

Intergroup Friendships in Intractable Conflicts

A case study of the Middle East Program for Young Leaders (MEP)



“We make a difference”. Logo made by the MEP participants.



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SUMMARY

Most of my academic background is from psychological disciplines, thus, my focus also within the thematic field of peace and conflict resolution tends to be on psychological processes and how humans respond to and address the various issues involved in large scale conflicts. The hostility that emerges between conflictants in deep seated conflicts, such as the one in Israel/Palestine, is one of my major concerns.

The contact hypothesis proposes that interaction of different groups reduces intergroup prejudice if certain optimal conditions are present (e.g. Allport, 1958). Critics, though, have pointed to the danger of research built on the contact hypothesis of Gordon Allport being applicable only in rare contexts, under highly idealized conditions (e.g. Dixon et al. 2005: 1). The generalisation of such research may not be useful in specific contexts where these conditions are lacking. When applied to areas of conflict, other issues and mechanisms related to the specific area or region, may affect the outcome of the processes in ways that are not presented in the generalized theories.

Changing attitudes and prejudices that in part pertain to whole nations is not easy. I hope through this study to complement theories on peacebuilding and conflict resolution by adding knowledge of the reduction of prejudice in protracted or intractable conflicts. The change of attitudes and prejudice is the focus of analysis in this thesis. A case study of the Middle East Program for young leaders (MEP) is at the heart of the discussion. The objective of this program is to: "Encourage and empower young Palestinian, Israeli and Jordanian future leaders (men and women) to develop a common direction towards peace and to create a sustainable movement for a better future in the Middle East." ¹ (MEP- Note). Information about the program can also be found on their website² and the website of the Abildso Foundation³.

In the thesis I compare findings from the MEP case to theories on the optimal contact strategy, inspired by the early work of Allport, and further developed by a variety of social psychologists through the last fifty years. I also compare the findings from the case to theories on conflict resolution, focusing on interactive conflict resolution, inspired by the work of e.g. Burton, Azar and Kelman, and formulated and reviewed by Fisher (1997). Through this I hope to address some important issues of conflict resolution by the use of knowledge and methods from the psychological disciplines.

¹ The logo on the front page: "We make a difference", is made by the MEP participants and symbolizes the three core values of the program: Commitment (I will), Compassion (U can) & Courage (WE must).

² <http://mep.abildso.org/>

³ <http://abildso.org/>

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1 Introduction

1.1. THE PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

In her report "Peacemaking Is a Risky Business", Hilde Henriksen Waage (2004) emphasises how even seemingly good intentions can contribute to the failures of making good settlements for peace. Asymmetrical relationships and a lack of understanding of the different parties' agendas and wills can give solutions that do not, in the end, result in peace or put an end to violence. This may happen even when there has been established a 'channel' through which talks and negotiations are made possible. Attitudes and prejudice are concepts used to explain the psychological processes that affect the way we think about people's thoughts and actions. In violent conflicts, these attitudes have a tendency to polarize and harden in a way that biases the perception of the other. This can make the road to a settlement or a peaceful agreement much longer than is often the case between neighbouring parties that know each other by friendlier terms.

1.1.1 Concepts & Definitions: Intractable- and Protracted Social Conflicts (PSCs)

Conflict is an important aspect of social change, and conceived to be a positive aspect of developing a 'healthy' culture of change and development in a specific community or organization. Adrian Furnham (1997), addressing conflicts at work and within organizations, argues that "the presence or absence of conflict is most dysfunctional when at extremes: complete absence of conflict is probably unhealthy; just as high levels can be very destructive. Conflict has to be managed." (Furnham, 1997: 384). Underlining the difference between conflict and violence, Galtung & Tschudi (2002) argue that: "Conflict is ubiquitous, violence is not. Hence the big question: How can we approach conflict in a non-violent way?" (Galtung & Tschudi, 2002: 151). Miall, Ramsbotham & Woodhouse (2005), adds to this argument that; "the way we deal with conflict is a matter of habit and choice. It is possible to change habitual responses and exercise intelligent choices" (Miall et al. 2005: 13).

The word conflict comes from the Latin *conflictus*: "striking together with force" (Forsyth, 1999: 236). Conflicts between groups or *intergroup* conflicts can be defined as: "Disagreement, discord or friction between the members of two or more

groups" (Forsyth, 1999: 236). In the conflict triangle of Galtung (1969a; 1996), the relationship between conflict, violence and peace is explained by pointing at three different but interrelated causes of conflict. These are:

- attitudes or assumptions,
- behaviour and
- contradictions (Figure 1.1).

In his model, attitudes are said to consist of three elements: emotive- (feeling); cognitive- (thinking) and conative (will) elements, as to say, they encompass your thoughts and feelings and motivations for acting or *not* acting in certain ways. *Behaviour* refers to how the parties *do* act, as by e.g. coercion or cooperation or by hostility and threats. *Contradiction* refers to the underlying conflict situation or where the parties' positions differ (Galtung, 1969a:486-491; Galtung, 1996: 70-72).

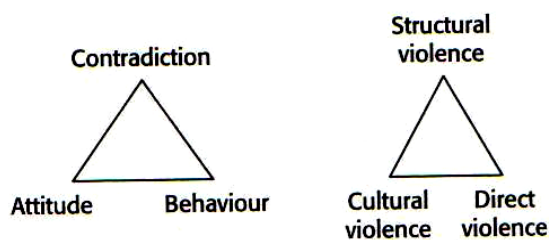


Figure 1.1 Galtung's model of conflict and violence.

Source: Miall et al. 2005 (10, figure 1.1)

Galtung relates different concepts of violence to the different corners of the triangle. *Structural violence* is related to the contradictions. This concept refers to situations when the structures of society cause people to die or suffer. Poverty or being denied access to democratic institutions and society structures, that could have enhanced your quality of living, is encompassed by this same definition. The term *social injustice* has also been used to describe such events (Galtung, 1969b; Galtung 1990)

Direct violence, also referred to as *personal violence*, where people are killed or hurt by physical means is related to behaviour. In these cases one can also say that there is a *somatic* aspect to the suffering (ibid: 174). *Cultural violence*, or what makes us *justify* or choose to perform the differing forms of violence, is related to attitudes

(Galtung, 1990). By the definitions of Galtung, '*negative peace*' is the *cessation of direct violence* and '*positive peace*' is the *overcoming of structural and cultural violence as well* (Galtung, 1996:2). Our responses in trying to resolve the conflict are depending on which of the causes we seek to change or remove.

The studies of interpersonal (between individuals), intragroup (within groups) and intergroup (between groups) conflicts all talk of conflicts that are addressed at different levels of society. This makes it necessary to distinguish between such conflicts at the micro level, within families, neighbourhoods and local communities; and conflicts at a macro level, involving larger groups. Conflicts between nations or ethnic groups at the international arena represent such macro level conflicts.

Following the argument of Lederach (1997), most current wars are intrastate affairs where "the primary issues of conflict concern governance and often involve the pursuit of autonomy or self-government for certain regions or groups" (Lederach, 1997:8). Lederach points out that *identity conflicts* may be the most suitable name for such conflicts, as they often are the result of failure in governing structures to "address fundamental needs, provide space for participation in decisions, and ensure an equitable distribution of resources and benefits that makes identification with a group so attractive and salient in a given setting" (Ibid). Such conflicts, in contrast to conflicts at the micro level, address questions and disputes that are of a political nature, and can be termed *political conflicts*.

Although some would argue that many conflicts evolve around goals that are falsely conceived to be incompatible (e.g. Galtung & Tschudi, 2002:151), political conflicts have been defined as: "The pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups" (Miall et al., 2005: 27). However, this definition is quite vague. It refers to any political conflict, whether it is pursued by peaceful means or by the use of force, but it does not say much about the content of the conflict or its dynamics. Another way to approach the concept of conflict is by identifying the issues of dispute⁴. This can be done by distinguishing between 1) positions held by the parties, 2) underlying needs and 3) interests (Ibid: 18). Some analysts also identify basic human needs as identity, security and survival, and say that these are lying at the roots of other

⁴ Dispute, conflict and contradictions are used interchangeably in this thesis.

motives for conflict (e.g. Burton, 1990; Azar, 1990). It is important to define the roots of the conflict in order to define the conflict and by this find a proper way of addressing the issues of dispute.

The terms *intractable-*, *protracted-* and *protracted social conflicts (PSCs)* are used interchangeably in the literature. These conflicts are seen to result from the denial of basic needs. Edward E. Azar argues that the most important factor related to protracted social conflicts is "the communal content of a society" (Azar, 1990: 7). According to him: "individuals strive to fulfil their developmental human needs through the formation of identity groups" (Ibid). A community is one example of such groups. He has developed a model of the genesis and dynamics of Protracted Social Conflicts (Figure 1.2). Through the colonial legacy and historical formation of a certain region, multicommunal societies rise. These societies have to address the different needs of the often multicultural or multiethnic communities as shown in the frames of the diagram. How this is done is depending on the capacities of the state as well as dependencies on external actors. The neglect or disproportionate management of such issues may purge the development of PSCs as shown in figure 1.3. Many authors point to PSCs as the greatest challenges of peacebuilding efforts.

Lederach says about intractable or protracted conflicts⁵ that they are: "characterized by deep-rooted and long-standing animosities that are reinforced by high levels of violence and direct experiences of atrocities. As a result, psychological and even cultural features often drive and sustain the conflict more than substantive issues". This is in line with the reasoning also of Johan Galtung (1969a).

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict is a typical example of such conflicts. The people on both sides of the conflict are deprived of basic human needs. The Palestinians are deprived of acceptance needs, access needs *and* security needs. The Israelis are deprived of security needs. In addition the Israelis have their historical heritage of thousands of years of deprivation of all three categories of needs, acceptance- and security needs in particular. These issues are amplified in chapter three.

⁵ Concepts used interchangeably (Lederach, 1997: 14)

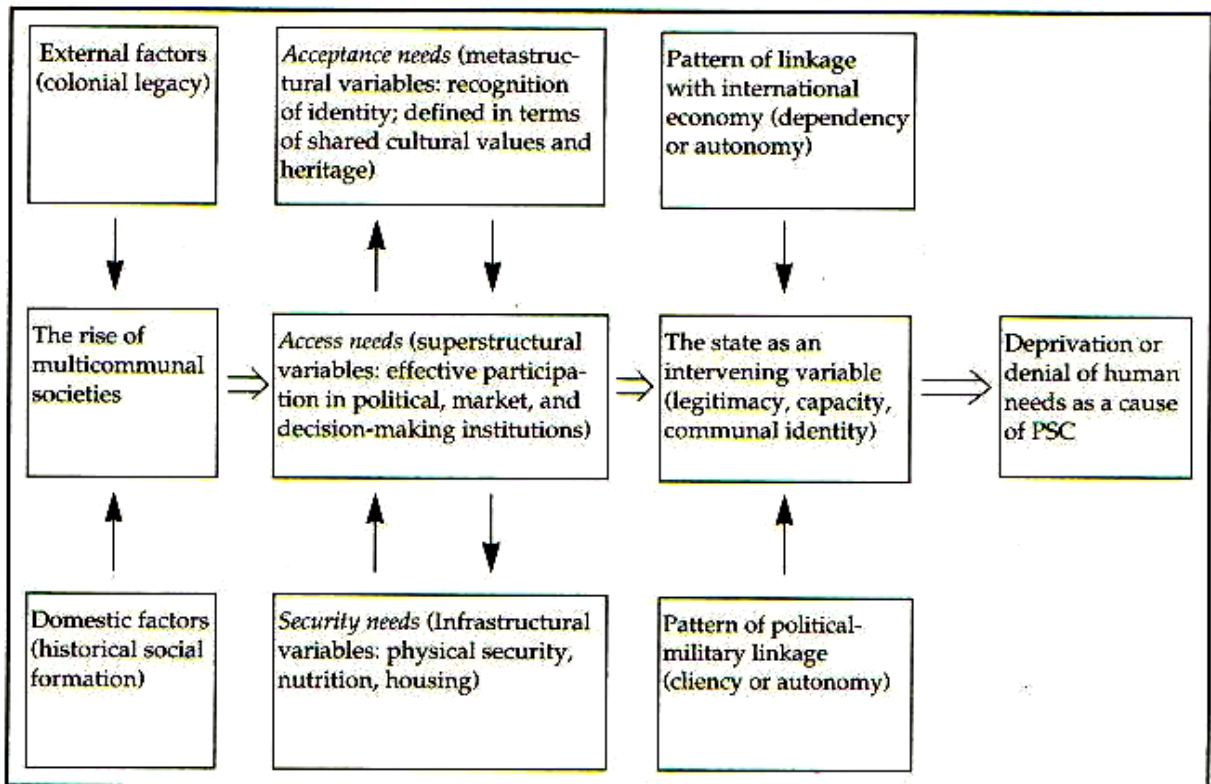


Figure 1.2 Azar's model of the Sources of PSCs.

Source: Fisher, 1997 (84, figure 4.1)

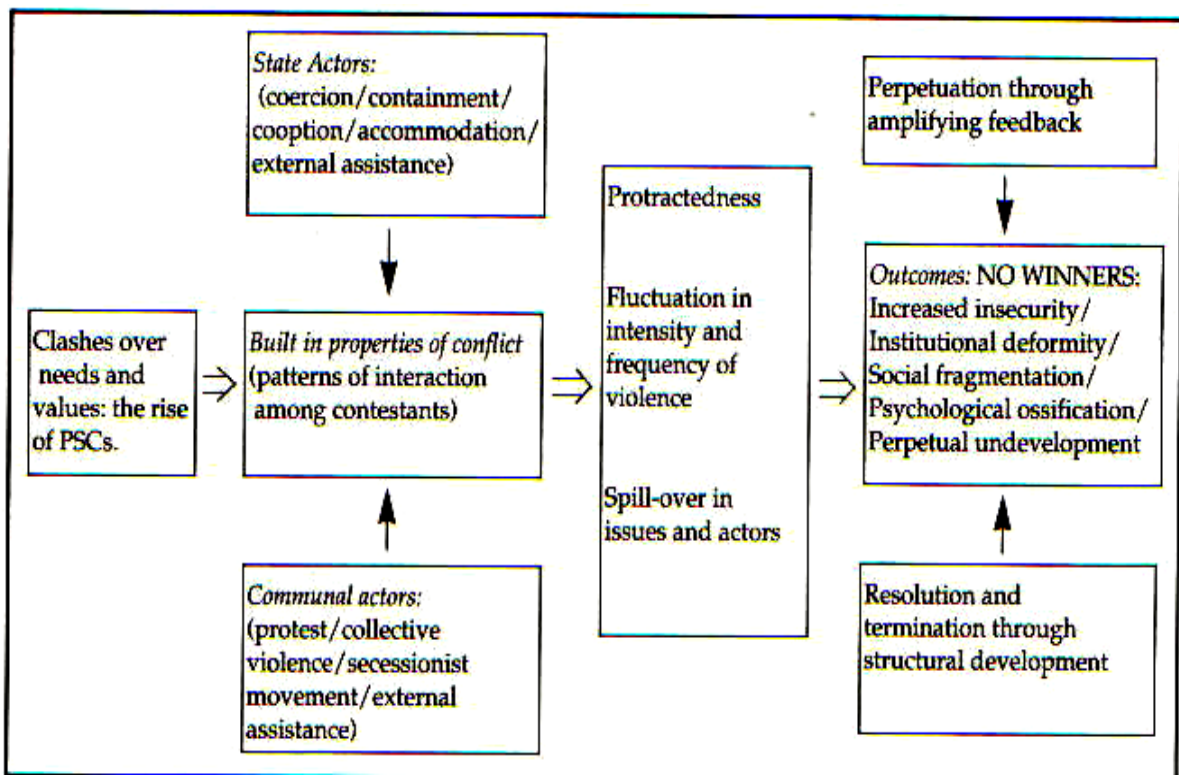


Figure 1.3 Potential outcomes of PSCs.

Source: Fisher, 1997 (86, figure 4.2)

The *sociopolitical reality* of intractable conflicts, regarding the issues of land, political-, civil- and economic rights (Salomon, 2004: 273) is an important aspect as it represents the basis for the contradictions or disputes of such conflicts.

Because the root causes of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict are outside the scope of this thesis, though, the dynamics of protracted social conflicts as described by Azar will not be discussed further in this thesis. The sociopolitical reality will only be discussed in relation to the *sociopsychological* reality, regarding identity, history, and the story a group of people tells about itself, about its role in the conflict and their views of the adversary (Salomon, 2004: 273.). This part of the conflict relates to the attitude part of the conflict triangle of Galtung, and how these may result in cultural violence. Even though, this aspect is closely linked to both structural and direct violence, the theories of Lederach and Galtung are more relevant for the purpose of this thesis, in their focus on the psychological and cultural features and their impact on the conflict. The historical background for the Israeli /Palestinian conflict is important in understanding these aspects. The sociopsychological reality of the conflict can be discussed in relation to how they are portrayed in the collective narratives of the two sides. This is done in later chapters.

According to Polkinghorne (1997); "Narrative is the discourse structure in which human action receives its form and through which it is meaningful (Polkinghorne, 1997: 135). Kacowicz (2005) explains narratives with references to linguistics and literature, and he defines it as: "a fundamental way of organizing human experience and explaining human behaviour, and...a tool for constructing models of reality" (Kacowicz, 2005: 344). The concept is near to ideas labelled as 'beliefs', 'interpretations', 'attitudes', 'values' and 'rationalizations' (Ibid: 345). According to Kacowicz, narratives in international relations: "tend to reflect different images and perceptions of the different actors, about themselves and about their environment" (Kacowicz, 2005: 345), in turn these sometimes lead to misperceptions by e.g. leaders and decision-makers (e.g. Jervis, 1970; Levy, 1983). Kacowicz argues that narratives are polarizing in the times of conflict in a way that they portray antagonists⁶ as the once violating social norms, at the same time as protagonists are seen to do the exact

⁶ The ones you are in conflict with.

opposite. This leads to tendencies of black-and-white dichotomies, driven by attribution errors, "where enemy images are persevered" (Kacowicz, 2005: 345).

Researchers discussing the Israeli/Palestinian conflict heavily emphasise that the conflicting narratives of the Israelis and Palestinians have to be addressed if coexistence in the region is going to be a life in peace (Kahlidi, 1997; Pappé, 2004; Salomon, 2004; Said, 2000). Differences in collective narratives are common in protracted or intractable conflicts. This adds to the importance of addressing these narratives in the thesis.

1.1.2 Why Study a Specific Case?

Peacebuilding efforts in intractable conflicts have been criticized for its lack of research and evaluations of the different programs in the different regions. Salomon and Nevo (1999), discussing the efforts in evaluating such work, argue that: "Peace education, although carried out in a great variety of programs all over the world for at least 30 years, has yet to see its legitimate share of conceptual development and research activity" (Salomon & Nevo, 1999:1). The relevance of research on peace processes and grassroots peace work has increased with the number of ethnic and international conflicts that are now calling for outside help (Bercovitch, 1997: 149). Bercovitch, among others, has emphasised the importance of also evaluating and collecting information from specific cases. According to him, this is important because of the varying interactions and climates that take place in the specific processes and 'rounds of talks'. These make evaluation by objective norms as duration of success or degree of failure non-sufficient (Bercovitch, 1997: 148). Others, like Underdal (1992), have emphasised that negotiating, and mediating negotiations also requires some training as an active practitioner (Underdal, 1992: 252). Such qualities may also best be valuated through a case-based examination.

