commented that the normal relations Arabs have with most countries do not result, for example, in those countries asking for changes in Arab educational curricula or to interference in media policy. Therefore, these authors have concluded that Israel is looking for extra-normal and not simply normal relations with the Arab countries.²⁰ Another case in point is the Israeli calls to be invited to Arab summit meetings.* Of course it is the responsibility of Arabs to stop incitement against the Jews in the schools and media, just as it is Israel's responsibility to do the same regarding the messages its media and curricula send against the Arabs.

The fourth contradiction consists of Israel asking the Arabs to do things that Israel itself will not commit to. The primary example here is the issue of disarmament, including nuclear weapons. For instance, Israel wants a Palestinian state free of heavy arms while the State of Israel would maintain the right to possess all kinds of weapons. Israel calls for an Arab world free from weapons of mass destruction, although Israel itself is not prepared to get rid of such weapons. These kinds of contradictions only serve to make it very difficult for the Arabs to deal normally with Israel.

In addition to these general contradictions, other specific contradictions arise from the positions the Israeli settlers and right-wing political groups. The settlers consider the Palestinians to be strangers living in the land of Israel. As one of settler leader told his Dutch visitors in July 2003: "they [the Palestinians] are strangers, inhabitants in Israel but not citizens, therefore they have no rights of the citizens and they must choose either to live as Israel wants and under the Israeli rules, or to leave the country."²¹ Just last month the settlers in Hebron distributed a leaflet calling upon the Palestinians in Hebron to leave the country.²² Israeli rightwing parties range from those that call for the exchange of inhabitants with Arab countries

²⁰ Look for instance on "Al-Al-Muwajahah", the magazine of the Committee to Defend the Arab National Culture, Volume 11, Cairo, June 1983, and another book published by the same committee: *Thaqafat Al-Muqawamah, wamuwahat Assahioni'eh*, Cairo. 1990

* Thanks to Ilan Halevi for this comment

²¹ The head of Alon Shavot Settlement Council Interview 16/7/2003

²² Al-Quds newspaper, March 2004, and also see B'Tselem reports in the same period.

(Moledet Party), to those who recognize the Palestinian as inhabitants but not as citizens of this land (Likud and other rightwing organizations).

Recognition of the Palestinian people remains a big problem even for those working for Israeli-Palestinian normalization. The post-Oslo Israeli governments, for example, still consider the Palestinian living in the West Bank and Gaza as “residents in areas that are under dispute” (previously considered Jordanian citizens in the West Bank and as persons with un-known citizenship in Gaza). For Jerusalemites, the situation is even worse: Palestinians are still considered by Israel to be “Jordanian citizens residing in Israeli land.” If one does not recognize the citizenship of the other, how can one normalize? When one introduces the issue of the Palestinian refugees, the issue becomes even worse, as Israel continues to officially deny its responsibility in the matter, let alone recognize their right to return.

The Israeli peace movements have their own contradictions. Four problems will be mentioned in this regard. First is the problem that the Israeli peace camp is more effective when working with the Palestinians than they are when they are trying to change Israeli public opinion by convincing them that the Palestinian want peace.* This helps to create the impression that everything is alright between Israel and the Palestinians, especially when the focus is on joint projects done through “political tourism” outside (or business inside), rather than on specific projects that confront the Palestinians’ miserable situation and show solidarity on the ground. This kind of ‘political tourism’ activity only helps to normalize the abnormal.

The second problem arose mainly after the failure of the Camp David talks in 2000, when some of the Israeli peace camp joined the campaign blaming the Palestinians for that failure because they refused Barak's so-called “generous offer.” Later on, when the Intifada erupted, there was relative silence and lack of solidarity on the part of the Israeli Peace Camp, with the voices calling for the end of occupation softening. While part of the Israeli peace camp chose to increase their solidarity with the Palestinians, they failed to develop their constituency within Israeli society. Similarly, Israeli intellectuals and Academia in general, have failed to show their social responsibility by acting on the values, such as the rights of the ‘Other,’ that they teach.

