



1.Sadaka Reut Office Wall (Harrow,2019)

‘The experiences of Palestinian and Israeli Youth’

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List of Abbreviations

CAFOD- Catholic Agency for Overseas Development

CIA- Community in Action Programme run by Sadaka Reut

IDF- Israel Defence Forces

NGO- Non-governmental organisation

oPt- occupied Palestinian territory

List of Photographs

1. Sadaka Reut Office Wall
2. Israeli CIA participants interreacting with one another at a regular CIA project meeting
3. Both Palestinian and Israeli participants with each other at a normal CIA programme gathering
4. CIA project participants and CAFOD volunteers in the CIA meeting room

Abstract

Conflict between Israel and oPt has been a feature of the post-war period. Long term conflict has resulted in annexation of land and fractured communities. Youth conflict resolution programmes like the CIA project run by Sadaka Reut has been developed at a grassroots level to build dialogue and partnership. The research evaluates whether such programmes are effective at building sustainable peace and development for the future. Qualitative research explores the experiences of a mixed group of young Israelis and Palestinians through a discussion group to identify common themes and barriers across both communities. Themes are considered in light of Dittmann/Samii intergroup research, Allport's theory of prejudice reduction, Hammack's concept of cultural identity and Thiessen/Darweish work on power structure in asymmetric conflict. The discussion revealed that strong feelings of religion and identity created barriers to understanding and made it difficult for young Israeli participants to find resolution within their communities. Encountering the other side was effective at allowing both narratives of the conflict to be shared. The impact of this was that both communities understood each other more, creating peaceful dialogue and hope for sustainable peace.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, sustainable, youth, oPt, Israel

Introduction

The ending of the British Mandate on 14th May 1948 resulted in the modern state of Israel being formed (Israel Ministry of Affairs, 2013). Since then, Israel has gradually annexed more and more of Palestinian land. The outcome of this is that Palestinians have continued to suffer systemic discrimination and inequality (Amnesty International, 2020).

The international community and development sector has recognised that before development can occur, resolution or reduction of the conflict needs to happen (UN Meetings Coverage and Press Release, 2021). In the meantime, NGOs have strived to reduce conflict between Israeli and Palestinian communities at a local, grassroots level. For instance, projects run by local NGOs, Wi'am Peer Mediation (Wi'am, 2016) programme and AEI's, Palestinian Youth Protecting Civic Values in Conflict (AEI, 2020) programme focus on community based conflict resolution.

Sadaka Reut is an NGO in Jaffa that has worked to create youth Palestinian Israeli cooperation for over thirty years. The mission of the organisation is to "educate and empower Palestinian and Jewish youth to pursue social political change through bi-national partnership." (Sadaka Reut, 2022). Significantly they are one of the few NGOs in Israel that offer voluntary positions for both Palestinians and Israelis outside the civil national service programme. The CIA programme focuses on making Palestinians and Israelis socially and politically active. So that they become committed to long term peace in both communities (Sadaka Reut, 2022).

This paper will explore the experiences of a group of Israeli and Palestinian young people. With the aim to delve into their thoughts on how and/or if they contribute to the mission of Sadaka Reut's CIA programme. By exploring this, the hope is to reflect on whether youth conflict resolution programmes generally can in fact lead to a form of sustainable community development in the future.

Literature Review

The conflict in oPt and Israel has been the subject of several studies aiming to understand the conflict through multiple lenses.

Gordon W. Allport was one of the first academics to look into how prejudice affects communities' dynamics with other communities. His work has been the starting point for much research into the psychology behind racial prejudice and stereotypes based on ethnicity that has come since (Horwitz, 2000, Bonilla-Silva, 2006, Katz, 1991). In his work, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 1954 he details how prejudice can influence group dynamics. This is crucial to my research as both Israeli and Palestinian communities have deep rooted societal prejudices against one another. From this, the question whether the CIA programme can tackle this must be explored throughout the paper.