Hebert C. Kelman (1997), argues that: "A social-psychological analysis provides a special lens for viewing international relations in general and international conflict in particular...It may, therefore, help to explain certain phenomena for which other approaches cannot adequately account, or introduce dimensions that these approaches have not considered" (Kelman, 1997: 192). His arguments for using

psychological analysis emphasise the need of addressing assumptions made about human behaviour *scientifically*:

"Psychological processes at the individual and collective levels constitute and mediate much of the behaviour of nations. Any general theory of international relations that fails to take cognizance of them is therefore incomplete. Indeed, political analysts and actors invariably make assumptions about such psychological processes- for example, when they talk about risk taking, decision making, intentions, reactions to threats and incentives, or the role of public opinion. What psychological analysis does is address such assumptions explicitly, critically, and systematically".

In his book on prejudice, Allport writes about the effect of contact as a means to reduce prejudice and group tensions. This work has been an inspiration for a large number of studies and researchers over the last fifty years, and a large base of knowledge has been inspired by his initial hypotheses. The contact hypothesis the way it was originally formulated states that:

"Prejudice (unless deeply rooted in the character structure of the individual) may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports (i. e., by law, custom or local atmosphere), and if it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups."(Allport, 1954, 1958: 267)

The Middle East Program for Young Leaders (MEP) is a project involving contact between young leaders potentially influencing different levels of the Israeli/Palestinian society. The program explores new ways of building relationships based on a personal and individual commitment, and involving a common agenda, decided and agreed upon by all the parties involved. Reports from the participants, coordinators and facilitators show that the program has succeeded in building relationships across borders, transcending some of the obstacles normally experienced in efforts to break down prejudice.

This thesis is based on a critical analysis of the MEP. By this I hope that the program may give lessons for peace work that precede knowledge of the contact hypothesis originally purposed by Allport, moving beyond the mere contact approach. Comprehensive knowledge of the mechanisms involved is, in my opinion, important for peace efforts on all levels of the affected societies.

As mentioned by the various authors, the differing facets of the process of mediation may best be evaluated through the study of a specific case. I hope that this study will bring contributions to the field of conflict resolution by its focus on facilitation and the dynamics and relationships of antagonists working together in a joint group. In the study I address the question of how relationships developed through different forms of activities, as leadership training and transformational leadership, affect changes in attitudes from attitudes of non-cooperation to attitudes of cooperation and empathy. I also compare the MEP to various theories in the field.

1.1.3 The Research Question

"How can experiences from the Middle East Program for Young Leaders (MEP) extend prior knowledge of 'the optimal contact strategy' in intractable conflict, and thus give basis for recommendations regarding conflict resolution?"

1. 1.4 Thesis Outline

In chapter two, the theories of attitudes and prejudice and the optimal contact strategy are explained and the concepts are defined. There is also a presentation of the research design used for the analysis of the case.

The historical background of the conflict is presented in chapter three. The question of symmetry vs. asymmetry in conflicts is discussed together with an explanation of narratives and how these represents parts of the psychological dimension of the conflict. The importance of legitimizing the narrative of the 'other' is also discussed.

Theoretical perspectives on international conflict resolution and peace building are presented in chapter four. This involves the different models of conflict transformation, and its implications for conflict resolution. It also involves theories of

third party mediation and intervention and Interactive Conflict Resolution, as proposed by Fisher (1997).

Chapter five is mainly a description of the MEP program. In this chapter the background of the program, the selection of participants and main strategies of the program are described.

In chapter six the results from interviews of and reports made by participants and facilitators is discussed, drawing conclusions at the end of the chapter.

In chapter seven the findings from the interviews are compared to the theories, drawing conclusions also of the validity of the study and the contributions of the MEP.

The general findings and lessons learned are presented in the overall conclusions.

2 Theoretical Approach and Methods

In their book: "Designing Social Inquiry. Scientific Inferences in Qualitative Research", King, Keohane & Verba (1994) emphasise the way good qualitative and quantitative research derive from the same underlying logic of inferences, yet, come in different styles. Most research does not fit clearly into one category and "the best often combines features of each" (King et al., 1994: 4-5). Their definition of *scientific research* is according to them, an: "ideal to which any actual quantitative or qualitative research, even the most careful, is only an approximation"(Ibid: 7). Described by them: "Sometimes the goal may not even be descriptive inference but rather ...the close observation of particular events or the summary of historical detail" (Ibid.). According to the authors such findings still meet the criterion of scientific research because they are prerequisites to explanation.

When doing a study of just one case, they emphasise the need for increasing the number of observations:

"If we want more observations in order to test the theory or hypothesis, we can obtain them in one of three ways: we can observe more units, make new and different measures of the same units, or do both, observe more units while using new measures" (King et al. 1994: 218).

In the study of the MEP I am trying to meet these standards. The study is meant to supplement recent theories on the *contact hypothesis* particularly in a setting or context of protracted/intractable conflict. The case is analyzed through the use of research done on attitudes and prejudice as well as conflict resolution and peace building in such conflicts. Attitudes and prejudice and the optimal contact strategy are explained in the first section of this chapter. In the second section intractable conflicts are defined and their conflict dynamics are accounted for. Why the MEP has been chosen as a case and the research- propositions and design are explained in the last section of the chapter, together with issues of reliability and validity.

2.1 ATTITUDES AND PREJUDICE

2.1.1 Definitions

In formal terms, an attitude is "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour" (Fiske et al. 1998: 269). An attitude is expressed by evaluative responses and the object a person directs these responses towards is termed the *attitude object*. It is common to differentiate between the affective, behavioural and cognitive components of attitudes: *affect*, referring to how we feel in relation to the attitude object; *behaviour*, referring to how the attitude is reflected in our actions and *cognition*, referring to mechanisms such as thoughts, memories and rationalisations or the "set of beliefs about the attributes of the attitude object" (Bernstein et al. 1997: 579). An attitude can be based on one, two or all of these components (Moghaddam, 1998: 101).

Leon Festinger (1957:3) argues in his classical cognitive dissonance theory that people change their attitudes in order to make their thoughts, beliefs and actions consistent with one another. Research, though, has shown that people tend to change their attitudes in accordance with their actions even when there is no cognitive dissonance. Daryl Bem (1967), in his Self-Perception theory, argues that people look to their *behaviour* to see how they feel about an object. Elliot Aronson on the other hand, believes that inconsistency becomes important when some aspects of *the self* is involved, and has worked to identify the conditions under which cognitive dissonance occurs (Aronson, Elliot, 1992). He found that dissonance is more likely to occur when people are in *danger of looking stupid or immoral*, when they *voluntarily* agree to perform discrepant behaviour, when they are *committed* to perform the discrepant behaviour or when they feel *responsible* for aversive outcomes (Moghaddam, 1998: 122). Arguing about the specific mechanisms involved, the differing theories seem to agree upon the fact that a change in reported attitudes is one strategy used by people to make them think better about themselves, and thus feel more comfortable. The findings support this notion.

Stereotypes are by Bernstein et al. defined as "the perceptions, beliefs, and expectations a person has about members of some group" (Bernstein et al., 1997: 583). The stereotypes usually involve the assumption that all members of a group

share the same characteristics, even when this is not the case. Stereotypes often lead to or accompany *prejudice*, which can be defined as “an attitude toward others solely on the basis of group membership” (Moghaddam, 1998: 330). Prejudice is by many theorists seen to consist of the same components as attitudes. The stereotype is then the cognitive component; the emotive component is often comprised of hatred and anger; while the behavioural component may involve discrimination (Bernstein et al. 1997: 584). As has been the case in many armed conflicts in recent as well as ancient history, violence against the other group even in the form of genocide has come to result of such prejudice. According to Dovidio and Gaertner (1999) the negative feelings and beliefs that underline contemporary⁷ forms of prejudice are rooted in either individual processes such as cognitive and motivational biases and socialization, or intergroup processes such as realistic⁸ group conflict or biases associated with the mere categorization of people into in-groups and out-groups (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999: 101). In intractable conflicts such as the one in Israel/Palestine, peoples on both sides are in addition reacting to *collective threat and fear* (Pettigrew, 2003: 70). Pettigrew mentions different ways by which threat typically affects individuals, referring to findings done by various social psychological researchers. According to these: " threats diminishes cognitive capacity and increases the emotional influence... it gives greater reliance on group stereotypes...perceptions of the threatening out-group as extreme and homogenous...and heightened distrust, suspicion and prejudice." (Ibid.) According to Pettigrew, the individual effects of fear are exacerbated by *collective threat*, through the process of social support. As to say: *Our responses must be true when everyone else feels the same*. He believes that peoples reacting to strong levels of collective threat and fear often violate also their own deeply held values and principles (Ibid.).

Work by social scientist Gordon Allport (1958) and others, on the reduction of prejudice takes as its point of departure what is called the *contact hypothesis*.

⁷ Recent researchers have made distinctions between traditional, blatant, direct forms of prejudice, and more subtle and less conscious contemporary forms (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999:101; Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997). Because of changing norms and legislative acts against discrimination, at least in western societies, overt expressions of prejudice have declined over the past 35 years. Contemporary forms however, continue to exist (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999:101).

⁸ Conflict as it is defined in chapter one.

Research has shown that intergroup relations can be improved if there is contact between individuals from antagonist groups and this contact;

- 1) Allows for equal status among participants,
- 2) provides opportunities for intimate relations among individuals,
- 3) includes institutional support, and
- 4) involves cooperative rather than competitive interactions⁹ (Allport, 1954: 267).

Research indicates that this type of situations contains some critical elements that provides for a perception of *the other as an individual* rather than as *one of them*. The situation is likely to create a mismatch between existing images of the other group, and the individuals you meet or get in contact with. You start to recognize the heterogeneity of the other group, and this is the beginning of breaking down stereotypes and prejudice (Tal-Or, Bonninger & Bleicher, 2002: 101). These kinds of positive interactions that facilitate the perception of the out group as members of your own group, may eventually lead to the original distinction, but now in a more positive and differentiated context.

Generalization from perceptions of one out group member to the group as a whole may be enhanced by the condition of prolonged contact. As mentioned by Pettigrew (1997: 173) prolonged contact, that has a 'friendship potential' can also allow for the development of empathy towards the other group (Ibid).

Research based on the work by Gordon Allport is called the *contact approach*. After more than fifty years of research, based on this framework, authors are now criticizing some of the research practices dominating this field. Dixon et al. (2005) argue that too much of the studies of interactions are occurring under rarefied conditions and that some of the findings 'gloss over' the 'harsher' realities of social life in cities experiencing high degrees of segregation. This is in spite of interventions to promote desegregation, guided by the contact approach (Dixon et al., 2005: 1). Although the authors recognize that the contact hypothesis "is one of the most successful ideas in the history of social psychology, and...contact researchers are right to claim that desegregation has a potential to reduce prejudice" (Ibid: 3), emphasis is made on the fact that the approach "offers little guidance about how this ideal is to be

⁹ This is "given a population of ordinary people, with a normal degree of prejudice"(Allport, 1954: 267). As to say, a situational variable cannot always overcome the personal variable regarding prejudices (Ibid.).

achieved in places where racial segregation and inequality are deeply entrenched" (ibid: 2).

2.1.2 'The Optimal Contact Strategy'

The *optimal contact strategy* "aims to identify and elucidate the conditions under which contact works most effectively to reduce prejudice and, by implication, to increase the possibility of social harmony" (Dixon et. al, 2005: 4). Prescriptions that in recent years have been recommended in the contact literature are that the contact should:

- be regular and frequent
 - involve a balanced ration of in-group to out-group members
 - have genuine "acquaintance potential"
 - occur across a variety of social settings and situations
 - be free from competition
 - be evaluated as "important" to the participants involved
 - occur between individuals who share equality of status
 - involve interaction with a counterstereotypic member of another group
 - be organized around cooperation toward the achievement of a superordinate goal
 - be normatively and institutionally sanctioned
 - be free from anxiety or other negative emotions
 - be personalized and involve genuine friendship formation and
 - be with a person who is deemed a typical representative member of another group
- (ibid: 5).

Discussing limitations of this optimal contact strategy, Dixon et al. emphasise the fact that scholars working in places such as Israel, Northern Ireland, South Africa and the United States have noted how "wider power structures – embedded within the historical, political, and economic organization of society- make conditions such as equality of status and cooperative interdependence either difficult to implement or applicable only within a narrow range of settings" (Ibid: 7).

Pettigrew and others have emphasised that intergroup friendship has been a neglected point in the contact literature. He also argues that friendships across group lines have special importance for the generalization of contact effects to out-groups not involved in the contact. Pettigrew proposes that the earlier consensus by contact

theorists of cognitive barriers deterring the widespread generalization of contact effects, fails to look at *the affective effects of intergroup friendships, possibly overriding these barriers* (Pettigrew, 1997: 181). His study suggests that interpersonal closeness is an essential condition often not contained in contact situations, and that "...effective intergroup contact relates more closely to the study of long-term close friendships than to the initial acquaintanceship literature. Optimal intergroup contact requires time." (Ibid: 182).

The MEP offers an opportunity to study the effects of intergroup contact in the context of deep seated or intractable conflict. The program is not originally built on or guided by research on the contact approach but includes all of the optimal conditions listed above, as well as other features that might play a role in developing friendship and constructive relationships.

2.2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Robert K. Yin (1994) heavily emphasises the difference between what he calls *statistical* generalization and *analytic* generalization (Yin, 1994: 36). When using e.g. surveys, researchers select a specific sample that is to be transferable to a larger universe. According to Yin this analogy of *statistical generalization* is irrelevant when we are dealing with case studies. In case studies one relies on *analytical generalization* where the researcher strives to generalize a particular set of results to a broader theory. Yin mentions five components that are specifically important in designing case studies:

- 1) a study's questions,
- 2) its propositions
- 3) its unit(s) of analysis
- 4) the logic linking the data to the propositions , and
- 5) the criteria for interpreting the findings (Ibid: 20).

The research design for this study is explained in this section. The last point, though, is left for the discussion in chapter seven.

2.2.1 Why Choose the MEP as a Case?

According to the above mentioned theories, what the research on attitudes in violent conflicts is lacking is mainly three things:

- 1) Studies of programs in specific real life settings,
- 2) An emphasis on long term efforts that by many has been pointed out as crucial for the development of longstanding relationships preferably taking the forms of close friendship,
- 3) *Thick descriptions* of the process the people involved are going through, explaining them more in qualitative than quantitative terms.

As also pointed out by critics of the optimal contact approach, obstacles met in specific contexts of intractable conflicts like the one in Israel/Palestine are many. The political issues, the violence and atrocities and the narratives of hostile images negating the rights and virtues of the people on "the other side" constitute some of these obstacles. In addition there are the barriers of language and the differing traditions and histories of the peoples in the region. Some would argue that one can hardly speak of prejudice in a context where much of the anger and hatred is based on actual violence and injustices that are very real to the people involved in the conflict. Yet, the mechanisms are similar to the ones seen in much less violent contexts. As a result group polarization continues to make peace settlements as well as peace in a larger sense, as the secession from direct-, structural- and cultural violence, less likely.

All of the conditions mentioned by the optimal contact strategy are already parts of the MEP program. The MEP thus represents a unique opportunity to examine some of the mechanisms of the reduction of prejudice in these types of conflicts. The fact that the program is not built on contact literature or the specifications of the optimal contact strategy makes it even more *realistic* compared to other, more experimental studies of such processes.

The program has gone through a selection process choosing participants of different gender, occupation, nationalities, with relative equality of status within the group but also to a certain degree in their lives outside the group setting. In addition to

involving 'a balanced ration of in-group to out-group members'¹⁰ as prescribed by the optimal contact strategy, the MEP-group involve Jordanians and Norwegians, adding to a less hostile and conflict prone atmosphere as reported by the facilitators of the program. The program is also based on a long-term or even life time commitment.

A major advancement in the MEP is that friendships have evolved and continued to exist also outside the group setting when the participants return to their positions in society and to their home environments. This may be viewed as a great success in terms of developing cooperative patterns and prejudice reduction. If this positive development is to be replicated by other programs involved in such work, one has to examine the process the participants have been through. The important question to be raised is which of the processes of the program, if any, actually triggered this development.

2.2.2 The Research Question and its Propositions:

What I examine in this study is how former knowledge on the contact approach corresponds to knowledge in the specific contexts of intractable conflict. This can be gained through a closer examination of the MEP, based on the predictions from the optimal contact strategy. The first part of my research question is the following:

"How can experiences from the Middle East Program for Young Leaders (MEP) extend prior knowledge of 'the optimal contact strategy' in intractable conflicts?"

This is a broad question, and needs to be narrowed down for research purposes. As I wanted to examine the processes of the MEP and to what extent these processes could account for changes in patterns of cooperation between the participants, I chose to focus on these specific processes in the thesis. This is emphasised in the following operationalization:

"How can processes of the MEP explain the emergence and maintenance of cooperative patterns within and between the program participants?"

¹⁰ In this case the ingroup and outgroup refers to Palestinians and Israelis as they form the antagonist groups in the conflict.

By this I have chosen to focus on one particular aspect of the program, the one related to cooperation. In addition there is a focus on the continuation of such cooperative patterns, as to say I am also emphasising the long-term commitment of the program.

In line with the contact –literature such long-term cooperative patterns may take the form of friendships. This is seen to be one of the prerequisites for changing deep-rooted prejudice, as to say, the change of viewing the other participants as an enemy or adversary to a friend or a 'fellow human being sharing a common vision' may be seen as one of its propositions. The view of the other participants and how these have changed while being a part of the MEP is also a main concern in the analysis. The hypothesis is that the contact under the conditions included in the MEP will lead to friendship and cooperation, and thus give the participants a more differentiated view of the other participants hopefully leading to a more differentiated view of the larger groups that the participants represent in their home environments.

Even though the MEP can be labelled a contact approach, it is also a program of transformational leadership, trying to teach and continue to develop the leadership skills of its participants. At the same time it shares features with conflict resolution workshops emphasising the development of skills such as listening, ethics in conflicts, creativity and dialogue. It also uses a practice that the MEP facilitators call: 'learning by discovery through relationships'. Invited guests share their knowledge and experiences regarding certain management skills, just as the participants are able to share their experiences. These additional features of the program may be fruitful in ways not predicted by the contact approach.

In the last part of the research question;

"...and thus give basis for recommendations suited for conflict resolution in such conflicts?",

I am trying to incorporate this part of the study. Implicit in this part of the research question is the *why*, or why the processes used in the MEP should be considered in further conflict resolution work. To answer this, I compare the MEP to other theories

on conflict resolution. These are further discussed in chapter four. I also examine the context of the conflict, focusing on the sociopsychological aspects represented by the history of the region and the narratives and explanations of the participants from the various countries. This is to discuss the additional challenges in efforts to reduce prejudice and promote cooperation and reconciliation, faced in intractable conflicts.