The fourth problem lies with the Israeli civil society organizations, who either chose not to deal with the headache of developing relations with the Palestinians, or who chose to develop business ties rather than engage in political work with their Palestinian counterparts. This

* Thanks to Paul Scham for this comment

includes those organizations and individuals who support peace initiatives but do not take action on the ground to increase the support for these initiatives. All of these contradictions, present across the sectors of Israeli society, encourage the anti-normalization process since these contradictions suggest that a majority of Israelis do not want normal relations with the Palestinians, and in fact, are looking for *separation*—not cooperation--in order to get rid of the Palestinians. This tendency is reflected in the Israeli people's majority support for Sharon's unilateral separation plans.

Finally, it should be noted that the position of the Israeli people, like that of the Palestinians, is influenced by the political context. Therefore, one can see that during the Oslo period (1992-2000), Israeli people were more inclined to cooperate economically with the Palestinians economically, as well as to have friendly social relations with them. The collapse of Camp David in 2000 and the outbreak of the Intifada created a reaction on both societies. Although approximately 70% of Palestinians and Israelis continue to believe in a two-state solution, the same percentage of Israelis also supports revenge against the Palestinians. Even those previously involved in peace activities could be heard saying, “I am fed up with the Palestinians and I do not want to see them.” This attitude was accompanied by increased support for the idea of separation from the Palestinians, which led to the current plans for disengagement and building walls.

Although the words “normalization” and anti-normalization” are not used in Israeli internal discourse, unless the internal and external political situation changes, the trend is clear towards separation and “divorce” with the Palestinians. Within this situation, those Israeli peace activists who continue to work with Palestinians are considered disloyal and are viewed with suspicion.

9. Conclusion: what can be done?

Although the Israeli- Palestinian situation is not normal--and might not become normal because of the occupation and expansion of Israeli settlements* --the previous analysis might

* Thanks to Menahem Klein and Riad Malki for this comment.

conclude that in the Palestinian-Israeli context, Palestinian readiness to normalize with Israel is higher than Israeli readiness to normalize with the Palestinians.

Among the Palestinians, people are divided on the issue of normalization, between those currently normalizing with Israel, and those who want to postpone normalization until after the establishment of the Palestinian state. There is, relatively speaking, no problem for Palestinians to accept the 'Other' who shares the same land. Even the minority of Palestinians who do not want normalization with Israel even after the establishment of a Palestinian state, accept the principle of peaceful co-existence with Israel once there is a long term non-belligerent situation.

This situation is opposite in the Israeli side. From the government, which claims that there is no Palestinian partner for peace, to the rightwing mainstream politicians who do not consider the Palestinians to be people, all the policies from the right and the left either consider and deal with the Palestinians as unequal partners, or pretend to cooperate while seeking to dominate them at the same time.

Among the Israelis, there are four positions towards normalization, all of which are problematic in terms of building healthy and normal relations with the Palestinians: first is the position of anti-normalization with the Palestinians, represented not only by the government but also by right wing political groups and a majority of Israelis looking to get rid of the Palestinians. The second position, in contrast, looks for extra normalization with the Arabs and the Palestinians. This position is related to third: normalization with the Arabs and the Palestinians from a hegemonic and patronizing position, where the Israeli side will have more power and hence greater dominance. These two positions are complimentary, because it seems that extra-normalization is needed in order to achieve the hegemony and dominance. These two positions represent the views of the Israeli Labor Party, and even other Israeli peace movements who manage their relations and negotiations with Palestinians in such a way as to promote their own goals. The fourth Israeli position involves normalizing the abnormal. This is evident in the focus of the Israeli peace camp on their relations with the Palestinians while simultaneously failing to change Israeli public opinion, which creates an illusion of normalization between the two peoples that does not exist.