Chuck Thiessen and Marwan Darweish academic focus is on asymmetric conflict in Israel and oPt. In the paper, *Conflict resolution and asymmetric conflict: The contradictions of planned contact interventions in Israel and Palestine* (2018), they outline how power plays a crucial role in the continuation of conflict. They argue that for conflict resolution to be effective, power imbalances and structural injustice needs to be broken down immediately. This links to my work as this theory could determine the longevity of conflict resolution programmes like the CIA project in oPt and Israel.

Ruth Dittmann and Cyrus Sammi study focuses on intergroup relations in the midst of conflict. The research draws attention to both young people in Israel and oPt. In the work, *Can intergroup contact affect ingroup dynamics? Insights from a field study with Jewish and Arab-Palestinian youth in Israel* (2016), the question if intergroup projects can transform mindsets not just of the participants but local wider communities. This is vital to my study on whether intergroup conflict resolution programmes produce a sustainable domino effect at a grassroots level.

Philip L. Hammack has done extensive research on the identity, culture and the narrative of Palestinian youth. In his work, *The cultural psychology of Palestinian youth: A narrative approach* (2010) he portrays the correlation between these three concepts. This is important to my paper as it confirms the how encountering different narratives of the conflict is needed to generate long term conflict resolution in oPt and Israel.

Methodology

This data was gathered whilst volunteering for the NGO, CAFOD which why this is a prominent academic passion.

In order to investigate my research question, qualitative research methods are used because they “explore individual thinking, emotions, and personal issues” (Skovdal and Cornish, 2015, p.57). Qualitative research methods bring to the surface a range of emotions and experiences that quantitative methods do not. This is crucial to determine whether youth conflict resolution programmes can have influence in building peace.

Access was given to an existing discussion group held in Sadaka Reut’s offices in Jaffa, Israel, as part of a regular CIA programme meeting. Discussion groups are “good at exploring shared norms, common knowledge, shared beliefs, and common debates” (Skovdal and Cornish, 2015, p.57). Informal discussion groups allow focus on a particular topic, in this case to explore young people’s perception of their contribution to dissolution of conflict, while allowing first-hand experiences to be shared freely, such as the different experiences of young Palestinians and Israelis. A translator was present to help communicate responses. Data was recorded in a handwritten field journal. Responses have been anonymised to comply with recommend ethics requirements (See Appendix 1).

The discussion group consisted of seven young people who are active in Sadaka Reut’s CIA programme. Five females and two males participated, six of them are Israelis and one of them is Palestinian. All members are eighteen- nineteen years old.

The transcribed dialogue was analysed using Narrative and thematic methods, to examine the responses and contributions gathered in the discussion group.

Prior to gathering this data, complete ethical practices were adhered to. “Consent forms for transcriptions, translation and photographs were gained through CAFOD ethical systems” (Harrow,2022,p.2) (See Appendix Two). The data has been transferred from field notes into electronic files on a sole use laptop. All the data files are confidential password protected. Pseudonyms have been used to protect members of the CIA programme in the midst of the conflict.

A note needs to be made on the limitations of the research. The data collected was gathered from only one CIA programme meeting. Participants of the discussion group were self-

selecting with an unequal number of Israelis to Palestinians. The ratio of women to male was disproportionate. Allowances need to be made for the translation from Arabic to English as not all words can translate with equal meaning. Direct researcher involvement in the discussion group needs to be acknowledge. This could have affected participants responses as my presence could have influenced what the youth were/were not saying. Researcher bias must be accounted for in all qualitative approaches. When analysing the data this will be considered.

Data Analysis

This section looks at the data collected from Sadaka Reut's CIA programme, highlighting experiences of Palestinians and Israelis and how they contribute to the CIA programme.

Using a thematic analysis approach, four themes were identified; religion and identity, encountering the other side, finance/education/language and politics. The first three themes are discussed due to limitations in the word count.

Religion and Identity

The group spoke in detail about the role their family and friends played in shaping their identity and involvement in the CIA programme.