2.2.3 Units of Analysis

I examine the MEP both as a group process and as individual processes in each of the participants. Every participant has an individual motivation for joining the program and also its individual gains, at the same time the focus on joint efforts in making changes in the Middle East is what brings them together. Great efforts are being made by the facilitators to strengthen the relationships and feelings of being a group that work together and keep in contact also in their everyday lives. All of the participants, especially the ones from the conflicting populations, also bring along a strong feeling of belonging to a specific nation. In the analysis it is not possible to fully isolate these three levels of analysis. Yet, in the case study I will focus more on the individual level and the group level, and this is reflected in the interviews. The national level is discussed in the history chapter where also the narratives of the two peoples in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict are elaborated on. In terms of units of analysis, the MEP comprises the eleven participants¹¹ selected for the first phases of the program and their experiences with the program from December 2003 until today. In the study the experiences of these participants are the dependent variable. The program, comprising also of the Abildso team and its coordinators, arranging all the gatherings and making it the program that it is today constitute the independent variable.

2.2.4 Linking the Data to the Propositions

The case study of the MEP relies on four types of sources:

- 1) *Written documents*, constituting reports from the gatherings written by the facilitators and also including comments by coordinators and the participants themselves, applications for funding to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign

¹¹ Two of these later withdrew from the program, and have been given little emphasis in the study.

Affairs, e-mails written by the facilitators, notes from lectures and workshops etc.

- 2) My own *interviews* of five of the participants and one of the Norwegian facilitators.
- 3) A short *documentary* of the MEP, resulting from a film project organized by the participants themselves where some of them are interviewed about their experiences with the program, and
- 4) a *questionnaire* sent to all the participants regarding the specific theme of my thesis.

The questionnaire consisted of only few questions and encouraged the participants to write about their experiences of how the relationships to the other participants have changed, more or less in the form of writing an essay. They have also been asked to focus on particular experiences leading to the specific changes, if there were any¹².

As I already knew that friendships had been formed during the processes of the program, after speaking with the program facilitators, the questions were meant to double-check these assumptions, as well as examine how the participants themselves regarded these friendships and specific changes. The documentary added to this information and gave me an opportunity to see the people I was interviewing, mostly by phone, in the program setting.

Because much research is already done on the contact approach and experiences leading to the reduction of prejudice, inferences could be drawn through the comparison of the program to the specific recommendations of the optimal contact strategy, and also through comparisons to similar projects in the region. Through the interviews I wanted to get a better view of the processes of the program, the ideas and thoughts guiding the actions of the facilitators, obstacles met, how these were responded to and also how the participants functioned as a group. The questionnaire was only meant to add to these data, as some people feel more comfortable explaining themselves in writing. The questionnaire would also give the participants the chance to think things over before they were asked to give their answers.

Because most of the interviews had to be done by phone I gave priority to some of the participants over the others. I decided to prioritize interviews with two of the

¹² As none of the participants responded to the questionnaire, as commented in later chapters, the questionnaire is not included in the appendix.

Israeli participants and two of the Palestinians as these represented the two antagonist groups. As an important part of the program was to include participants from various environments and political backgrounds, I chose participants that reflected this variety also for the interviews. In addition, one of the Jordanians was interviewed. Three women were interviewed, one from each of the Middle East countries, and two males. Due to the extensive amount of material that came from these interviews, and the qualitative and quite exploratory approach I have chosen for the study I decided to focus on these five interviews for the analysis rather than interview the rest of the participants. This would give me more space for an in depth account of the responses given. All of the eleven participants were given the chance to respond to the questionnaire. The interview guide for the interviews of the participants can be found in the appendix. All interviews were recorded, with the consent of the interviewees.

2.2.5 The Validity and the Reliability of the Study

As this study is exploratory and trying to give a thicker description of contact processes based on a quite small group of people, the problems of generalizability are of course many. The personality of the participants may without doubt be seen as a major contribution to its continued success. They were handpicked for the program, and much emphasis was put on their commitment to the program and their abilities of cooperation. Experiences made by the participants prior to or outside the program may also be important in this regard. Even though the study can not be generalized to all kinds of group constellations, the selection of participants can, in my view, be regarded as an interesting part of the analysis in itself. As also mentioned by Allport in his original theory on the contact hypothesis, some personalities have higher levels of prejudice that do not easily change. For changes in early phases of a peace process a focus on people that are relatively 'open minded' may be necessary. By this the case offers a way to examine a path giving positive outcomes. This is important in these types of conflicts. The difference between people that are 'open minded' and people that are not is something that I will not be able to examine in this case, I can only account for the different criteria used when selecting the participants, and some of the background that made them choose to apply for the program in the first place. Yet, as

shown in the interviews presented in chapter six, the participants, based on their experiences in the MEP, have been through a process of change. This may add to the *pragmatic validity*¹³ of the study.

In the analysis I rely on the verbal and written explanations of people, all involved in the MEP program, as to say, much of the data is quite subjective in nature. Yet, the reliability of the varying sorts of measures I use can be evaluated in terms of the consistency between them. I have also tried to ask the same questions in different ways, through different measures, hopefully adding to the reliability of the findings. The validity of the study can be evaluated through its ability to add something to, explain parts of or be explained by parts of relevant theories. In the analysis I compare the study to the various theories discussed in this chapter and chapter three and four.

Sarbin (1986) refers to narratives as "The Storied Nature of Human Conduct", and has proposed the study of narratives to complement more traditional psychological experiments that have been used in analyzing human personality. In line with his work, Singer and Salovey (1993) propose linkages between: "memory, goals, emotion, self-regulation, narrative, and the processes that connect them" (Singer & Salovey, 1993: 3). They focus on what they call *self-defining moments* or "a persons unique set of personal memories" (Ibid: 4) and how this affects an individuals personality. The emergence of a narrative psychology is seen as a consequence of the acknowledgment of the limitations of positivism, focusing on observable events that can readily be quantified and measured objectively. More phenomenological explanations, focusing on the way humans construe meaning out of their lives and experiences, are best understood through written or verbal narratives portrayed by individuals or through collective narratives that are not as easy to capture. Social sciences in general have been criticised for the neglect of these phenomenological explanations during the last twenty years (Ibid: 2). Studies of narratives are also used in sciences such as sociology and history. Thus, they may open for possibilities of dialogue between the differing fields of research. This may contribute to limiting the gap of knowledge about people living under extreme conditions as experienced in

¹³ Pragmatic validity is, according to e.g. Steinar Kvale (1989), 'to make true'. Truth is what helps us to act in a way that contributes to reaching desired outcomes (Kvale, 1997: 86).

regions of intractable conflicts. In chapter three, the context of the conflict and the national levels of the analysis are discussed through the use of historical accounts of the conflict and accounts of the different collective narratives of the Israeli Jews and the Palestinians. I try through this discussion to reflect on the way these narratives affect the realities of the peoples involved in the conflict, and how these may serve as obstacles or peacebuilding. As mentioned by Salomon (2004) they may also play a central role in facilitating coexistence (Salomon, 2004: 273).

3 Historical Backgrounds and the Narrative Perspective

"Although every nationalist movement and creed asserts its uniqueness, all are in fact comparable. All share a common set of assumptions about the proper ordering of human society. All nationalists believe humanity is naturally divided into smaller units, or nations. All nationalists believe the nations can be identified by certain characteristics that all its citizens hold common. These characteristics include the linguistic, ethnic, religious, or historical traditions that make a nation distinctive. All nationalists believe that times might change but nations retain their essential characteristics...All nationalists believe that peoples have a special relationship to some particular piece of real estate in which their ancestors first emerged as a distinct group and flourished...All nationalists believe that nations possess something called 'common interest', and it is the role of the state to promote it. Indeed, all believe that the only form of government that can assure the common interest of the nation is self-government....In the modern world, these assumptions need no explanation or justification. They just *are*. And the very fact that they appear obvious and commonsensical means that nationalism, when used in its most general sense, might be called an 'ideology' "(Gelvin, 2005: 198).

Recent Map of the Israel, the Palestinian territories and the Surrounding Region



Source: University of Texas Libraries, 2006.

The state of Israel comprises almost 80 per cent of what can be labelled historic Palestine¹⁴. Israel's population is about 6, 5 million, and approximately 3, 5 million Palestinians live in the occupied territories¹⁵. The total number of Palestinians, living also outside these territories, is estimated to be around nine million (Gelvin, 2005: 206). The resiliency of the *ideology* of nationalism, as mentioned in the quote above, is not representative for nationalist movements as such. These come and go, and most historians believe that the movements come and go more as results of coincidences and surrounding realities than as results of a 'true' or 'false' nation identity (Ibid: 198).

In my account of the historical background of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict I focus on events that are important in the narratives of the two sides. Many authors have pointed to the fact that these narratives serve to fuel the hostility towards the other side, and this will be discussed in the second section. Not being an historian myself, I have chosen to focus on works by experts on Middle East History. Because of the controversies regarding the different versions of the history in the region, I decided to use literature from experts originating from Israel and Palestine as well as historians from outside the region, acknowledging that finding a complete and accurate description may not yet be possible.

As the happenings around World War I have been important for the shaping of what can be labelled 'Modern Palestine', I start by giving a short description of these events.

3.1 THE HISTORY OF MODERN PALESTINE

At the beginning of World War I the European states divided themselves into two alliances. Britain, France and Russia¹⁶ formed the Entente Powers and Germany, Austria and the Ottoman Empire, the Central Powers (Gelvin, 2005: 175-176). To be in position to claim parts of the Middle East in case of victory, the entente powers formed secret treaties stipulating some form of compensation for fighting their enemies (Ibid: 178). Some of these treaties 'gave away' the direct control over territories that were originally belonging to the Ottoman Empire and some countries

¹⁴ Historic Palestine or The old Mandate Palestine included also the occupied territories.

¹⁵ The West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

¹⁶ And the United States after 1917.

were also given the right to form protectorates or organise zones of indirect control. In addition, the countries committed themselves to establishing an ‘international zone’ in Jerusalem. This was done to make sure that Christian groups would not be in position to deny others access to the holy sites of the city. This was feared by the Orthodox Church in particular, which was looking to Russia for the protection of its interests (Ibid).

3.1.1 The Palestinian Mandate

The former Palestine was to be put under the control of no less than four different countries or foreign governments.

- 1) According to the Sykes- Picot Agreement¹⁷, Palestine, being a part of Syria, was promised to France,
- 2) according to Russian readings of the same agreement, Palestine, being the territory surrounding Jerusalem, was to be under international control,
- 3) according to Arab readings of the letters to Sharif Husayn¹⁸, Palestine was to be part of the Arab ‘state or states’,
- 4) the Balfour Declaration¹⁹ gave support for a Jewish establishment in the same territories (Gelvin, 2005: 179).

When the Americans entered the war, President Woodrow Wilson went against all of this, announcing his basis for post-War Peace in Fourteen Points, two of them being the right of peoples to self-determination and an end to secret agreements. The League of Nations²⁰ was established to provide a way for international disputes to be resolved in a peaceful manner. Interrupted by World War II the peace making efforts of the League of Nations ended in establishing a mandate system. The previous colonial powers were to ‘ensure the sacred trust of civilizations... not yet able to stand

¹⁷ Agreement made between the British and the French, May 1916, dividing the Arab Middle East between them into two spheres of influence and into new political entities (Pappe, 2004: 66)

¹⁸ The British promised Arabian warlord Sharif Husayn the right to establish an ambiguously defined Arab state in the predominantly Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire. This was to be in exchange for convincing his son, Amir Faysal, to launch a revolt against the Ottoman Empire (Gelvin, 2005: 178).

¹⁹ The Balfour Declaration of November 1917 endorsed the Zionist goal of: “establishing a ‘national home’ in Palestine for Jews around the world” (Ibid.).

²⁰ Formed by the entente powers, the USA, Germany and the newly established Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were not initial members.

by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world' (Ibid: 180). The European mandatory powers had absolute rights over both the economical and political affairs of their mandates. According to Gelvin, the states now known as Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Iraq had never before existed and were actually created by this mandate system. France got the mandate for the territory now including Syria and Lebanon. Britain got the mandate for the territory now including Israel, the occupied territories, Jordan and Iraq (Ibid: 181).

3.1.2 The Zionist Movement and Jewish Immigration to Palestine

Around the nineteenth century intellectuals began using the term '*arab*' to refer to their linguistic and cultural community. Nationalist descendents used the term for their own purposes (Gelvin, 2005: 202). Some historians trace the origin of Arab nationalism to attempts made by the Turks to 'turkify' the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century. This is one of many examples of a nationalist movement 'inventing' a nation (Ibid).

Arab nationalism was just one of many nationalist movements that emerged in the Middle East. Arab nationalism as well as a more regional nationalism, though, both lost their influence because of the mandate system, yet, nationalisms as associated with established states have taken hold. The Zionist movement was typical of nationalist movements that arose in Europe during the nineteenth century. *This movement asserts the right of the Jewish nation to an independent existence in its historic homeland.* (Ibid: 206-207).

Theodor Herzl (1890-1904) has been one of the most important persons in the history of Zionism. He meant that the Jews needed a homeland where they formed the majority of citizens and could escape the anti-Semitism experienced in many countries. Palestine was remembered by Jews living all over the world, as the place where Jews were exiled from by the Romans in the first century. Herzl organized the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland in 1897. It issued the Basel Program which called for the establishment of a 'Jewish home' in Palestine. The Program stipulated that Zionists should commit themselves to obtaining this through

diplomacy. The first real success of the Basel Program was the Balfour Declaration (Gelvin, 2005: 207-208).

The British, after receiving the mandate for Palestine, allowed Zionist immigration to Palestine. The immigration began before the Balfour Declaration and continued after the war. It took place in waves. The Jews emigrating to Palestine from Europe in 1904-1914 and 1918-1923 formed many of the institutions and ideals that still exists in Israel (Ibid:208-209). According to Gelvin; "The belief that the Jewish nation had to purge itself of the ill effects of centuries of exile is called ' the negation of exile'." (Ibid: 209).

Even though indigenous Palestinian inhabitants resisted the Zionist Settlement policies in various ways as e.g. land occupations, violence against settlers and destruction of property, these were: "merely defensive, rather haphazard and without political goals. There was no Palestinian national movement until after World War I"²¹ (Ibid: 210).

The tension between the Zionist and the Palestinian community escalated during the late 1920s and 1930s. This was due to the spread of anti-Semitism in Europe that purged Jewish immigration to Palestine dramatically²². According to Gelvin; "By 1931, Zionist land purchase had led to the ejection of approximately twenty thousand peasant families from their lands. Close to 30 percent of Palestinian farmers was landless and another 75 to 80 percent did not have enough land for subsistence"(Ibid: 211). This resulted in an escalation of violence in 1936. This was called 'the Great Revolt' by the Palestinians. The British suppressed the revolt in urban areas. To put down revolts in the countryside the British employed tactics like collective punishment of villages; 'targeted killings' or assassinations; mass arrests, deportations and dynamiting of homes of suspected guerrillas and their sympathizers (Ibid:212). Gelvin sees this as the roots of the 1948 War, also called the *nakba*, or 'calamity' by Palestinians (Ibid).

²¹ Before World War I most educated Palestinian viewed themselves as Ottoman citizens. After the war some were attracted to Arab nationalism, other regarded themselves as Syrians (Gelvin, 2005: 210).

²² The Jewish population expanded from 17 to 31 percent of the total population in Palestine (Ibid: 211).

3.1.3 The 1948 War²³

The revisionist historians in Israel have challenged many of the official Israeli arguments of what really happened during the 1948 War. Others again, have tried counter arguing these propositions. According to Pappé; "Israelis -leaders and people alike- have a genuine psychological problem when faced with the refugee issue. This is indeed for them the 'original sin'...It puts a huge question mark over the Israeli self-image of moral superiority and human sensitivity" (Pappé, 1999: 58). The progress of dialogue and acknowledgment of the need of a peaceful solution between the Israelis and the Palestinians, particularly after the Oslo accords, have added to narrowing the gap between the two versions of the history regarding the Palestinian refugee problem, (Ibid: 37).

According to the later revisionist, Benny Morris (2004), the violence in December 1947 started with Arab attacks against Jewish traffic after the UN general Assembly resolution of November 29th, 1947²⁴. Following his discussion, the Arab exodus was triggered by constantly changing military and psychological realities on the ground in different sectors and "along the time-bar"(Morris, 2004: 70). These realities were determined by changes in strategy and tactics of the Haganah²⁵ that again were responses to Arab strategy, tactics and responses (Ibid.).²⁶

Morris writes that Zionist leaders came to realize that the Palestinians were not ready for war and that their engagement remained largely disorganised and uncoordinated (Ibid: 86). HIS-AD²⁷ officers reported that "...most of the public will be willing to accept partition"(Ibid: 87). Others reported that: "the Arab population of the Galilee is unable to bear the great and prolonged effort [of war] because an absence of any internal organisation" (Ibid).

There were also reports of Arab villagers being afraid that they by surrendering and giving up arms to the Jews would be deemed as traitors by the Arab army if they

²³ This section is in part built on an earlier assignment that I wrote as a part of the course in 'Ethical- and political conflict in the Middle East and North Africa', autumn, 2005.

²⁴ This was endorsing the partition of Palestine into two states (Morris, 2004: 65)

²⁵ The name of the main Jewish militia.

²⁶ Psychologist Thomas F. Pettigrew (2003) argues that peoples under threat "rarely aggress upon one another without rationalizing their actions as reactive- either as revenge for prior aggression or as a pre-emptive strike" (Pettigrew, 2003: 77). The problem is that these rationalized aggressions leads to violence spirals (Ibid).

²⁷The Haganah Intelligence Service, Arab Department.

reached their areas, and that their villages then would be destroyed (Morris, 2004:96). The Haganah, on the other hand, had problems trusting Arab approaches of truce and surrender, thinking that the moves might be merely tactical. They also argued that Haganah policy had to be determined on basis of national, not local considerations. These made it useless to agreeing to ceasefire in some areas while Arabs rejected peace where they, themselves "had the upper hand"(Ibid.).

An effort made in January to make truce in Haifa ended in advice by the Mufti to "remove the women and children from the danger areas in order to reduce the number of casualties" (Morris, 2004: 103). According to Morris a resolution adopted by the Political Committee of the Arab League, September 1947, recommended that the Arab states "open their gates to the absorption of, and care for, the babies, women and the old from among Palestine's Arabs- if events occur in Palestine that necessitate it"(Ibid.). This guideline, endorsed and adopted by the Arab Higher Committee (AHC) and the National Committees and village leaders, contributed to fuelling a mass exodus (Ibid).

3.1.4 The Palestinian National Movement

These first attacks were not to be the last in the 1948 War. The review done by Morris elaborates on how deliberate Zionist policies lead to the blocking of the return of Palestinian refugees and that large parts of the Palestinian population were in fact expelled. Documents from the time of the War show reluctance by Jewish governmental offices in displaying their motives and justifications of their policies, yet, their effects, showed to be very real to the Palestinians.

After the creation of the Israeli state the society of what had been Mandate Palestine, now included the new settlers, the indigenous people living there, veteran Zionists, and close to one million of the indigenous Palestinian population had been made refugees (Pappe, 2004: 142). The quality of life of the refugees in the camps was determined by the regimes under which they were living (Pappe, 2004: 143). By the late 1950s, this desperation lead to guerrilla activity and boys and also girls were recruited from an early age. According to Pappe, this process was a part of the re-emergence of the Palestinian national movement (Ibid: 148).