Taking into consideration this asymmetric situation, the question becomes how to convince some Palestinian academics and civil society organizations to deal with the Israeli Zionist peace camp now, even when they cannot see any signs that this will lead to the

recognition of the Palestinian people's rights of self determination. This is especially challenging since many of these individuals and groups already have their own relations with Israeli anti-Zionist and post-Zionist academics and civil society organizations. These groups can and must continue normalizing with the groups they choose. For the sake of pluralism and diversity it is important that each side respects the other's approach to normalizing, and at the same time respects the differences between the two sides. This is the main essence of pluralism and respect for diversity.

As explained previously, every Palestinian group normalizes with certain Israeli groups and does not normalize with others, while the reverse is true from the Israeli side. What is needed now is a formula that enables all the normalization/anti-normalization processes to peacefully coexist, without using violence against each other and without accusing the others of treason, collaboration, or extremism. At the same time, both societies and across the divide need to develop a formula for all these groups to come together to work on shared themes such as combating the wall on Palestinian lands and, most importantly, struggling against occupation as the main evil which creates other evils such as terrorism.

In order to build joint actions, there must be respect for one another's positions. As a result, individuals should not express personal outrages against the positions that they disagree with, but rather make an effort to understand the deeper roots of these positions and to respect them. The other way to deal with these issues (apart from outrage and anger) is to try to convince those who do not deal with oneself to do so. When one does not try to convince the other side of one's view, and does not listen to the view of the other, it can create additional tension. It is important to exchange views and to learn the positions of others, who may provide new and different ways for thinking about normalization. Moreover, since the majority of Palestinians accept normalization with Israel if the occupation ends, it should be emphasized that if the Israeli peace camp strengthens its work against the occupation within Israeli society, it will build trust among Palestinians, which could lead to a willingness to normalize. Another way to change Palestinians' positions is for the Israeli peace camp to show them acts of solidarity in their suffering from the occupation. This, for instance, is the reason why these Palestinians, although against normalization now, accept and build normal relations with the Israeli Ta'ayush group and other Israeli groups that act in solidarity with the Palestinians.

Those Israelis and Palestinians in the peace camp who are acting together now without waiting for permanent status issues to be resolved need the previously-mentioned tactics and methods for dealing with the opponents of normalization now. However, they also need the following:

- 1) More to work to develop a peace culture and an acceptance of the ‘Other’ in each society.
- 2) More to pressure—in the form of concrete daily activities--on the Israeli government to end the occupation.
- 3) More work with academics and intellectuals on themes that lead them to combine what they think with what they do on the ground.
- 4) More work to invite Palestinians suffering from the occupation to speak to Israeli audiences in order to influence Israeli elections.
- 5) More gradualness in involving people in joint work, starting with getting them to participate in making contacts, to dialogue, and then to joint projects. This is valid in regard to individuals, groups and states.
- 6) More joint political and solidarity work, than joint business projects.
- 7) More use of the professionals’ capacities to develop scenarios for the different issues of the conflict.
- 8) More respect for human rights and the need for justice for both peoples, also including an acknowledgment of both sides’ sufferings.
- 9) More independence from the political leaderships on both sides, so that even if official talks collapse the cooperation will continue.
- 10) More work with the people who left joint work because they lost faith. This should not be through trying to “convince” them, but through attracting them to new creative ideas, and new creative activities.
- 11) More respect to the different peace orientations, and more attempts for coordination between them.
- 12) More work to prevent the illusion that every thing is alright between the Israelis and the Palestinians.
- 13) More work in exchanging experiences between the peace activists in both societies.
- 14) In the Arab world it is important to have more work with those not affiliated with the Arab regimes. In addition, Arab civil society organizations need to build good relations

with each other in addition to building relations with Israel. Why, for example, should Mauritania have to cut its relations with some Arab countries because of establishing relations with Israel? It is very dangerous for Israel to continue to be a factor in the tension between Arab countries. This will not help normalize Arab relations with Israel on either the official or the popular level.

Hopefully this paper has shown that anti-normalization can become normalization with the changing of the political context. Furthermore, the partnership between normalization and anti-normalization groups across the divide must continue to act in peaceful way in order to give health and diversity to the joint life in the land of Palestine/Israel.

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