The CIA programme offers a gap year before and after compulsory national military service. Military service requires men to serve for a minimum of two years and eight months. Women have to partake in service for a minimum of two years (IDF,2022).

Several participants put off joining the IDF straight away and engaged in Sadaka Reut's work instead.

In talking about the joining IDF in the following year, Nora says ...

"I am nervous about being part of the institution, but it is natural for me to go, so therefore it is normal for me to go." (Nora)

Nora's use of the words "nervous," "natural" and "normal" suggests the cultural and societal expectation of participating in military service. Nora seems to feel that going against military service is not an easy choice and young people have a role to which they must conform.

These words reflect Nora's view that it is *abnormal* and *unnatural* not to do compulsory national service. The IDF, in her view, is the organisation that *normalises* this.

Oliver also explains his decision not joining the IDF...

"I do not intend to participate in active service with the army next year unlike the other Israelis in the room. It is not easy to refuse service. So, my choice has meant that I must go through lots of medical examination including psychologists and physiologists to prove that I am unfit for duty." (Oliver)

Oliver clearly states how social expectations make it difficult to “refuse,” and that his only choice is to pretend to be ill to *prove* to his community that the decision is not purely his.

When it comes to family, Oliver points out:

“My family is supportive of my choice and want me to do whatever makes me happy, my parents would have taken the same opportunities as I have.” (Oliver)

Oliver feels the need to express his family’s approval, supported by the idea that they would have done the same. Together with the medical exemption, this narrative may help mitigate any backlash he could receive from the wider Israeli community for not joining the IDF.

The topic of religion was also raised: .

“The fact is that religion is the main cause of the conflict on both sides.” (Oliver)

Oliver takes on a very formative tone of voice and speaks in factual terms. He does not delve into his specific views on religion, or reject it, but reiterates a well versed phrase.

“My religion (Judaism) is opposed to hearing the other side and this is an aspect of division.” (Natalie)

Natalie use of the pronoun, *my* religion, creates the separation between Israelis and Palestinians. She shows a sense of ownership and belonging to one particular religion that is a dominant discourse in the area.

Apparently, Nora avoids religion but does seem to admire it too.

“Jewish holidays are now more social gatherings, not religious. I avoid religion but cannot deny it has a beautiful side to it.” (Nora)

Mary’s thoughts on religion appear to be somewhat conflicting...

“I don’t really believe in religion, but it is difficult to deny or neglect that religion doesn’t play a role in decision making.” (Mary)

Mary’s word choice interestingly demonstrates her internal struggle between Judaism and the conflict that many young people like herself experience; the difficulty in rejecting religion but acknowledging it’s so much part of their lives.

Ian seems to feel religion inspired him to be part of the solution despite the religious dilemma:

“My faith plays a role in my life but not a big part. It didn’t lead me to Sadaka but I have been affected by it but day by day it isn’t my faith that leads me here.” (Ian)

Likewise, Sarah says...

“My decision to join the course was influenced by my religion (Islam) but not completely.”
(Sarah)

Unlike the others, Sarah seems at ease and comfortable in the relationship between her faith, identity and the conflict.



2. Israeli participants of the CIA project (Harrow, 2019)

Encountering the other side

In joining the regular CIA meeting, the aim of the programme, ‘build communication and live a shared life’ became a central focus. The Israeli participants especially spoke in detail about the CIA programme offering them, a chance to understand and hear about both sides of the conflict.

“I have been able to meet people I may not have met before.” (Nora)

“Everyone sitting here realises that closing the gap comes from our understanding of each other. The combination of encountering others and their culture (Palestinian culture) creates partnership.” (Natalie)

Both Nora and Natalie realise that active dialogue between the two communities will generate integration. Could this reflect a part of Israeli society wanting partnership and dissolution to the conflict?