The Palestinian national organizations started inventing a 'new tradition' involving ceremonies, rallies and days of celebration. This trend was embraced also in Gaza by Palestinian members of the Muslim Brotherhood and the pan-Islamist movement founded in Egypt in 1928 (Ibid.) At the end of the 1950s, Palestinian activists had succeeded in formulating their two clear goals: the creation of a Palestinian state, and the return of Palestinian refugees. The state was to replace the state of Israel and would by this also realize much of the second goal (Pappe, 2004: 151).

The Israeli military regime was putting 160,000 Palestinians under their rule in October 1948. This regime lasted for 18 years. According to Pappe though; "the basic laws passed by the Knesset in the early 1950s served to reinforce a discriminatory situation that persists today" (Ibid: 153-160). According to him, three laws: the law of return, the naturalization law and the law of the Jewish National Fund were deteriorating the situation for the Palestinian population. This was because the laws:

"gave precedence to Jewish immigrants over indigenous Palestinians in almost every sphere....Palestinian land, which at the eve of the war amounted to about 4.6 million dunams [1 dunam = 1,000 m²] within the territory that became Israel, was reduced by 1950 to half a million dunams. By 2000, even though the Palestinian population had grown tenfold, the amount of land available to them remained almost unchanged" (Ibid: 160).

3.1.5 The War of 1967 and the Palestinian Uprising

In June 1967 the Israelis organized a strike against the Arab world, leading to the occupation of the West Bank. According to Pappe, this was partly a result of the nationalist thinking of the 'redeemers' who regarded the West Bank as an important part of the Jewish state. At the end of the Six Day War, Israel also controlled the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights (Ibid: 187-188). According to Pappe; "In 1972, 1.5 million refugees were registered, of whom 650,000 lived in thirteen camps in Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. The number of refugees would increase to about 2 million by 1982" (Ibid: 189). Jordan was the only country where there was no prohibition of land purchase and real estate transactions for the

Palestinians but even here most of the refugees lived under humiliating conditions (Pappe, 2004: 190).

Experiencing the military rule united the Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the people living in camps in other Arab countries lost hope in the ability of the political leaders to change their situation. The PLO started recruiting the refugees in the camps for the liberation struggle. Candidates went through military training and nationalist education and graduates were rewarded with influential positions in the community. The resistance movement al-Muqawamma, revolted against the PLO's leadership and installed Yasser Arafat as its leader in 1968. This allowed Fatah²⁸ to tighten its control over the organization and restructure it after Leninist lines. After the 1967 War al-Muqawamma's focus became the liberation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Ibid: 191-193).

Between 1967 and 1987, several terrorist attacks organized by the PLO were retaliated and 'revenged' by Israel. Using security issues as a main reason, additional efforts were made by Israel to expand their territories and domination in the region. This resulted also in two awful massacres in refugee camps in Lebanon. Judaization became an important part of the domestic politics of Israel. In 1975-76 the Housing ministry was waging a campaign where Jews were asked to settle in Galilee "in every possible way: new towns, new kibbutzim, new community centres" (Ibid: 227). Emergency regulations from the British Mandate were used to expropriate land without compensation or the right of protest.

The word *intifada*²⁹ was used to describe the Palestinian uprising, starting in December 1987 as an attempt to end Israeli presence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Ibid:232). The PLO publicly announced their Declaration of Independence, 15 November 1988 (Ibid: 241). The intifada ended in 1991 after the Israeli army used an economic clampdown on villages as a last resort, cutting electricity and water.

According to Pappe: "The Oslo document represented a meeting point between an Israeli wish to compromise territorially and a PLO willingness to begin peace negotiations with such a compromise- but by no means to conclude them" (Ibid: 242).

²⁸ One of the most significant Palestinian organizations, with Yasser Arafat as one of its centre figures, springing from the *fidaiyyun* (Palestinian fighters) (Pappe, 2004: 149,322)

²⁹ Arab for 'shaking off' (Ibid: 232).

The agreement took the form of a document called the Declaration of Principles (DoP) and was proclaimed on 13 September 1993 on the White House lawn. Following the agreement, three subjects were to be dealt with in future negotiations: the question of Jerusalem, the fate of the Palestinian refugees, and the problem of the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. As pointed out by Pappé, this exposed the real nature of the conflict rather than a good solution that would end it. As the agreement in practice seemed to be very far from what was written in the document and actions continued to reflect the reality of Israeli superiority in power, the Oslo agreement lost its image of a 'process of peace' around 1996. The tragic assassination of Rabin in 1995 was adding to this trend (Pappé, 2004: 243- 248).

Most Palestinians saw the Oslo process as just another form of occupation and the Jewish community felt that it had failed on the personal security issues. In October 2000 the Palestinians were again taking military actions against Israel, after Sharon visited Muslim wholly places in Jerusalem. This time suicide bombing had become a preferred method for people wanting to oppose the occupation by force. According to Pappé, this was connected to the emergence and development of political Islam in Palestine, and should not be confused with a support on religious, legal or textual grounds (Ibid: 259-261). The political support for such political Islamist groups has continued to grow in the occupied territories, as showed also in the support for Hamas³⁰ in the 2006 elections.

3.1.6 Asymmetries in Conflicts

Symmetric conflicts are conflicts of interests between relatively similar parties when it comes to power³¹ (Miall et. al. 2005: 21). When conflicts arise between more dissimilar parties such as a majority and a minority, or an established government and a group of rebels, they are labelled *asymmetric conflicts*. In these cases the very

³⁰ Hamas is an Islamic resistance movement, belonging to the brand of political Islam, and was founded by the leaders of the old Brotherhood on the first day of the first intifada. The old Brotherhood was a Palestinian branch of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, taking the hold over Palestinian politics on the West bank and the Gaza Strip between 1948 and 1967. Hamas, or the new Brotherhood, formed a military wing aimed at fighting the occupation alongside the PLO. According to Pappé, Hamas was one of the first political Islamist groups regarding the actions of suicide bombers as martyrdom (Ibid: 261-262).

³¹ I will not discuss the relative aspects of power in this thesis, but merely point to the fact that some parties are less dependent on the concessions of the other parties, as they may obtain their goals without cooperation. This gives them an advantage regarding their bargaining positions.

structure of the parties and the relationship between them may be parts of the roots of the conflict. Changing this structure may be necessary for resolving the conflict (Ibid.). In asymmetric conflicts the 'top dog' normally 'wins', but also asymmetric conflicts normally impose costs on both parties. Even in highly asymmetric conflicts the parties may reach a situation of *mutually hurting stalemate*. This is when both parties decide that they can not bare the costs of further conflict, and is usually the point when the conflict is *ripe* or the parties are ready for negotiations towards a settlement. Zartman and Rubin (2000) have studied the paradox of 'weak states' negotiating with 'strong states' when "by all counts they should loose" (Zartman & Rubin, 2000: 271). They have found that symmetric conflicts whether high or low in power often result in deadlocks (Ibid: 272-273). They have also found patterns in the way stronger parties in contrast to weaker parties form their negotiation strategies. "The party perceived as the stronger on the basis of undeniable power possessions- the United States, the European Community, India, and the entire developed 'North' – adopted forms of a take-it-or-leave-it strategy towards its negotiating partner located on a spectrum of weakness" (Ibid:275). They also found that "Weaker parties respond not by acting submissively, but by adopting appropriate counter-strategies" (Ibid: 277). The patterns showed that the weaker party increased their predicted effective power by making "a nuisance of themselves over issues that mattered much more to them than to the distracted and strong partner busy with other problems" (Ibid.)

As emphasised in the report of Hilde Henriksen Waage (2004), the asymmetric relationship between the Israeli government and the PLO was one of the reasons why negotiations such as the Oslo talks have not yet led to peace in Israel/Palestine. It was also a problem that the Norwegian mediators did not manage to do their part in trying to level the parties and reach 'just' agreements satisfying both sides. As she mentions, levelling the conflict might not be possible without extensive efforts also by external actors such as the United States, as they contribute to the asymmetric relationship through their financial and political support (Waage, 2004).

The effectiveness of negotiations is one issue regarding asymmetry in conflicts. The imbalance in power may make the road to a settlement shorter as both parties "adjust their behaviour to the relative power of the other side" (Zartman & Rubin,

2000: 284). Yet, what is seen in intractable conflicts in particular, is that the negotiated settlements often do not satisfy the weaker party, even when their governments have made an agreement. As for democracies in general, how to satisfy the minority that does not have the power to make majority decisions is a complicating issue. This is also a problem in articulating peace settlements. As within democracies, peace agreements made *between* the governments of two or more nations or communities will also have to go through the 'tests' of public opinion and satisfying the needs of the affected populations. This increases the necessity of representative agents engaging in such processes.

3.2 TWO VERSIONS OF HISTORY

Historians have pointed out that the historiography of modern Palestine has inherent biases. This is due to the violent nature of the conflict, taking the form of a war, where documents and archives are deliberately being kept out of the public sphere, but it is also due to the asymmetric relationship between the Israeli and the Palestinian populations in the region. Rashid Kahlidi (1997) emphasises the fact that most writing about modern Palestinian history has been done by non-Palestinians which have lacked: "an intimate familiarity with the indigenous sources, the individuals concerned, and the social and cultural context of Palestinian politics" (Kahlidi, 1997: 90). Valuing cross-cultural approaches on the one hand, he emphasise the obvious need for a people to write their own history on the other (Ibid.).

This has for a long time been the argument also of Edward Said (2000), arguing for the rights of the Palestinian people. According to him, national identity involves narratives of e.g. the nation's past and its founding fathers. He also points to the fact that "the art of memory for the modern world is both for historians as well as ordinary citizens and institutions,... something to be used, misused, exploited" (Said, 2000: 179). The fact that the Palestinian history has not been recognized and that the Palestinians have never received any official acknowledgment of the injustices that was done to them in the aftermath of World War II is one of his main concerns. The story of Jewish independence and re-emergence after the Holocaust has been so strong that it has been: "impossible to ask the question: Liberation for whom?" (Ibid:

184). In the view of Said, the greatest battle the Palestinians have waged has been over the right to remember and possess a collective historical reality.

3.2.1 Narratives and Self- Defining Moments

In line with the reasoning of Lederach and Galtung, Salomon (2002) emphasises that intractable conflicts are ongoing violent conflicts between actual adversaries that are "basically conflicts about tangible resources, accompanied and sustained by collectively held national, ethnic, tribal or religious narratives describing (the good) *us* vs. (the bad) *them*," (Salomon, 2002: 6). The aspects of attitudes and cultural violence, as described by Galtung, are in my opinion best understood through the differing narratives of this specific conflict.

Daniel Bar- Tal (2005) suggests a new conceptual framework that illuminates the *psychological spheres* of the society members involved in intractable conflicts. He assumes that although having its unique context and characteristics, each intractable conflict involves general psychological principles and dynamics that are similar, and knowledge of these mechanisms and dynamics will be important to make needed psychological changes in the process of peacemaking and peacebuilding (Bar-Tal, 2005: 4-5). His framework emphasises the two-faced nature of collective narratives in intractable conflicts, as they serve to satisfy basic needs of the society members, enabling them to cope with stress and withstand the enemy, at the same time as they may 'close minds' and thus contribute to the continuation of conflict as well as serve as a barrier for resolving it (Ibid: 38).

As emphasised also by Said, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, in addition to its socio-political aspect, has the sociopsychological one (Fisher, 1997; Salomon, 2004; Lederach, 1997). Polkinghorne (1988), in his account of narrative knowing and human existence, point at how: "Narrative opens the experience of history and moves it beyond personal history to create a communal history" (Polkinghorne, 1988: 134). The sociopsychological reality is portrayed in a people's collective narratives and is reciprocally interrelated to the socio-political reality of a region. Polkinghorne argue that cultural traditions offer *plot lines* to us that can be used to make events into stories. He uses the words *narrative schemes* to describe schemes that organize

individual events using a framework including our purposes and desires depending on and restricted by our *physical, cultural and personal environment* (Ibid.). As to say, while collective identities influence political and social change, they are at the same time transformed in response to such changes, as they come to be parts of the political and social environment. Following this reasoning, narratives may serve to unite a people against perceived oppressive power structures, providing collective explanations and 'stories' regarding the perceived oppressors. This may again affect the way one decides to approach issues of conflict.

Rouhana and Bar-Tal (1998) emphasise how the clashing narratives of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict have some unique characteristics that makes the conflict very resistant to resolution. According to these narratives, both peoples perceive themselves as the inclusive indigenous people on the land; the Jews, by their historical and biblical heritage there, the Palestinians, being the ones inhabited there for thousands of years before the Jewish immigration on the eve of the 20th century. Both have a history of victimization, thus they both share a basic sense of lack of security and mistrust of the whole international community (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998: 763-764). The authors also emphasise that there is a double asymmetry in perceived power in the conflict. The relations between Israel and the Palestinians is characterised by a perceived asymmetry in favour of Israel, while when regarding the power relations between Israel and the Arab world, the Arab world surpass Israel in human and material resources and capability of enduring a defeat (Ibid: 764). According to the authors this is how power relations are perceived by many Israelis, and they emphasise that this double asymmetry generally has been overlooked in studies of conflict resolution and impact of intergroup perceptions. (Ibid: 764-765).

According to Rouhana and Bar-Tal:

"Society members seek and process information in selective and biased ways because the stressful and threatening conditions cause increased motivation for closure, which leads to cognitive freezing. Under cognitive freezing, society members commit themselves to certain beliefs and refrain from critically challenging them" (Ibid: 766-767).

This underlines the dual role of the collective narratives, being necessary tools for human survival when experiencing extreme animosities, yet at the same time fuelling hostilities by contributing to an often stereotyped view of the adversary.

3.2.2 Legitimizing the Collective Narrative of the 'Other'

Rouhana and Bar-Tal argue that for conflict resolution to happen in intractable conflicts like the one in Israel/Palestine there has to be profound changes of beliefs by leaders and negotiators, as well as by the society at large in order to support a negotiated agreement (Ibid: 767). Salomon sees the mutual legitimization of the other's collective narrative as the most important goal of coexistence education in Israel/Palestine. To him, this means acknowledging the right of the other's narrative to exist and "accepting its validity on its own terms" (Salomon, 2004: 278). According to Salomon:

"When a community's collective narratives start becoming questioned and 'sacred cows' becomes candidates for slaughter, the monolithic grip of the collective narrative weakens and an examination of each side's actions can take place. It is, no doubt, a soul searching process: Although it does not pertain personally to the individuals involved in a coexistence program, it nevertheless, is an assault on their collective identity and pride" (Ibid: 279).

He argues that the process of legitimization must be gradual. First, this should take the form of gaining familiarity with the narratives of the other, e. g. through personal stories portrayed by someone representing the antagonist group. Ideally this will lead to the acknowledgment of the fears and suffering experienced by the 'others' and an acceptance of their right to feel humiliated, oppressed or discriminated against. The next step would be the acknowledgement of the history the way the people of the other side sees it, and again, the acknowledgement of one's own role in the conflict (Ibid: 278-279).

Regarding the question of asymmetry in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Salomon argues that as the two sides in the conflict differ in their social class, political power, education, and also their legal and civil rights, it is also true that the

Jewish- Zionist narrative dominates, at least within the Israeli territories. Thus, it may not make sense to expect the Palestinians to accept the Jewish-Zionist narrative as legitimate, as this is already the dominating one. Yet, Salomon proposes that the Palestinians should be expected to come to accept the Israeli side's right to live securely (Ibid: 281).

As emphasised by Rouhana and Bar-Tal among others, it is extremely difficult to produce a vision of peace in societies "embroiled in intractable conflicts whose dynamics are not conducive to such vision" (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998: 768). Yet, they argue that some psychology based intervention methods can contribute to initial steps, such as changing beliefs necessary for engaging in a conflict resolution process and exploring narratives in small groups. They outline the references to several such methods or workshops in their article (Ibid: 768-769). Some of these will be considered in the analysis of the MEP in the remaining chapters of this thesis. The MEP approach though differs in its efforts in building relationships before focusing on political issues. Addressing political issues or leaving them out is a question of controversy in coexistence work. This is one of the aspects discussed in the following analysis. First, though, in the next chapter, theoretical perspectives on conflict resolution and peace building are discussed.

4 Theoretical Perspectives on Peacebuilding & International Conflict Resolution

Within the framework of peacebuilding and conflict resolution there is a need of clarifying concepts as the terminology used in this field of practice and research often is ambiguous and the concepts overlapping. In this chapter I account for theoretical perspectives I have used in the analysis of the MEP.

4.1 CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

4.1.1 Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

As shown by the conflict triangle and also other, more circular models of conflict dynamics, it is not always easy to define what comes first, the contradictions, behaviour or attitudes. Miall et al. proposes a circle of social change to illustrate conflict dynamics and conflict resolution (Figure 4.1).

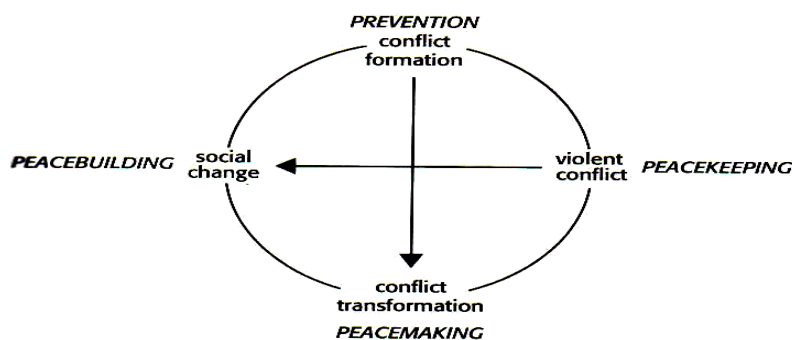


Figure 4.1 Conflict dynamics and conflict resolution

Source: Miall et al, 2005(23, figure 1.9)

In this model the 'life cycle' of conflict is seen as a progression from peaceful social change to conflict formation to violent conflict, then to conflict transformation and back to social change. The sequence can also go directly from conflict formation to transformation and back to social change, or from conflict formation to violent conflict and back to the creation of new conflicts. Transforming the conflict or questions of dispute from violent or suppressive actions into peaceful behaviour, is the

challenge of social actors in the affected society. This is also the subject of conflict resolution.

Conflict resolution implies that the deep-rooted sources of conflicts are addressed and transformed. This term refers both to the process of bringing about these changes and the completion of the process. In addition it refers to the work of practitioners both on the interpersonal level and between different constellations of groups. Still, the senses of the term seem to emerge, as many of the mechanisms involved are similar or the same (Miall et. al., 2005: 29).

Miall et al. define *peacemaking* as a sense of "moving towards a settlement of armed conflict, where conflicting parties are included to reach agreement voluntarily" (Miall et al., 2005: 30). *Peacekeeping* refers to "the interposition of international armed forces to separate the armed forces of belligerents" (Ibid.). This concept is now often associated with monitoring and policing and supporting humanitarian intervention, but can also take the form of military interventions. *Peace-enforcement* is defined as: "The imposition of a settlement by a powerful third party" (Ibid.). Contrasting these varying concepts, *peacebuilding* is, according to the same authors, underpinning the "work of peacemaking and peacekeeping by addressing structural issues and the long-term relationships between conflictants" (Ibid.). Following the definitions of Galtung, mentioned in the introductory chapter, peacebuilding, thus addresses issues of *positive peace*, while peacekeeping and peace-enforcement mainly address issues of *negative peace*. According to Ronald J. Fisher (1997), peacebuilding; "Combines the classical meaning of social development to reduce inequity with a new interactive element designed to improve the relationship and deescalate hostility between the parties." (Fisher, 1997:168).