“Palestinian history and experience does not surprise me... I acknowledge the humanity of Palestinians and want to feel their life experiences in person.” (Ian)

“The tension between the two communities is a loaded and central issue in Israel. I chose to join the project was because I felt it was right to deepen my knowledge and improve the situation.” (Mary)

Again, Ian and Mary seem to represent a section of Israeli youth who feel they need to educate and inform themselves on Palestinian life and narrative.



3. Palestinian and Israeli participants of the CIA programme(Harrow,2019)

Finance, Education, Language

Sarah being from a Palestinian background says...

“I was originally fearful about joining the course, but now I see the impact my volunteering has on others, I can make a change at least for some people.” (Sarah)

Sarah detailed particularly how Palestinians have extra hurdles to overcome in Israeli society.

She goes on:

“I think it is difficult to find Palestinians who want to join the Group due to financial reasons. The programme is intensive and it takes a lots of time to volunteer when you could be earning money, this is often a big hurdle to face for Palestinian communities.” (Sarah)

And:

“At times it has been difficult to work with the seven in community. On a few occasions I felt left out.” (Sarah)

The Israeli participants suggested that difference in language and education may have made Sarah feel this way. All Israeli participants went to only Jewish secondary schools as Sarah went to a mixed school with majority Palestinians.

Ian states...

“I was only exposed to Jewish education, radio and television but I wanted to hear the other side.” (Ian)

Through volunteering at a local mixed secondary school, all participants agreed that language was a tense issue.

Mary says...

“From my experience volunteering at the school, I have learnt about the very complex situation that comes from using two languages in the school. The dynamics are very sensitive, for example the Arab teacher is very overbearing and therefore commands more attention. Children know both languages but neither language very well and are often confused. As a group we hope to come up with a way of equalising the level of language and respect for both languages.” (Mary)

Participants then shared their parents and friends' thoughts on the CIA project.

Sarah expresses ...

“My family are supportive of the programme as an opportunity for my age group but my friends question my choice to volunteer for a year when I could be earning money and working.” (Sarah)

Similarly, Ivan spoke of his friends not fully understanding why he participates in the programme. He says...

“Though my friends support me, they see it as a waste of time.” (Ivan)

Ivan's qualifying statement accentuates the feeling that his friends are not really supportive of his participation in the CIA project.

Ivan and Sarah seem to feel that volunteering itself maybe the problem with peer attitudes – it makes no money so it's pointless, reflecting the economic deprivation and lack of paid employment available to many Palestinian youth.



4. CIA participant and CAFOD volunteers(CAFOD,2019)

Theoretical Discussion of Data

Of interest was the notion of cultural identity and experiences of inequality and conflict. These are of relevance to theories of power dimensions and conflict resolution, so were important to gather. The idea was to highlight shared experiences of the conflict from both communities as a tool to build understanding and dialogue.

To begin with, Israeli participants felt the need to express their desire to learn about the Palestinian narrative. Ian and Mary particularly felt strongly about interacting and getting to know Palestinians. The effect of this is that they gained communication skills that could possibly be used to improve relations between the communities at a grassroots level. This ties in with the scholars Dittmann and Samii's research. Their intergroup research highlighted, "Jewish participants confirming that intergroup contact can sometimes be an effective tool for improving outgroup attitudes, even among members of groups in conflict" (Dittmann and Samii, 2016, p. 25). This links in with the purpose of the CIA project; actively contributing to changing attitudes in the wider Israeli community. It does this as the programme focuses on prejudice reduction which occurs when both young Palestinians and Israelis encounter each other and share dialogue. Prejudice reduction is classified as "antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because they are a member of that group" (1954, cited in Katz, 1991, p. 131). Perhaps part of the reason Ian and Mary cared so deeply about meeting Sarah was because of the prejudice from their own communities that they had grown up with. This implies that the use of prejudice reduction is central to Sadaka Reut's work and crucial in maintaining conflict resolution effectively. Therefore, the CIA programme is successful at conducting continual conflict resolution.