The hourglass model of Miall et al. (Figure 4.2) illustrates the different phases of conflict escalation and the different concepts used within the framework of conflict resolution. The hourglass represents the narrowing of political space that characterizes conflict escalation, and the widening of political space, that characterizes conflict de-escalation. Different conflict resolution responses become more or less appropriate as the space narrows and widens. By this model cultural and structural peacebuilding are parts of both the prevention of conflict, at the top of the hourglass and normalization

and reconciliation after a conflict settlement, at the bottom of the hourglass. *Conflict settlement* corresponds to 'elite peacemaking' or negotiations and mediation among the decision-making protagonists.

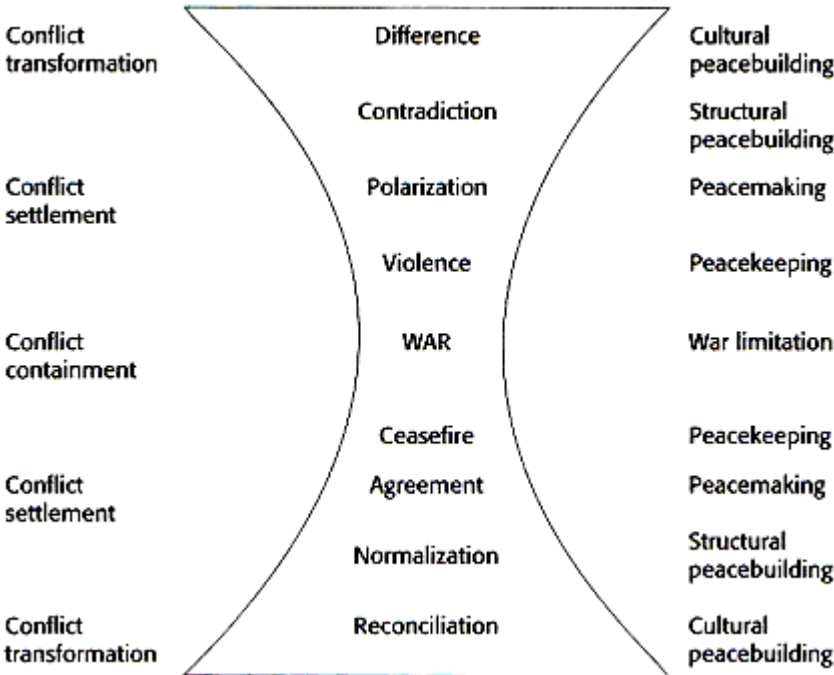


Figure 4.2 The hourglass model
 Source: Miall et al. 2005 (12, figure 1.3)

Third party interventions have originally been seen as interventions by external actors, but there has been a shift towards appreciating efforts of also internal third parties (Miall et. al. 2005: 25). The role of third parties will be discussed in the next section, along with the different mechanism of conflict transformation.

Boutros- Boutros-Gahli, in *Agenda for Peace*, defines *post-conflict peacebuilding* as "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" (Boutros-Boutros-Gahli, 1992: II: 21). As the discussion of the different concepts in relation to the escalation, transformation and de-escalation of conflict shows, there is no clear beginning or end of the conflict or the need for peacebuilding efforts. The focus of this thesis is on peacebuilding through dialogue and building friendships between antagonists in the conflict. Because the need for peacebuilding efforts is rather constant in intractable

conflicts, the thesis accounts for such work in areas of intractable conflicts per se, and not in post-conflict areas as the definition of Boutros-Boutros-Gahli presumes.

4.1.2 Intervention by a Third Party

As indicated above, conflict resolution implies a transformation of the institutions and discourses that reproduce violence (Miall et. al. 2005: 29). "Where two parties are reacting to each others' actions, it is easy for a spiral of hostility and escalation to develop through positive feedback."(Miall et al. 2005: 18). This is one of the obstacles faced in intractable conflicts. According to Fisher's model of *third party consultation (TPC)* the role of a third party is central or even essential in conflict analysis and resolution (Fisher, 1997: 142).

Third party interventions are usually done through the use of some kind of *diplomacy*, and it is common to distinguish between three tracks of diplomacy. Track I diplomacy involves official governmental or intergovernmental representatives. These can use good offices, mediation and sanctions or 'carrots and sticks' to force or press for a mutually accepted outcome. They can also work simply as facilitators making the actual rounds of talks possible.

Track II diplomacy involves unofficial mediators who do not possess the means of carrots and sticks, but work with the parties encouraging them to find mutual agreements (Miall et al. 2005: 20-21).

Track III diplomacy put emphasis on the importance of indigenous resources and local actors and involve also grassroots movements (Ibid: 25).

The role of the third party, whether in track I, II or III diplomacy is to "assist with the transformation from what is an un-peaceful relationship, into one that is peaceful and dynamic" (Ibid: 21). As already mentioned, this is done by helping the parties to engage in and 'meet' in some form of communication or dialogue. Though, in peacebuilding, dialogue is used in a different sense than its common use in non-conflict areas.

The word dialogue comes from the Greek 'dia' meaning 'through' and 'logos' meaning 'the word', or 'the meaning of the word', thus the dialogue process may be seen as a stream of meaning that flows through and among the people involved

(Bohm, 1996: 6). According to Bohm, dialogue is not the same as *discussion*, or *debate*. These forms of conversation implicitly point toward a goal, tries to make an agreement, solve a problem or "make your particular point prevail" (Ibid: 7).

According to Bohm: " In the dialogue group we are not going to decide what to do about anything....We must have an empty space where we are not obliged to do anything, nor to come to any conclusions.." (Ibid: 17). In the 'International Online Training Program On Intractable Conflict' (2006), it is also stated that dialogue is a process "in which parties engage in deep and meaningful conversations with their opponents, not for the purpose of resolving a dispute, but rather for developing a better understanding for the people 'on the other side'. Through dialogue, disputants break down negative stereotypes, focus on deep-rooted feelings, values, and needs, and come to understand the complexity of the conflict and the issues on all sides." (International Training Program On Intractable Conflict, 2005: 7). Constructive dialogue between people from antagonist groups that possess a lot of hatred towards each other is difficult, and there is a need for a third party facilitating and supervising the way individuals respond to each others thoughts, arguments, feelings and ideas.

Fisher has developed a model of interactive engagement between parties in conflict, called *Interactive Conflict Resolution (ICR)*. According to him, this method has great potential complementing other existing methods of conflict management, particularly in the de-escalating phase. It can thus, supplement traditional diplomatic activities (Fisher, 1997: 163). ICR is defined by Fisher as:

“..involving small-group, problem-solving discussions between unofficial representatives of identity groups or states engaged in destructive conflict that are facilitated by an impartial third party of social-scientist-practitioners. In a broader manner, ICR can be defined as facilitated face-to-face activities in communication, training, education, or consultation that promote collaborative conflict analysis and problem solving among parties engaged in protracted conflict in a manner that addresses basic human needs and promotes the building of peace, justice and equality.” (Ibid: 8).

This approach is coming close to the one adopted by the MEP facilitators, yet it differs by its emphasis in the choice of facilitators and in the focus on basic human

needs and the more political issues of conflict, not addressed at the current stage of the MEP program.

4.1.3 Three Levels of Leadership

The MEP case is comprised of young leaders from Norway and the Middle East. The participants were selected for the program because of their potential as opinion leaders and 'agents of change'. Hopefully they will use their MEP network and relationships with people from the other side in the conflict to change the violent structure and culture of their societies. Lederach, has made a model of different levels of leadership based on the view that the affected population in a setting of internal armed conflict is represented by leaders and other actors, as well as the roles they play in dealing with the difficult situation (Lederach, 1997: 38). This is illustrated by a pyramid, where leadership is laid out in three major categories: top level, middle range and the grassroots (Figure 4.3).

Level one comprises the key political, religious and military leaders in the conflict. These are leaders with high visibility in society. These leaders are usually locked into positions regarding the issues of the conflict. The leaders are also perceived to have the power of making decisions for and deliver the support of their respective constituencies (Ibid: 38-40).



Figure 4.3 Lederach's model of actors and approaches to peacebuilding

Source: Miall et al.2005 (24, figure 1.10)

On the second level are persons who function in leadership positions but whose position is not necessarily connected to or controlled by the authority of the formal government or major opposition movements. Some of these are persons who are highly respected as individuals within certain occupations. Others may be leaders of important networks or groups connecting a certain region or community. The category of middle range leaders also comprise well known personalities belonging to a certain ethnic group or e.g. prestigious poets and Nobel Prize winners that are well known also outside their specific region. The second level leaders may have influences reaching leaders at the top levels at the same time as they are not bound by the same political or military restrictions as the leaders at the top level, and they often have connections through networks across the human and physical geography of the conflict (Ibid: 42).

The grassroot level represents the base of the society. In protracted conflicts these may be involved in efforts such as finding food, water, shelter and safety. The leaders on this level are refugee camp leaders, health officials or members of indigenous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Unlike many actors at the higher levels of the pyramid, these leaders experience the deep-rooted hatred and animosity on a daily basis. (Ibid: 43).

The *middle range approach* to peacebuilding is based on "the idea that the middle range contains a set of leaders with a determinant location in the conflict who, if integrated properly, might provide the key to creating an infrastructure for achieving and sustaining peace" (Lederach, 1997: 46). Lederach mentions that a theory or literature of such an approach to peacebuilding has not yet been developed, but that there are other parallel approaches. According to Lederach, the middle range approach to peacebuilding, the way it is represented to day, fits into three categories: problem-solving workshops, conflict resolution training, and the development of peace commissions (Lederach, 1997: 46?).

Fisher, building also on the theories of Lederach, has made a schematic model of the potential transfer effects of interactive conflict resolution (Fig. 4.4). His model shows the potential transfer effects of ICR interventions on the policymaking and interaction of antagonists. In the model there are two parties. For each party, some

important actors in policymaking are identified, the leadership, the governmental bureaucracy, public-political constituencies, diplomatic representatives and unofficial diplomats involved in ICR or other unofficial interactions. The model is meant to encompass both highly organized and institutionalized entities such as states and structured collectivities such as insurgent groups (Fisher, 1997: 201).

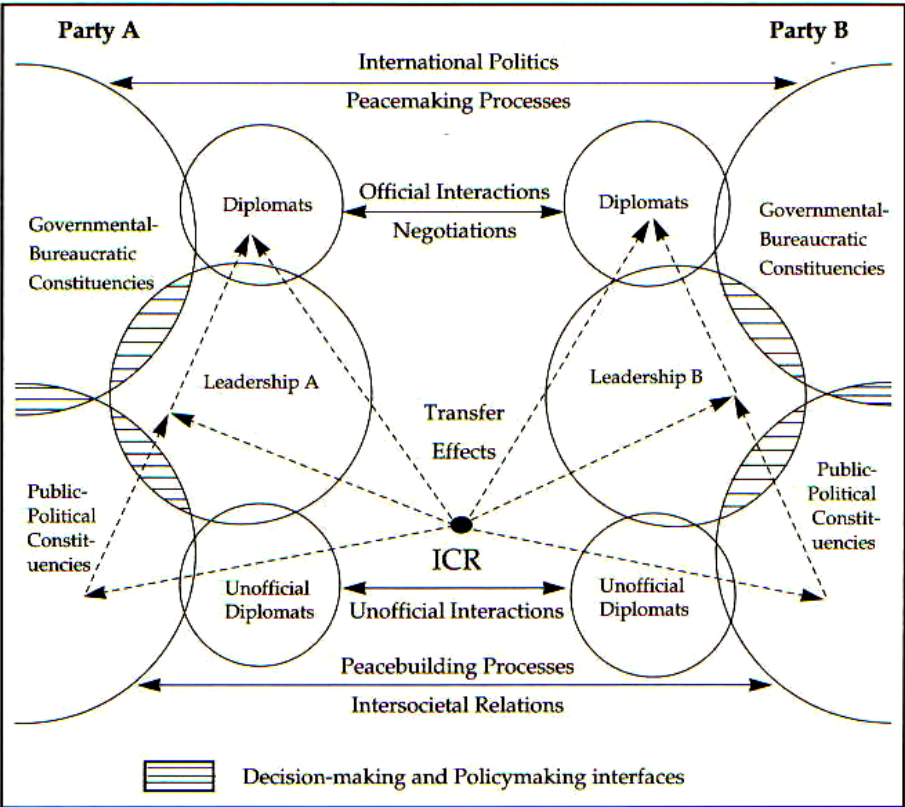


Fig. 4.4 Potential transfer effects of Interactive Conflict Resolution.

Source: Fisher, 1997 (202, figure 9.1)

In the model, international politics refer to all kinds of government-to-government exchanges. Intersocietal relations refer to all kinds of interactions between the public-political constituencies of the two parties. Unofficial interactions include ICR interventions with various unofficial yet influential participants (Ibid: 203). According to Fisher, the least direct form of transfer would be through influentials or preinfluentials, connected to public-political constituencies in their

communities. These include e.g. young professionals, journalists, retired politicians, political activists, academics or NGO leaders which may have influence on public opinion in their communities and on various bodies that interface with policymaking through e.g. think tanks, political parties, research institutes or the media (Ibid.)

In a review of ICR interventions, Fisher (1997) reports that the number of published interventions has grown since the early 1980s making it possible to do a more substantial review and analysis of such efforts (Fisher, 1997: 187). His analysis covers interventions in intractable conflicts that: "...aspire to influence the relationships between the parties. Almost all deal with a two-party situation, even though some of the conflictants, such as the Middle East, involve multiple parties." (Ibid: 188). Most of them are workshops with durations ranging from two to fourteen days. Some were parts of an ongoing program of interventions. According to Fisher, there has also been a development toward continuity in the field, sometimes achieved by participants that have returned along with new delegates (Ibid: 191). As reported by Fisher, most of these workshops have only case studies to substantiate their effectiveness. Only seven per cent used a form of post-assessment, and five percent used a before and after design. Control group designs were never implemented. The lack of pre-and post test assessments on such programs are according to Fisher hard to explain, as the procedures, relying mainly on interviews and questionnaires should be easy to produce (Ibid: 194).

Table 7.1 Effects of 76 workshops from 1965-95, reviewed by Fisher

Reported Outcomes	n	%
1. Increased Understanding/Improved Attitudes	10	13
2. Influence on the Peace Process	31	41
3. Contributions to the Peace Process (Documents, Plans, Initiatives)	13	17
4. Contributions to Negotiations (Analyses, Formulations, Frameworks)	20	26
5. Indeterminate	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
Total	76	100

Source: Fisher, 1997 (table 9.4:196)

As showed in table 7.1, 13 per cent show only increased understanding or improved attitudes of the participants. No negative effects are reported. 41 per cent have been reported to have had a beneficial influence on the peace process. 17 per cent had a direct influence through interventions, producing specific contributions used in the peace process. These were e.g. principles for settlement, plans for peacebuilding activities and initiatives to reduce tension. 26 per cent had direct effects on the diplomatic processes. Outcomes from category 3 and 4 are more concrete expressions of category 2, while both category 2, 3 and 4 subsume changes in category 1 (Ibid: 195-196).

According to Fisher, results of his interviews show that most ICR practitioners are optimistic about the potential utility of the method, they believe that the methods is relevant to the international system as " a method that is valuable in its complementarity to existing practices such as negotiations and mediation" (Ibid: 198). Fisher also mentions that most of the interviewees:

".have not experienced resistance from parties or potential participants, who tend to see the confidential, low risk, research-oriented venture as providing a unique and possibly useful forum for interaction. Rather, they have experienced resistance from other scholars, decision makers, or funders who regard the approach unrealistic, risky and perhaps dangerous". (Ibid).

The MEP program includes both problem solving workshops, and conflict resolution training, and has potential for addressing more emotionally related issues of hatred and remorse, generally done by peace commissions, on a later stage of the program. It also involves preinfluentials from the Israeli and Palestinian, as well as Jordanian community, giving the possibility of potential transfer effects on a large range of constituencies within their communities. The MEP as an ICR approach is discussed in chapter seven.

5 The Middle East Program for Young Leaders (MEP)

The Middle East Program for Young Leaders is, according to its content descriptions, a leader training program "under the umbrella of peace and reconciliation" ('Across Norway': 4). The overall objective of the program is to: "empower young Palestinian, Israeli and Jordanian leaders with a united commitment to peace in order to create a sustainable movement that aims at removing the barriers of hostility amongst the different groups in the region." (MEP- Proposal, 2002: 11).

Timeline:

2001/2002	May-Oct 2003	Dec 2003	Feb 2004	April 2004	July 2004
Application NMFA ³²⁺	Selection process in the Middle East (ME)	First gathering in Norway:	Second gathering in Norway:	Third gathering in Jordan:	Fourth gathering in Jerusalem
Consultating People in the Region , US & Europe	Trust building Ground Rules	Trust building Ground Rules	Trust building Ground Rules	Core Values and Vision of the program	

Sept 2004	Dec 2004	April 2005	2006
Fifth gathering in Norway	Sixth gathering in Jordan	Seventh gathering in Norway	Ethics in Conflict Module completed
Listening skills Creative workshops, Etc.	Work on modules from Workshops, Participants Corner, first time without MEP team	Making Documentary, School Project, Ethics in Conflict Module more concrete	Application for funding US State Department+ USAID Application for funding of ethics in conflict, Israel

Figure 5.1: MEP Timeline, from the initial phase and up to today.

The facilitators want the participants to discover leadership skills and visions of the future that "excites passion and commitment in and among the participants and in their sphere of influence" (Føyen, 2004 [e-mail]). A willingness to work long term in building strong commitment to each other is a precondition for entering the program, as it is meant to be a continuing process, recruiting new participants in the continuation. The building of relationships is done through leadership training, the

³² The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

development of shared visions, common values and ground rules for the program as well as through practical initiatives and tasks (Føyen, 2004 [e-mail]). This chapter is based on written documents from the Abildso Cooperation and an interview with the MEP Program Manager, Asgeir Føyen, done at the Abildsø Farm June 2006.³³ As most of the first section is based on this interview, only the use of other sources is cited. Most of the second section is based on an extensive MEP-Report of the two first gatherings from 2004, made for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the second section this report is only cited when using direct quotations.

5.1 THE BACKGROUND OF THE PROGRAM

The initiative for the MEP program was made by the Abildso Cooperation. This is an independent, non-profit foundation situated at the Abildsø Farm in Oslo, and has a mandate to: "inspire people locally, nationally and internationally to work for peace and reconciliation" (MEP- Report, 2004: 22). The Abildso team have long time experience from work in the Middle East and other conflict areas.

Asgeir Føyen, the program manager, is an engineer by profession, and has many year of international experience. Through experience, particularly from areas of conflict, he developed an interest of work regarding conflict related issues, and this interest was gradually turned in direction of the Middle East. He is now chairing the foundation situated at the protected farm at Abildsø in Oslo, Norway. The Abildso Cooperation was formally established in 2002. He has been engaged, though, in the Middle East since 1994. His experience regarding negotiations of natural resources such as water, between Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian authorities, has been his most challenging experience through his career as an engineer and managing consultant. In September 2000, during the second intifada, the peace process or Oslo process was officially over and this ended the use of much of the work he and his counterparts had been engaged in. Lots of investments made by a diversity of companies, governments and organisations seemed to have lost its importance, and much of the efforts seemed to have been done in vain. After a long process of thinking through how this experience as a negotiator and facilitating counterpart could be used

³³ The interview was done in Norwegian, as to say, the remarks referring to this interview are my own translations.

in the future, he and his team decided that their relations to important people in the region were still very strong, and this could be a point of departure for a long term project focusing more on the relational aspect of people from the three countries. Their main observation, strengthening their belief in such an effort, was that the relationships, friendships, and trust which had developed over the last six years of work in the region, continued even when the projects failed.