In addition, Israeli identity and culture involves the expectation that young people will fight for Israel. This was shown through Nora feeling unsure about compulsory military service and Oliver's decision to not join the IDF. Both of them came across as grappling with their identity and torn between societal Israeli expectations and what they want to do. Sarah presented her identity entirely different. She appeared as being comfortable and secure in her Palestinian identity. This draws from Hammack's work. He explains in detail about the connection between identity and culture. Hammack has the view that identity is a combination of personal experience and narrative (Hammack, 2010, p. 510). The result of this is that culture is intrinsically linked with identity. The significance of this is that it reveals the

power cultural narrative plays in forming someone's identity. This is evident through all of the Israeli participants being surrounded by the narrative of the IDF from an early age and for this to be culturally acceptable in the Israeli community. In Sarah's case, this is especially relevant. Palestinian narrative is dissimilar to that of Israelis because of the oppression and the inequality Palestinians face. Sarah explains the disproportionate educational opportunities, language barriers and financial burdens her community face. One of the reasons this happens could be because of the permanent Israeli narrative being pushed to the forefront. Maybe this then creates systemic inequality in wider Israeli society. The CIA programme brings together two groups of youth with differing identity and culture, challenging each community's narrative. The outcome of this encounter should in theory produce a more balanced and less biased approach to the conflict and issues surrounding it. This was shown through Ian recognising that he had only heard one side to the conflict all his life. The CIA project allowed him and other participants to dilute and dissolve tension at a local community level if they felt that was the needed. This is why, Hammack emphasises the role of narrative being a tool to build sustainable long term conflict resolution. Hence, this clarifies that the CIA is productive in sustainable conflict resolution.

Furthermore, participants described the relationship they have with their religion. Some participants like Ian felt that religion motivated him to help make change towards the conflict. Whereas, Natalie, Nora and Mary seemed to be conflicted with religion. They found it difficult to reject Judaism completely as it is a central concept to Israeli society. Maybe Judaism is used in a way by the Israeli state to keep the asymmetric element of the conflict. This could be interpreted as the power dynamics in Judaism having a correlation with the conflict. Possibly Natalie, Nora and Mary were trying to express this through their conflicted views on faith and the conflict. Thiessen and Darweish argue that when evaluating the effectiveness of conflict resolution programme, one must consider the ongoing power asymmetry. They believe that conflict resolution programmes should firstly "endeavour towards the structural modification of power relationships" (Thiessen and Darweish, 2018, p. 76). The aim of this is so that structural injustices are broken down in order to reduce one community having more power than another community. The consequence of this is that long term conflict resolution can occur. This is because both communities are then equal to one another in regard to, economics, culture, education. The effect of this is that dialogue, partnership and conflict dissolution can happen sustainably. The CIA programme invites both young Israelis and Palestinians to challenge systems of power imbalance and

inequality in their local communities. Thus, this is why the CIA project succeeds at building long term conflict resolution.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper details the lived experiences of a group of Israeli and Palestinian young people. The beliefs, views and ideas they presented touched on various areas of the ongoing conflict. These were grouped into three main themes and explored through theories of power dimensions and conflict resolution. This brought to the forefront that the CIA programme is effective at sustainable conflict resolution. This shows that youth conflict resolution programmes can lead to a form of sustainable community development in the future. More investigation is required on a bigger scale to examine the different barriers that stop conflict dissolution at a local community level in both Israeli and Palestinian communities.