The problem with projects such as the water negotiations was that these were all contemporary. When the funding and projects disappeared the people disappeared. This was why the team wanted to focus on relations that were independent of any such project. They observed that political efforts, engagements and offices have their limitations regarding such relational efforts because of their tight time schedules and the instability of governments in the region. People were coming in and out of governing offices in high speed. What was necessary in an area of such deep rooted conflict, was a stable, long term efforts that would continue regardless of who was in power in the certain period of time. According to Asgeir Føyen, there was a crying need for patience in such work. This would give people in the region the time and possibility to develop into devoted leaders or agents, with the means and possibilities to change their own future.

Consulting different actors also in the region, he, together with the Abildso Cooperation, decided that engaging young leaders from the various countries would be the best approach. Leaders play a very important role in the management of such conflicts. They did not want to criticize the leaders of today, but rather identify young leaders of different backgrounds, representing the societies of the three countries, and showing the will and commitment towards such a program. Making a decision to commit to this program would not be easy for the potential participants because they are under a lot of pressure from their respective environments.

5.2 RECRUITMENT AND OVERALL FRAMEWORK

The first phase of the program was supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the governments of Jordan, Israel and Palestine. Main objectives for this phase were to recruit up to three young leaders from each country and that

these participants in a long-term perspective would form a 'Steering group' for the continuation of the program. Initially this would be three Palestinians, three Israeli Jews, one Israeli Arab, three Jordanians and three Norwegians. The participants were to agree upon the main goals and overall framework for the MEP program, and decide what kind of skills that should form the basis for the training programs in the next phase.

5.2.1 Selection of Participants

A selection team of professionals with diverse experience was chosen for the process of selecting participants, guided by some key points that would be the basis for the identification of potential candidates. The team consisted of both members of the Abildso Cooperation and local Middle East advisors (Figure 5.2). But emphasis was made on the fact that the local advisors would be the once to identify who they thought would be the best leaders for *their* society (Føyen, 2006 [interview]). *Formal education, achievements, professional competence* was important in the process, yet it was secondary to the potential for *leadership*.

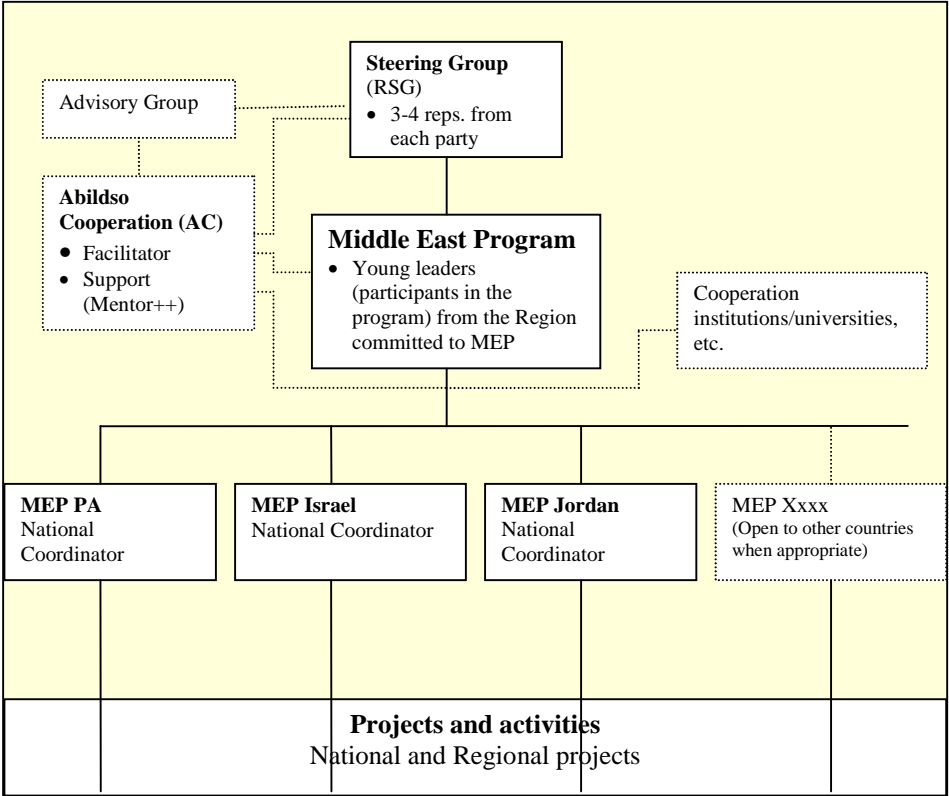


Figure 5.2 Organization Chart of the MEP

Source: MEP-Proposal, 2002 (12)

The emphasis on leadership skills was due to the idea that people tend to live up to the expectations expressed by those they respect and trust. According to the basic ideas of the MEP program: "Potential leaders can be found, but great leadership must be formed"(MEP- Report, 2004: 22). They differentiate between leadership and management, and say that leadership is related to *whom you are*, together with your values, visions, motivation and influences, thus training of these skills can be complex and demanding. Management skills are easier achieved through training, but demand the extensive use of practice.

The selection of participants was to include people from the *broader spectrum of society*, from different professional backgrounds, with different experiences and from different political environments, yet they would have to be able to work well together towards common goals. The selection should also include both *males and females* in their *early/mid twenties to early thirties*, which had finished basic formal education as well as their military/national service. The participants were recruited as *individuals* and not as part of an organisation. *Personal commitment* was to be the basis for participating in the program, but their employer had to be supportive of the participation as well. According to Asgeir Føyen, recruiting the participants as individuals not representing institutions or organisations opened up for potential candidates that would not otherwise be allowed to join such a program. All participants also had to speak and write in English as the language of all MEP activities (Føyen, 2006 [interview]).

The local advisors used their social networks and proposed ten candidates from each of the countries. These were interviewed by the Abildso team and the respective advisers in small groups, and participated in a small roundtable discussion with the other candidates from either side. After this, the best candidates were identified. The participants' *character*, valued by subjective measures of certain characteristics (List 5.1), was important, as well as potentials for developing such characteristics through training.

List 5.1: Selection Criteria Used for Selecting Participants:

1. **Learnability** (open mindedness and self-awareness of limitations and potential)
2. **Integrity** (Accountability, transparency-sharing weaknesses and strengths, honesty, loyalty, faithfulness)
3. **Visionary** (ability to formulate and articulate goals, listen to deep values and dreams, openness to be directed by visions)
4. **Value-driven** (have a set of personal ethical building blocks, distinguishing right from wrong, that guides you in life)
5. **Relation skills** (willingness and abilities to establish strong relationships, 'true interest in others', non-judgmental and positive towards others, approachable)
6. **Responsibility** (determined, faithful to ones promise, willingness to take responsibility for oneself, in family, society)
7. **Helpfulness/Serving attitude** (show concern and empathy for others, humility in relation to others)
8. **Patience** (ability to **wait** for the right timing, being on alert, sound judgment)
9. **Courage** (willingness to take risks where outcomes are uncertain, willingness to make mistakes and learn from them, willingness to sacrifice and not give up, stand up for things that may not be popular)
10. **Commitment** (persistence, loyalty, stay firm and determined in difficult times)
11. **Initiative** (willingness to make decisions, be proactive)
12. **Self-control** (awareness of what is appropriate and inappropriate in different situations)
13. **Self-motivation** (does not need external motivation to be motivated, can be motivated in spite of difficult times/ personal struggles)
14. **Respectfulness** (respect for constitutions, law, authority or leaders, respect for other people's opinion, position, culture, gender, religious belief).
15. **Teambuilder/-worker** (ability to share credit for success and failure, to inform, listen, share, help others, communicate and get people to work for common goals)
16. **New Leader** (willingness to encourage others into leadership- especially the young)
17. **Citizenship** (loyal to the government under those authority you live and benefit from, focus on family, local community, nation, region, world)
18. **Fairness/Justice** (a wish to contribute to fairness and justness- equal treatment based on commonly accepted human rights, independent of faith, political, ethnical, social group, position)
19. **Tolerance** (open minded and acceptance for diversity)

Source: MEP- Report, 2004 (29-42).

Openness to change was the most important of the personality aspects. Asgeir Føyen commented that their experience lead them to believe that you could find people that would be open to change in every group, culture or organisation, regardless of the 'tone' of their environment or the social pressure in the group. Even when the policy of conforming to the group ideals is very strong, there will be people asking questions or wondering 'why is this so?' (Føyen, 2006 [interview]). According to him, the selection process has showed this to be true. Following is a list of the points the MEP Abildso team considered as part of the selection process. Based on these, and profile assessments of the interviewees generating personality style reports, the interviewers made their final choice.

Three Palestinians, three Israelis, three Norwegians and two Jordanians were chosen for the program. Some worked as parliamentary advisors, some as entrepreneurs, economists, health personal and some were master students. Among the eleven participants that were chosen for the initial phase there were four females and seven males. One Norwegian and one Palestinian later withdrew from the program.

5.2.2 Main Strategies

The goals of the MEP are to investigate main obstacles to peace, and how they may be broken down or removed. The objectives of the program are also to build strong and lasting relationships across borders and mentor for leadership committed to peace and initiate national or joint projects in different sectors. The leadership training includes areas such as teaching good governance, listening, democracy, justice /human rights, but the emphasis is put on "Learning by Discovery through Relationships (LDR)" (MEP-Report, 2004: 9; Føyen, 2004 [e-mail]). According to the philosophy of the program; "People learn best in the context of committed relationships"(ibid). The participants learn through experiencing and exploring relationships and an important part of what they learn is the things they discover through these relationships. The organisers believe that most of the knowledge of relationships and building relationships will be found in a small group, if one manages to create an open atmosphere. This knowledge can be expanded through research or written material on the subjects that is of some importance to the participants or facilitators, but it all

starts as exploration in the group (Føyen, 2006 [interview]). The participants work actively with selected topics in different group constellations and plenary discussions. By this, each subject is explored by the participants themselves.

According to Asgeir Føyen, it has also been absolutely necessary to do the process step by step and make efforts to 'feel' and 'listen' to all the parts of the group to get an understanding of what would be the *possible* next step. Even though programs were arranged before the meetings it was not necessarily possible to follow the programs as planned. This was an important part of the process of moving on *towards* the next step. Anger, misperceptions, or latent conflicts had to be brought up and discussed, either in the larger group or in conversations between individual participants and facilitators (Føyen, 2006 [interview]).

Eight main areas of discovery were being explored in the program meetings of phase one and continued into phase two. These are:

- transformational leadership,
- life strategies and ethics,
- interpersonal relationships,
- political paradigms for peace and justice,
- creative training and learning, teamwork,
- crisis management and
- conflict resolution.

The participants are in general encouraged to focus on win-win solutions, with an open mind, and to investigate new ways of dealing with conflict together. In workshops, the participants worked together to construct a preferred vision for the future, receiving training also to become mature and balanced leaders.

When the different areas of discovery were brought up, it was done through discussions with invited guests that had thoughts and experiences to share from the area. A "transformational leader", explained by the facilitators as a leader that has been in charge or taken the lead in a period of great change within his or her organisation or society, was invited to be the introductory speaker, sharing his/her life experiences regarding this topic. Extensive practice in the area of discovery was

regarded to be more important than e.g. a doctorate or extensive theoretical knowledge.

The involvement in the program is intensive in time. The first phase consisted of three trips, of approximately two weeks duration each, to Norway. In addition there were tasks and assignments to be done between the gatherings. The participants stayed in host families when they were in Norway. Prior to each gathering the Abildso team went to The Middle East to follow up participants, their employers and families, and also to keep good contact with and inform the Israeli-, Jordanian- and Palestinian authorities. In addition these trips gave the organizers an impression of the current atmosphere in the region. From 2003 and up to today there have been seven gatherings; four in Norway, two in Jordan and one in Jerusalem (Figure 5.1). The Palestinian participants chose not to join the gathering in Israel.

5.2.3 Workshops and Contributions of the Participants

The MEP, through the first gatherings, agreed upon a set of ground rules that everyone had to follow in interactions:

- My perception may not be the only one or the right one
- Confidentiality about what each other share
- No interruptions. Facilitators are allowed to interrupt
- No accusation or name calling, violent speaking, shouting or personal attacks
- No political discussions or discussions on daily incidents/tragedies in the Middle East among participants
- Be on time
- Concerns should be shared immediately with Coordinators or other Abildso Staff (MEP-report, 2004: 9)

They also agreed upon a joint vision and core values of the program (figure 5.3).

On the forth gathering the participants were divided into two mixed groups in workshops, aiming at formulating proposals for concrete projects that would support

the visions of the MEP. They decided on three ideas to be developed further, they are now all implemented or in the phase of being implemented³⁴:

- **Ethics in conflict.** Developing a workshop module for 'ethics in conflicts', partly inspired by Senior Researcher Henrik Syse, from the ethics program at the Peace Research Institute of Norway. The module is meant to be used by universities and other institutions in all the four participating countries.
- **Nation wide Student Essay Contest in Norway. Theme:** 'The Role of Norway in the Middle East.'
- **Documentary Film.** Making a MEP documentary. (This has been made through the help of film director Tina Davis (MEP- Creative Ideamaking Process, 2004)

The participants have also met and had discussions with various transformational leaders; the prior Norwegian minister of health, Ansgar Gabrielsen; former prime minister of Estonia, Mart Laar and the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and leader of the Jordanian delegation of the opening rounds of the Middle East Peace Talks in Madrid, Kamel Abu Jaber among many others.

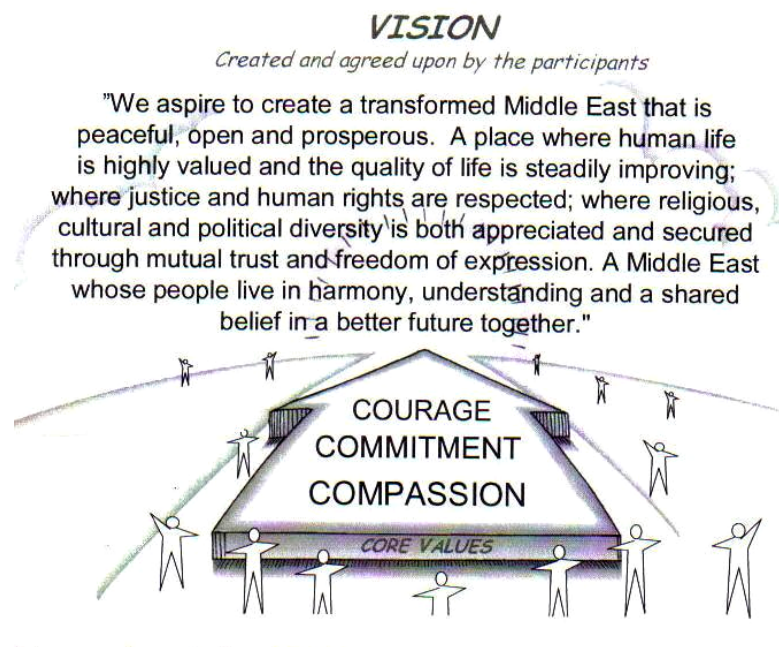


Figure 5.3 The Vision and Core Values of the MEP

Source: MEP fase 2, 2004 (1)

³⁴ See also figure 5.1.

In addition to the workshops, initiatives have been made by the participants to recruit new '*peers*' for the program. These are friends, colleagues or other people from the community of the participants that have the desire to join the program in the future. Most of the participants from the Middle East have now 2-3 peers that they have introduced to the program values, rules and visions. There has not yet been a meeting introducing these peers to the other participants.

In the workshops the Abildso team, consisting of four Norwegian, one American and one Canadian, all parts of the Abildso Cooperation worked as facilitators, performing the following tasks:

- Chair all meetings (without voting rights)
- Give input, advice, and guidance as the process proceeds
- Give training to the young potential leaders
- Be available for confidential consultations
- Bridge relational gaps among the parties and individuals
- Assist in building confidence and trust among the parties
- Secretarial work (write minutes, reports, proposals, etc.)
- Professional advice/assistance (related to projects that will be carried out)
- Assisting in the training and recruiting of mentors
- Receive input from the advisory group
- Assist in fund-raising for the different initiatives (MEP- Proposal, 2002: 14)

After the second gathering the Abildso team suggested a joint history project to the participants where the participants were meant to write the history of the region together. Both the Jordanians and the Palestinians thought that it was too early in the process for these issues to be addressed.

6 Findings from the Interviews

The interviews of the participants were mostly done by phone, limiting the time for in depth questions³⁵. Yet, I experienced that they had heartfelt experiences they wanted to share. As they are all actively involved in matters concerning the conflict and work towards a more stable and predictable future in the Middle East, they were eager to talk about issues related to the program as well as general aspects of the situation in the Middle East. In this chapter I account for the main topics talked about in the interviews. Reduction of prejudice and relational aspects of the program was the main focus in the interviews. During the interviews, though, aspects related to conflict resolution in general and how the MEP approach is considered to be quite unique by the program participants was mentioned frequently. For this reason it became an issue also of my concern.

I got the chance to meet one of the participants who was visiting Norway. This gave me an opportunity of collecting more vivid explanations of the gatherings, of the other participants and also to get a more extensive interview that has been very useful in the analysis. The short documentary also made it easier to visualize the people I was talking to on the phone.

The way the participants talked about their background, why they joined the program and their experiences in general was explained to me by extensive use of narratives. This only strengthened the assumption that a narrative approach is useful for these types of studies. To hide the identity of the various participants I only refer to the country they come from when quoting them. This is done because of the always changing conditions in the regions putting pressure also on the participants in their relations to their local environments.

None of the participants responded to the questionnaires³⁶.

³⁵ The phone interviews all lasted about thirty minutes.

³⁶ The questionnaire and the selection of interviewees are accounted for in chapter two, section 2.2.3.

6.1 THE ACCOUNTS OF THE PARTICIPANTS AND FACILITATORS:

6.1.1 How do Images Change? – Forming Long Lasting Friendships

The different participants all had their individual backgrounds and particular reasons for joining the MEP program. Some were brought up to think of the people on the opposite side, or the 'other side'³⁷ as a differentiated group containing people they would label as 'good' as well as people they would label as 'bad'. Others were brought up to blame the 'other side' as a whole for all their sufferings. For some, the meetings with participants from the opposite side was very difficult, one of the Palestinian participants reported that her/his first time of shaking hands with one of the Israelis was as late as after the third gathering. Some experienced their first meeting with Israelis, Palestinians, Jordanians or Norwegians through the MEP. Others had friends or connections with representatives of the other groups also prior to the program.

The forming of friendships with people from the 'other side' was seen by many as one of the program's major contributions. For those who had no positive experiences with represents of the opposite side from the past, this was a major contribution also to changing their view of the participants from these groups. One of the Palestinians answered this on the question of why she/he chose to join the MEP:

"The MEP is a program that in that time when I joined it, it was a line of hope that we Palestinians look for, because it is a new way of dealing with issues that we deal with on a daily basis. Meeting the other side, which is not an easy thing to do, and it is not my favourite thing to do too, but, in a way it was a way to see how the other people, how the other side is thinking, how he acts, how he sees the world....This is one reason that I joined. The other reason is that it's a kind of competition with myself.....I was going to check if I fit or if I don't fit. And I think I fit..."