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Appendix

Appendix One - CAFOD Consent Form

Written consent form – interviews, photos and film

CAFOD, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, would like to collect quotes, photographs or footage of you to help raise the profile of CAFOD's work. Please tick the boxes if we may use your interview, photo or video for:

Purpose	Detail	Tick to consent
Publicity within CAFOD	Shared on CAFOD's intranet, staff emails and within the CAFOD building, where they may be visible to the general public.	☒
In CAFOD publications and materials	Published in CAFOD's leaflets, posters and magazines and included in emails to CAFOD supporters. These materials will be mainly for Catholic individuals, parishes and schools in England and Wales.	☐
In external publications	Published on CAFOD's website and social media channels, used in CAFOD press releases and in print, broadcast and online media in the UK and internationally.	☐
In publications and materials for CAFOD's sister organisations and donors	Published in any leaflets/posters/magazines/websites/social media/news media for CAFOD sister organisations such as Caritas agencies or donors such as the UK government Department for International Development.	☐

Note to interviewer – if consent is not given to all channels, consider whether you can guarantee the safety of the individual and ensure their preferred use of their image/story. Your content may not be usable unless full consent is given, so consider whether you want to proceed with the interview/photography/filming.

CAFOD produces materials based on principles of dignity, respect and truth.

To protect the identities of people who may be talking about sensitive or controversial topics, we can use a pseudonym instead of your real name – [please let us know if this applies to you](#).

I have read and understood how you expect to use quotes, photographs and video footage, and am happy for you to do so.

Date: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Name and signature of CAFOD representative receiving authorisation: _____

If child is 17 or under, please also complete:

Name of parent/guardian/person with responsibility: _____

Signature: _____

You can withdraw your consent at any time. If you have any concerns, contact CAFOD's Supporter Care team on 0303 303 3030 (from outside the UK +44 (0)303 303 3030) or email ss-01@cafod.org.uk

Email your completed form, marked as confidential, to Sally.Kitchener@cafod.org.uk or Louise.Norton@cafod.org.uk

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Verbal consent form for interviews, photos and film

Key points

- Written consent is best practice, as well as legally required in many situations, and should be obtained whenever possible. The template form for written consent is available above.
- Verbal consent or preferably written consent must be obtained for all interviews, photos and videos – regardless of location or age.
- Written consent for people under the age of 18 by their parent or guardian must be captured whenever possible. Child protection policies are available on the [child protection COW](#).
- People should not feel obliged to take part. We/the partner should not put pressure on anyone.
- If capturing interviews, photos and/or film while overseas, ask CAFOD staff or partner staff for guidance on obtaining consent, particularly for young people.

How to get verbal consent

Where verbal consent is given from adults or children, it should be given both before and after the interview, photography, or filming.

1. Explain to the person what their story and image will be used for and where. Show them examples of CAFOD materials and explain that publication will primarily be for supporters in England and Wales.
 - Explain that their story may be used in CAFOD's materials such as leaflets or magazines.
 - It may be used on CAFOD's website, which has the potential for distribution around the world, including their own country.
 - It may be used for external publicity such as newspapers, TV, radio and online media.
 If they only want to give consent for certain channels, this must be recorded alongside the interview/footage. Images and biographical information should only be used for the purposes for which consent has been obtained. So if they don't consent to all channels, you may choose not to interview them.
2. Consider the safety and security of the individual, their family and community when capturing their story for further use. Offer to use pseudonyms if needed.
3. Ask if they are comfortable telling their story, having photographs taken and are happy for you to share their story in this way.
4. Ask if they have any questions.

Additional advice for children 17 or under

- Where interviews or footage are to be taken of children, where possible they and their parents/guardians should be prepared in advance and told where information, quotes and images may be used.
- If a child is younger than 16 years old, consent *must* be gained from a parent or guardian (this may be through a partner organisation when working overseas) regarding the publication of images. In addition, consent should also be obtained from the child where they are considered old enough.
- In some countries, parental consent is required for older children – please check with the programme and/or partner staff about local regulations.
- Consent can be written or verbal; adapt communications methods according to the needs of the child and parent/guardian.

VERBAL CONSENT FORM – to be filled in by CAFOD representative

Name of interviewee: _____ Age: _____

Date: _____ Verbal consent given: Yes / No

Name of CAFOD representative receiving authorisation: _____

Email your completed form, marked as confidential, to Sally.Kitchener@cafod.org.uk or Louise.Norton@cafod.org.uk

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