The same participant continued by saying that:

"I think that I did not shake hands with the Israelis the three first times that we met in Norway, I think it was after the third or fourth time that just dealing with them a little bit, and I started dealing with them, and that is important for me, I started dealing with them not as Israelis, but as human people, because if I think about them as Israelis I don't think in fact that I can deal with them".

³⁷ The opposite side and 'the other side' are used interchangeably and refer to the Israeli and the Palestinian participants. Israelis are at the opposite side to or the 'other side' to the Palestinians and vice versa.

After asking her/him about what happened after the third gathering, resulting in this change, the participant answered:

"In the first three or four times I was not able to see them as any other thing, only as Israelis, that they were killing us every single morning..... After three or four times, when youhave your breakfast, do some skating or ice fishing or climbing or playing football or whatever. You start dealing with a guy that has two arms, two legs and a head like you. And this is what makes the difference a little bit, but on the political level it is a different story.."

Even the participants that started out with more differentiated views reported changes in how they viewed parts of the antagonist groups that they had put in the category of 'bad people ' or 'terrorists'. One of them, a Palestinian, explained her/his background like this:

"My family was very very supportive, educating me and my brothers of how to live peacefully, how to seek other people and counter conflicts in a very peaceful way. So I was raised as a peaceful person myself. Even my contributions in the last and the present intifada were peaceful contributions. I would either contribute with medical help and support or educating other children when our schools were closed.....as a family we had Israeli friends...we had Palestine Israeli friends and Israeli Jew friends..I was brought up in a way to see the positive side of a person and never judge on appearance or a religion. I remember my father always saying to me: it is not a Jew Palestinian problem it's an Israeli Palestinian problem, so it had nothing to do with religion. So I learnt as I grew up that Ihave a problem with the politics, with the general politics, but not with the people themselves."

She/he continued by explaining why the MEP still contributed to a change in her/his views of the 'others':

"...I can see Extremist Israelis become friends of mine for example like [X]....[X] is an extremist person, and I have learned that such an extremist person, [she/he] and I can have a dialogue. [She/he] and I can have something to share, something to talk about, laugh together, maybe cry together, so it is, I have learnt that it's not only the good Israelis whom I should mingle and talk and be friends with, but it's also the extremist Israelis who have very extreme ideas about Palestinians or the Israeli/Palestinian conflict..."

Another participant, from the Israeli side also emphasised the importance of including the broader sphere of the various societies in the program:

"About what the MEP can change, it can change and spread a lot around the world - as the peer groups will be developed, and they would have their own peer groups and the structure would continue to grow and grow, and people would know each other on a personal basis. I think that it would help. And I think that if we would start a movement, I think it would be wonderful. Now, the problem is that in Israel it could be a very left wing movement, and I think that the idea is to make it something very wide. That not only left wingers would join it but also right wingers, and religious people and seculars and new immigrants and everyone, everyone that could be a part of the Israeli population should join this. And it is not easy, 'cause Israel is very stereotyped."

The same participant explained her /his background:

"The Palestinians, well I grew up hating them mostly.....not only by my family, but also by my youth group. Everything where I grew up, my growing up environment was very based on the knowledge that this is how it is, the Palestinians are to be blamed for everything we are going through in the past two intifadas, and that we are the good guys and they are the bad guys...we knew somehow, and we put it in the back of our minds, that we knew that there were good Palestinians. Not every Palestinian is a terrorist. we also knew that innocent people were getting killed in this war, but we thought that, well, this is a war and there are casualties in a war..... It is a part of war and it is their fault because they are fighting from within the civilian territories".

About how the MEP had contributed to the change in her/his views, the same participant continued:

"X and I contacted very fast. And the connection became very good from the beginning. It was something very special, something that I really can not describe...I got to know them and... in general I learnt that there is another side. And that they are not the only ones to blame. Every conflict has two sides. Maybe some are more to blame than the other, but we really, we can not say that all the blame is on the Palestinians. There are some agreements that Israelis like to ignore.. And there are civilians that are getting killed and it is not ok and we should do more to prevent that. In general it has changed my view very much, more than I can say that... **Now I can say that I can *feel* the other side, and I think that that is the biggest change of all."**

The other Palestinian also emphasised the change in her/his view of the Israeli being a settler at the time:

"One of the participants used to be a settler, used to be. And I think that was the hardest thing to work with, but [X] isn't any more, and you know: Such a program, there is hundreds of programs in Palestine in a way like the MEP, but the quality of people supporting us, the ministry of planning has been supporting us, the president was

supporting us. When you have all this support you start not thinking of the participants and if they are as you think or not. At the end of the day they are human beings like us. If I let my mind dream, I dream of them like monsters and killers and everything, but when you meet them, they are normal human beings."

The participants were asked about their relationship with the other participants between the gatherings, whether or not they have regular contact with them and if they consider any of the other participants as their *friends*. Most of them were very clear on the fact that all the people in the program had become very important to them. One of the participants phrased it like this:

"Yeah, we meet each other, we check on each other, of course I miss them. They are a part of my life now, my daily show, whenever I remember my family, my friends. They are my extended friends. They are in the circle of people that I care about, think about and worry about. I wonder if they are ok, what is going on in their life, and we actually have updates between us, we send each other updating e-mails. "I got a new job" for example ...I am a Palestinian and I got married in Jordan, and I insisted on the Israelis to attend my wedding, because they are a part of my friends and I would like to share my wedding or such a moment with my friends, the people I care about. They were invited and I wanted them to be there without doubt....I wanted to share the moment with them, because they are a part of my present life...hopefully they will be a part of my future life.....They ARE my friends, yes. They are not my enemies..."

Another, from the Palestinian side found that the friendship concept was hard to use in her/his situation:

"There are many definitions for the word friend. I don't want to say that they are not my friends. And I don't want the same time to say that they are my friends. I just want to put a hundred lines under the words I said, that it is very different in Norway, from how it is at home.You go with a taxi driver, he speaks of these issues. You are sitting with friends in a restaurant or a coffee shop, they are speaking about this. So, that is not easy, for us to consider these people as our friends. I can consider them as colleagues working for different future for different things, I can consider them. An important point, for me, is that you should know that me....like all Palestinians, am fighting for my rights and everything I do in the morning..."

When asked about how often the participants talk to each other between the gatherings, one of the Israeli participants said:

"Some participants talk often and others less often, but it depends more on the personal relationship than nationality. The Israeli group have a very good contact, even if we have very different views and are at very different places in life. We do not live close to one another, but we talk to each other once or twice a week. When it comes to the other participants it depends on the feeling in time. Usually it is with a phone call and Skype. ...I have a very good relationship with one of the Palestinians. We speak more often than the others, because we have a similar position in life."

I asked whether they sometimes even meet, and she/he answered:

"With the Palestinians it is almost impossible. But one of the participants came to visit me. We are not allowed to go to the Palestinian territory, and they need special permission to come to Israel. When we started, we decided that we are not going to work against the system. We are not against the government, so if they say we can not do something, we will not do it for now. We do not want to fight the law or something. So there are natural limitations to what we can do..."

Another from the Israeli side stresses how important it is that they sometimes meet:

"Right now it is very hard to see that it has a future. I know that it is in every one's hearts but as long as we do not meet each other it is useless. It is very hard to maintain a program without meeting at least once a year."

As the remarks made by the participants show, the MEP has offered a possibility for them to meet 'the other side' and get to know people that for them represent something unknown, and someone they have grown up, learning not to trust. This has given them the opportunity of 'feeling the other side'. Relations have grown into friendships were participants that would normally appear in the outgroup representing the 'other side' or even the enemy, have now become parts of their ingroup or the people they think and care about in their everyday lives. At the same time, the program is recruiting people from the broader sphere of the various countries. This gives the participants the opportunity to build relationships to counterstereotypic representatives of the 'other side' as e. g. the one that is brought up to see the people separated from the 'cause' or the political problems faced in the conflict. At the same time, they build relationships to people that normally represent the stereotypic image of the antagonists or the extremists in this particular case.

This is reported to be a positive aspect of the program by the participants. They also emphasise how they keep in contact between gatherings. Yet, it is difficult to meet, especially those representing the 'other side' in the conflict.

6.1.2 Gatherings and Group Processes

The MEP program differs from other dialogue programs or conflict resolution initiatives, in the way it focuses on transformational leadership, social activities and "Learning by discovery through relationships". By this it can be seen as a dual approach focusing on the building of trust and relationships on the one hand and conflict resolution and management skills on the other. The activities and different workshops, though, seem to be important in strengthening the relationships. At the same time, building relationships contribute to skills such as showing respect for others and detect boundaries of what to talk about and what *not* to talk about, even if it is tempting to stress your own point of view.

According to Asgeir Føyen, one relational aspect was chosen as a theme for each gathering. The first was *listening*. The facilitators used a minimum of teaching procedures, but rather asked some questions that they let the participants explore for themselves. The questions could be as easy as: "Why do we listen to other people?" and "How do we listen?" (Føyen, 2006 [interview]). The participants worked in smaller groups, and the group constellations changed so that all of them would get the chance to know each other better.

One of the Israeli participants thought that social activities were important for the connections:

"I think that the MEP organizers really put a lot of efforts in organizing trips and social experiences to us, like ice skating and skiing in the mountains, and I do not know what else. Yes, we went to trips like to meeting people and those kinds of interactions really helped us talking and experience the everyday like it would have been in Israel only it was everyday like in Norway, and those days were really beneficial for the connection."

When asked about the other workshops that they had, and whether she/he found them to be useful, the same participant answered:

"I think that mostly it helped everyone to be lined together, so everyone would know what to be expected...it's also in the social experience. We know now how to better

listening... how should we talk and how should we do things. Everyone knows what to expect... Everyone knows what is expected from us, how do we behave as good leaders...so we have sort of learnt everything together, we grew up into it together and this has been very beneficial for the friendships....And we all knew that we wanted to do something different, we all knew that we wanted to push this friendship forward, this program forward. ...Everything just happens getting there. We are in this thing together, and we are still just on the way, we are still just enjoying the way, and we have this go, and everyone has to go together.."

Another Israeli participant emphasised the importance of the social activities, yet wanted to highlight the need for the MEP to spread its influence to larger segments of the Middle East society:

"Of course you feel closer when you track together in all these beautiful places in Norway. We also had some seminars with leaders from the business arena, e. g the prime minister of Estonia. When we were in these workshops together it makes us closer. You can make people feel good together, but this is a very small group. How can you make peace much wider? You have to coordinate this process. If you take the right people in the way that they have an open mind, you can get them to be closer...But this is in a small level. The question is how to make it wider."

The same participant also pointed at the spill over effect of the program:

"We felt closer and people ask us about the program and we deliver our feelings to other people.[X] said that only two persons knew [she/he] was joining the process: [her/his]father and [her/his] boss. Now [she/he] is telling everyone and everyone is also asking questions and even wants to contribute, and be a part of it. I think in this way these activities have made this change in us".

The personal value was also emphasised:

"...the MEP is a huge prize for me. It should give me the tools not to be just a leader, but to be a good leader. Most of the participants are young, 24 to35, and not all of us are seeing ourselves in the political arena like me. The MEP is giving me a continuing workshop, support and experience for the career that I want to make, and the change that I want to take part in."

A Palestinian answered:

"The most important skill that I learnt is to listen, and actually to listen to the other side. I just want to repeat that on the first times I was there it was not easy for me just to sit in the same room or listen to them speaking or giving their opinions. And I think the most important skill I learnt is to listen, and actually, in a way, to respect that they are

speaking. Not respecting what they are saying, but respect that they are speaking so I can listen."

Explaining why listening is so important, an Israeli participant said that:

"I think the basic rule is that you give the other person an opportunity to say everything that he wants to say. This is a very important tool. It is important also for you. Then you learn how the other person thinks. When somebody speaks to you and also listen, you feel that you understand him, and it is also easier to convince him to change. Ground rule: Listen! It sounds very basic, and is probably a very natural thing for you- but not for us- laughs-. We also had a mediation work shop. We learnt how to become mediators. It was very good to have that experience also. From being the one with the cause, to becoming the one observing everyone and make compromises between people. So it gives again a lot of tools, personally and generally."

One of the Jordanians, seeing the conflict partly as an outsider made other comments:

"..the relationship aspect with the other participants which are people from other countries...Israel, Palestine and Norway, was a very important part..... And maybe for us as Jordanians seeing Israelis and Palestinians being able to work together was also a very important part of the program that if you take people out of the conflict itself they are both humans and they both want a common goal, and how to be able to reach that is what we need ...There is a common goal between two parties which was very important in my mind.....what I can say on the individual basis about cooperation and people getting to know each other is that people was able to work together to come up with activities and ideas of programs. Nothing yet have been implemented. This should be the next phase of the MEP now, but at this point it was joint relationship building with the participants of the program."

One of the Palestinian participants has not as high hopes for governments, but rather for the people. She/ he feels strongly about the MEP:

"Generally speaking, it's unique. I was part of many peace movements and peace activities with Palestinians and Israelis together, but the MEP is a unique experience as far as I see it, as far as I also hear feedback from my friends....I see it as unique experience because I believe, and many people friends in my age believe in the same way that if we really want to end the Israeli/Palestinian conflict...Than it's gonna be between people, it's not gonna be between governments...We have history together and probably we share the same blood together because there are Palestinian Jews. So probably their extended families are now fighting..... It is unique because it is bringing people such as me who are not part of any government, who are not part of any influential organization.

It is bringing me to talk, to build something, to build a very strong relationship, constructive relationship not destructive, with people same age, same characteristics as me from the Israeli side. ..I haven't been in such a program before. .."

The responds of the participants emphasise the importance of being together, doing something together and learning skills together, that makes them closer as a group. This is both because they get to know each other through the activities, but also because of the work in groups, that gives them a feeling of being united, following the same kind of program and following the same path and experiencing a joint process. Their goals vary, as they have chosen different careers and professions in their individual lives, yet, they all seem to feel that the program gives them important skills that are useful also in their everyday lives. Some focus on peace between common citizens, while others focus on the influence of leaders. At the same time, they all focus on the importance of people like themselves working together towards the superordinate goal of peace in the region.

6.1.3 Political Issues and Ground Rules

As a starting point the ideal was complete openness in the group meetings, and there should be *nothing* that one could not talk about. Yet, as reported by the facilitators, not all subjects are fit to make the relations between the participants stronger *at this point in time*. Some issues are damaging for the relationships because they create hostility. As building strong and lasting relationships is the main objective of the program, the facilitators found it necessary to make some ground rules regarding the dialogues and rounds of talks during gatherings. Respecting the feelings of the others has been important in this regard, and as the trust between the participants is growing, the threshold of what can be discussed can be lowered. According to Asgeir Føyen, it is also not necessary to discuss issues that one has no impact on at this point in time, if these issues only serve to cause frustration and aggression in the group (Føyen, 2006 [interview]). The focus on ground rules, made by the participants together with the facilitators from the Abildso team, have shown to be very important for the continuation of the program.

Politics and religion are some issues that are not yet to be discussed in the gatherings and one are not allowed to use words that are of an accusing nature. According to the facilitators the participants have showed some relief regarding these ground rules as they keep away the temptation of discussing certain issues. It also gives the facilitators an opening for intervention in the process, as they serve as supervisors. The ground rules are only there to *protect* the relations and can be changed along with the process.

One of the Israeli participants were asked which parts of the program she/he thought were conducive to bringing the participants closer to each other as a group, and answered:

"We have had the rules from the beginning that we don't speak about politics. We decided that if somebody wants to stop a discussion about an issue, we stop it. We do not want to fight each other, sometimes we just have to leave it. This is something that also gives me clues for life. Personally I may have some political discussion with some of the members, not with everyone of course. Sometimes when I speak with someone he wants to stop it. This is the point. Something that I got from this project, some of the benefits, is that sometimes in discussions you feel that you have to express yourself, and that it is very important to say what you are thinking. But then you realize at some point that even if you did not say it, so what? **If you want to make a change you have to listen to the other and try to understand why he is thinking in this way, then you can decide to make a change. And it really works.**"

When asked whether or not the ground rules represent a new tool in addressing issues of conflict, the same participant answered:

"Ground rules are basic tools. If we don't have them we can not make a discussion. I was participating in a conference in Italy between Israelis and Palestinians. The Italian government and the EU arranged it. It was not connected to MEP, but was something else. They asked me if I wanted to come to help one NGO, I have helped them many times in different issues, and they asked if I wanted to come to one conference. If you don't have these ground rules all the time you loose the goal, you loose the point, you go to not important issues."

She/he continued by explaining a particular incident from the MEP:

"We had a crisis in our team when one of the participants said Palestinian authorities, when the other wanted to say Palestinian state. They discussed just the term, and got into a strong struggle. The Palestinian said, if you do not say Palestinians but just say

Palestinian authority, I will not continue the project, and went out of the room. [X] broke the ground rules. Then the Norwegians and the other participants were very stressed and worried but he came back and went on as nothing had happened. But if we did not have the ground rules and it was like this all the time and we don't solve or learn anything just want to prove that you are right and the other one is wrong."

Another participant, also from the Israeli side answered:

"First of all, we were not allowed to talk about politics and I think that this is a most important thing. If we would just speak about politics the minute we got there, we would never get to know one another, we would never get to know the stories of one another, dreams, hopes, we would be just arguing all the time, so it's very easy to come and argue about those things because we live with them every day. So I think that forbidding us to talk about politics got us to really know the people, and brought us to the relational stage, where we stand today."

The MEP organisers have been criticised for keeping the political issues, perceived by many as the fundamental issues of the conflict, outside the scope of their program. While some of the critics find it unrealistic to approach the conflict without addressing the more *basic* issues of dispute, the facilitators put it the other way around saying that the good relations have to come *first*. Being a non-political or nongovernmental organisation is important in this regard. Being non-political makes them free to have a more long-term engagement or perspective than e.g. politicians and governmental offices that have to account for the programs they support regularly and within shorter periods of time (Føyen, 2006 [interview]). As shown in the interviews, the comments made by the participants, to a large extent, support the notions made by the facilitators.

6.1.4 Conflict Prone vs. Peaceful Home Environments

According to the program facilitators, Norway was chosen as the place to have the first meetings for practical reasons.

- It has been difficult and sometimes even impossible to meet in the Middle East. The Israelis can not travel around easily in the neighbouring countries, and the Palestinians can not easily get a permit to go to Israel. Jordan has been a compromise, but some families and friends feel uncertainty towards sending their family members even to this part of the region.

- It is positive for the process that the participants get away from the emotional stress that follows the everyday life in the region, to be able to calm down, relax and feel safe. In Norway *all* the participants feel safe. This seems to have the effect of making things possible that was perceived to be impossible in the home environments.
- Because the program organisers from the Abildso cooperation are situated in Norway and they have the Abildsø farm that serves as a good place for the gatherings, Norway became a natural choice. This also made the recruiting of host families easier. There were originally some difficulties in recruiting hosts for the participants, but the families that chose to take part in the process all feel that they have benefited from the program through the relationships they now have developed. Host families have also made new connections in their home environments in Norway through this process, and they have reported that their knowledge of the Middle East has grown and prejudices have been challenged. (Føyen, 2006 [interview])

Many of the participants made comments about the difference between Norway and the Middle East, and how the Norwegian environment made them feel safer. When asked about how experiences in the everyday life in the region challenge their views of the other participants, they point to the fear of terrorism or targeted killings. One of the participants, from the Palestinian, side said that:

"Yes, off course, yes there are days and certain things that happens and when I loose my temper by looking at the negative sides. When I see a suicide bombing or when I see a curfew in my city, or whenever I call my mom and she tells me about how bad the situation is I get really angry, and the hatred inside me rises up a bit, or not even a bit. It rises up, the hate, the anger, lot of things. Of course there are times when I believe that I can be a suicide bomber, and my friend can be a suicide bomber because of all the stress we are under. And we identify the stress as the Israeli occupation, so, definitely I can negatively think of the other side. I can think that it is not working, peace is not gonna bring me anything. It is only war and that's it. But, then, when I calm down, as is the most likely, I become the person I am. There is enough bloodshed. I don't want to loose anyone else, so. I don't want anyone to loose anyone special or dear to them...."

Another, from the Israeli side confirms the difficulties, yet points at how everyone is not to blame:

"That was a very hard question. Because I do feel, still very close to them, and at the same time I feel very, very angry, and I think it is a natural thing. When there is a terrorist attacking, anger is the most natural thing to feel. And I can not prevent myself from

hating whoever did that or whoever educated him. I know my friends don't have anything to do with that but I still think that their school system and their educational system is corrupt and I think that ...I do have a lot of blame in me, towards them, and it usually comes stronger after a terror attack."

Yet another, also from the Israeli side explained how some stories emerges that may contribute to a lack of trust towards the other side:

"Yes, it does, because.. I will give you one example: I have a friend who has a farm. He has a Palestinian also, that works with him on his farm. They were very close friends. It was not a friend, but a friend of a friend really. And during the intifada one of the workers stabbed him, after they knew each other for a long time and they were like friends. My friend told me that this is the way that the Palestinians or Arabs act. They don't care about the relationship when it comes to national things. When things like that happens (I am not saying my point of view now) but it makes you rethink about the project".

One of the Palestinian participants stressed the point that it was hard to really understand the conflict from the outside:

"If you want to understand living in a conflict very well, you will have to be in it. That is my opinion, my suggestion. There is the daily thing, that even if I explain it to you in ten hours, you won't understand it until you see it. That is why I am telling you that it's a really different story, and it's a really different thing to go inside the thing or study it from the outside. "

Answering the question about what it is in the MEP that brings the participants closer together, the same participant says:

"I'll tell you why I see the MEP as a different program. It's a picture that you can imagine: Bringing actual, loving people. Letting them spend time with real families in Norway, making them live the normal life, and you don't feel that you are going for a special program. When you go home, you have your bed. You have your friends there. You have your family. You don't go to the university or school, you go from the morning to the evening and then you go back home, you sit with your family. You speak with them, you have dinner. You can go out walking, or do what you feel like... This atmosphere makes things so much easier. It makes you feel that you're in a safe place, that you... It makes you feel that you're fine."

Contrasting this to the life at home she/he says that:

"We are fighting, and working, not for the big thing that people think that we are working for the red colour, the blood that we see. We don't like killing, as people are picturing us

all over the world. We are human people fighting for the smallest things that all people, that you have every day. You wake up, have your breakfast normally, go walking, then going in the shower, going for your school, doing your research, finishing your work, having dinner with your family. Then going out, enjoying time with your friends, having your normal life. That's the things that we are fighting for, our normal life that you people are living every day. And that is why I joined the MEP. I am seeing maybe as a hope, that I will get to this point."

Being asked about the importance of the facilitators, one of the Israeli participants also emphasised the need to feel safe in the relations:

"For sure. The team itself has a lot of experience. Asgeir has participated in the region in the past with the water issues and has a lot of experience. If you don't understand the Israelis and Palestinians, you can not coordinate this. We have a very different culture and mentality. Also Israelis and Palestinians, but compared to Europe there is a very different mentality. ...In one-to-one processes you feel that you can share, feel, get support to stay in the process and feel safe in the process. It is important because the meeting with Palestinians and vice v can give you a lot of bad points if you want a specific career in life and even one of the Palestinians say that he might be killed if they know that he met Israelis in the beginning. We can talk about this... Thomas..arranging things and facilitating a lot of things. Then we have the coordinators who have a tough experience, the Israeli one, from the water negotiations, the Jordanian works in the Jordanian institute of diplomacy, she arranged two meetings in Jordan and has a lot of experience and patience also. The team is important. Without the Norwegian team it could not be done. We could not do it without a neutral ground. If it was in Israel, Palestinian territories or even in Jordan, we could not really make it like the way it has been in Norway. This is more natural."

Another participant made a point out of the pressure of time in the everyday life, and how this makes constraints on the possibilities to meet and work with such programs:

"It's not very easy, because at least in Israel, I don't know how it goes in Norway, but at least in Israel, everyone, every young person is trying to fight for his well being, his mortgage, salary, car expenses. We work a lot, and also when we study we also work a lot because we have to provide. We are not having any allowance, like in Norway. So we hardly have free time. ..To find spare time to be together we have to really make time in advance, and make a structure. It is not easy. We do it, and I think that we need more...it's easier when we go abroad and we meet and we have to adjust ourselves to their schedule. To find time in our own schedule, in Israel, just like that, it's hard."

As shown in these comments made by the participants, it is obvious that the non hostile environment made possible through arranging the gatherings outside the region, but particularly Israel/Palestine has been important. The facilitators have also been important adding to a 'safer' atmosphere were all the participants feel that they will be heard and are cared for on an equal basis. They also emphasise the harsh reality in their countries, both regarding the issues of conflict and constantly being reminded of violence and perpetrator acts, but also of everyday challenges as raising money for themselves and their families. This is leaving out time for extra activities. At the same time, experiencing life outside the region opens up for thoughts and possibilities that do not seem obvious in their home environments.

6.2 CONCLUSIONS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Drawing conclusions from the interviews, what the MEP program has really succeeded in is the formation of friendships that expands the borders and problems faced in the everyday life of intractable conflict. They have managed to build trust between the participants and also towards the facilitators in the Abildso team. Resulting from this is an expanded and more differentiated view of the 'other side' particularly on the issues of trust. Even though this trust may not generalize to the broader sphere of the different populations, it seems to have brought some hope in the participants and also given them explicit people to 'work with' on the other side. People that are able to and most of all, willing to, make an effort to understand their thoughts and feelings.

Four important features of the program seem to have brought about this development in the program participants:

- **The ground rules**, leaving out politics and issues that are not yet ready to be up for discussion. With this comes also the practicing of listening skills, showing respect for the others' points of view even when you do not agree with them, and 'putting yourself in the shoe of the other'. This was expressed by one of the participants as "seeing the issue from another corner of the triangle".

- **Facilitators**, supervising and guiding in the relations is reported to be necessary even after the participants now have known each other for more than two years and constantly keep in contact. 'Hot issues', like politics and the historical narratives can not yet be raised without leading to hostility and problems in the relations. Even if progress has been made, the participants still do not think they are ready to continue the program without the supervision of facilitators. This can also be seen in relation to;
- **The long-term perspective**, which makes the efforts of being part of such a project worth while even when changes are not seen right away. The long term perspective seem to have given the participants a feeling of being part of a joint effort where they have to contribute by keeping in touch and bringing the program forward.
- **Meetings outside the region**, which gives the participants the opportunity to rest, put the problems of their everyday lives aside and concentrate on the friendship issues instead of keeping distance to the 'perpetrators'. This is also an obvious part of making a less hostile atmosphere for the program.

In addition to this, some of the participants emphasise the positive aspect of meeting people from the other side that are more or less like yourself and that they experienced meeting friends from the other side that they 'clicked' with instantly. This may strengthen the assumption, made also by the facilitators, that the personality variable is an important one, as you will find people sharing similar characteristics also in very different political or social environments. At the same time, the participants saw the integration of people also from extremist groupings as one of the big strengths of the program. As to say, **the constellation of the group and selection of participants may be an important part of the success of the program. Closer examinations of optimal group constellations could thus be an important factor to be considered in future studies of this and other programs.**

7 Comparing the Findings to the Theories

In this chapter the MEP is discussed in relation to the various theories. In the first section the recommendations of the Optimal Contact Strategy is discussed, emphasising how the conditions of the strategy relates to this particular setting. How the findings may add to the contact literature is emphasised through the way this program has managed to build constructive intergroup friendships. This is mentioned by e.g. Pettigrew (1997) to be essential for contact to lead to generalizable decreases in prejudice towards the out-group. In the second section, the findings are discussed in relation to collective narratives and how these represent particularly difficult or emotionally challenging issues of the conflict. In the third section of this chapter I discuss the findings in relation to the various definitions of conflict resolution and the model of potential transfer effects of ICR, proposed by Fisher. The conclusions from the comparisons, the research question and comments on validity are discussed in the last section.

7.1 HOW DO THE FINDINGS CORRESPOND TO THE THEORIES?

7.1.1 The MEP and 'The Optimal Contact Strategy'

The first recommendation of the optimal strategy is that the contact should be: **'regular and frequent'**. In the MEP program this has showed to be difficult, mainly because of difficulties to raising the funding required for organizing the meetings. Yet the first meetings were quite frequent, contributing also to the continuity of the process. The participants have also contributed to maintaining this continuity by keeping in contact through internet connections and telephone calls. They report, though, that this continuity is needed for the program to continue and progress to be made and that it will be difficult to maintain the program if the meetings will not be held more often in the future. It is emphasised, though, by the participants, that the relations will continue even if the program would have to end. This is suggesting that strong relations have been established within a rather short period of time. As discussed below, the long-term perspective and frequency of meetings may be more important in addressing the more difficult issues, not yet talked about in the MEP.

The MEP also involves a: **'balanced ratio of in-group to out-group members'**.

This offers the opportunity for the participants to engage in friendships, involving people both from their own and the other side. The importance of encountering parties from the other side is obvious, giving the participants the possibility to get to know 'the enemy' and challenge stereotypic perceptions and images that evolve in such conflicts. In addition, the participants report a sense of 'feeling the other side'. They experience that they can be real friends with the others, trust them and see them as accountable. Regarding the hostility of the context they are normally in, this is a new experience for many, giving hopes, instead of strengthening enemy images of 'us versus them'. This can be seen in relation to two of the other recommendation, made by the contact approach. The recommendation emphasising that the contact should: **'involve interaction with a counterstereotypic member of another group'**; and the one prescribing that contact should: **'be with a person who is deemed a typical representative member of another group'**.

These are contradictory towards each other, and not easily interpreted. In the MEP program, emphasis have been made to include representatives of the broader sphere of the societies of the two sides, yet they are all selected for the program due to some characteristics that are probably not encompassed in the stereotypic images of 'the other' on either side. For the Palestinians, stereotypic images definitely followed the extremist Israeli who, in the beginning of the program was a settler. Settlers are feared and hated by many Palestinians and even by moderate Israeli Jews in Israel. One of the Palestinians was on the first meeting with the others wearing a Muslim 'hood' that he had pulled down his face, triggering images of terrorists and fundamentalist Arabs causing anxiety in at least one of the Israeli participants. One of the Israelis reported that even her/his image of Jordanians was challenged by getting to know the very well educated Jordanians in the program contrasting her/his original views. Many of the participants did not know *any* representative of at least one of the four countries included in the program before they joined the MEP. Therefore, most of their views of would *have to be* based on stereotypes and not differentiated views that develop through acquaintances and friendships. An important difference between coexistence work in intractable conflicts and work in areas where the conflict is not a part of all areas of society is that in intractable conflicts, many people never have the possibility

to even *meet* representatives of the other side under peaceful conditions. This adds to the importance of programs like the MEP. Giving people the chance to meet and share their thoughts and ideas with people from the 'other side'.

Even though the participants report that the views they have of participants of the other side are not generalizable to 'the other side' in its broadest sense, the emotional changes that have happened in this case might be just as important. In my opinion this may even be the most important contribution of the MEP, and where it stands out in comparison to other programs. It is hard to say which of the conditions or parts of the program that has actually triggered this development.

The MEP certainly involve a : '**genuine acquaintance potential**', and the contact in the program is: '**personalized and involve genuine friendship formation**'. In the sense of the MEP this has meant that the participants have been given a possibility to meet people of the same age that are in similar positions in life also having similar goals and wishes for the future. The possibility to meet as such has also been important, as meetings with people from the other side are very hard to maintain in times of intractable conflict. In this regard, the notion that contact should: '**occur across a variety of social settings and situations**', may also have been important. Many of the MEP participants mentioned the different social activities contributed to bringing them closer. Yet, for the MEP participants, the emphasis has been put on the necessity of meeting each other *outside the conflict setting*. This can be seen in relation to the prescription that the contact should be: '**Free from anxiety or other negative emotions**'. Creating such an atmosphere though, is not easy in regions of ongoing intractable conflict as all the participants are constantly being kept aware of their social obligations and loyalties to their respective societies in their everyday lives. When taken out of the everyday setting, they are given the opportunity to experience life in a society not torn by conflict, and this has been crucial to the possibilities of friendships to grow.

So has the fact that the program is: '**organized around cooperation toward the achievement of a superordinate goal**'. This prescription is easy to follow in traditional coexistence work involving segregated groups that are not in conflict, yet in larger conflicts such as the one in Israel/Palestine, most conflict resolution efforts

seem to evolve in the common frame of 'negotiations', 'finding optimal solutions', 'make settlements for peace' and 'best alternatives to a negotiated agreement'. Implicit in these approaches is the notion of 'us vs. them', bringing **competition** to it, rather than cooperation and collective superordinate goals. In this regard, the MEP organizers have found it necessary to *put the political issues of the conflict aside*, replacing them with the creation of new goals and agendas, agreed upon by all the participants, encouraging cooperation and new ways of dealing with the conflict. In the MEP, this process, called the 'vision process' was done quite early, on the second and third gathering. This approach have shown to have preventive effects regarding deadlocks and hostility, even if the discussion of political issues show to be inevitable in a later phase of the program. The goal and initiative of the MEP obviously also has to be: **'evaluated as "important" to the participants involved'**. In the MEP, commitment to the program values and initiative has been emphasised from the beginning, through the selection process, and is later showed by the strong efforts made by the participants to stay in touch. As mentioned by one of the participants, the ones that are not committed enough realizes this and decides to leave the program. This has happened to two of the original participants.

What the participants report to have been of primary importance is also the efforts made by the facilitators contributing to the safe and predictable framework for the gatherings. This can be seen in relation to both the prescription that the contact needs to: **'occur between individuals who share equality of status'** and should: **'be normatively and institutionally sanctioned'**. Because of the ground rules, agreed upon by all the participants in the first phase of the program, they all have the same guidelines to follow and the right to give their opinions, yet, not by all means. The facilitators supervise and intervene if some of the rules are broken. The participants heavily emphasise that friendships would not have evolved if political issues had been discussed in the first phases of the program. This would probably have charged the gatherings with hostility. As it is widely known that a non-hostile environment is necessary for contact to lead to the reduction of prejudice, this notion should, in my opinion, by all means be taken seriously.

7.1.2 Political Issues and the Two Competing Narratives

The political issues and the narratives of the past, are beyond doubt the most emotional and difficult aspects of the transformation that has to be made if peace is going to be the future of Israel/Palestine. Findings from the MEP though, propose that addressing these issues may not be the best place to start. The building of trust between conflictants in intractable conflicts like the one in Israel/Palestine is a time consuming process. The actors from the different parties need to see that they can create a future together even if it, as a first step, is only on a low scale basis. The damaging impact of living a life totally consumed by conflict is also obvious in the way that at least some of the participants need some time outside the region before their 'guards' and distrust regarding people from the other side can be let down and the building of trust and relationships can evolve.

As mentioned by Salomon, the legitimization of the collective narrative of the other side means that one has to acknowledge the right of the other's narrative to exist and *'accept its validity in its own terms'*. Even if the collective narratives of the other side have not yet successfully been addressed in the MEP, the participants have come a long way. This can be seen in the comments made by various participants mentioned before, as e.g. the one saying that: *'I got to know them...in general I learnt that there is another side. And that they are not the only ones to blame. Every conflict has two sides'*. This is a long step on the way of trying to see the perspectives also of the other side. Another, saying that: *'..I think that the most important skill I learnt is to listen, and actually, in a way, to respect that they are speaking. Not respecting what they are saying, but....that they are speaking so I can listen'*, Also a big step on the way towards acknowledging that the other side also has the right to speak and have their own opinion. For people in intractable conflicts, that have grown up witnessing or hearing stories of loved ones being hurt or killed by people on the other side, being taught to blame the other side for all their sufferings, these are important advancements.

Following the argument of Rouhana and Bar-Tal saying that it is very difficult to produce a vision of peace in societies *'embroiled in intractable conflicts whose dynamics are not conducive to such vision'*, the advancements made by the MEP are

in fact substantial. They have developed their slogans of *courage, commitment* and *compassion*, realizing that they, in the process they are in, need courage and persistence if they want to promote a change.

7.1.3 The MEP as Interactive Conflict Resolution

The MEP can definitely be seen as a conflict resolution program focusing on peacebuilding through its emphasis on '*long-term relationships between conflictants*'. The transfer of what Galtung refers to as the cultural aspects of conflict is also addressed by the way participants are given tools to handle conflicts in a more peaceful way, through *compassion, courage* and *commitment*, and also through transformational leader skills and listening. The psychological aspects of conflict are also addressed as the participants get to know people and build friendships crossing the lines of conflict, and also practice ways of seeing the many sides and perspectives of the conflict. Some would probably argue, though, that as the basic issues of conflict are not squarely faced by the program, it is incomplete in terms of how conflict resolution approaches in intractable conflicts have been organized in the past.

As I have mentioned earlier, this may not be a shortcoming of the program, but may rather be a necessary part. A more gradual process, focus on the building of trust has in the MEP been important for the sake of preventing hostility and deadlocks. This may also give lessons for other programs.

It is not easy though, to account for the transfer effects of the program to the broader sphere of the Israeli/Palestinian society. The participants selected for the program can all be characterized as preinfluentials, some even influentials following the categorizations of Fisher (1997: 192). The participants are also in the process of including 'peers' in the program. These are people from their own spheres of influence that they believe will be fit for the MEP and contribute to making the program wider, reaching a broader part of their respective societies. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the participants, in the middle of forming a political career, explicitly pointed at the importance of engaging leaders in such programs:

"... e.g. Ariel Sharon in the last two years decided to make a step [disengagement] that was very unpopular in the beginning, yet he made it, and everybody accepted it, and it changed things. You can change people all the time, this is important and a lot of NGOs are making these changes, but the most influential aspect is to change leaders. If you make leaders more open in their mind.. it can make peace..."

She/he emphasised the importance of knowing people in higher positions also on the other side:

"As I see it, I hope some people with connections to the MEP will be in the parliament and government. -Maybe participants, peers of peers of peer groups for instance, and the same on the Palestinian side and the Jordanian side. I hope it will become wider, and the personal contacts will play a very important role if there is a mistrust between the two sides or maybe political leaders from both sides can make a phone call and talk directly to someone they trust, and get information about what is going on. If, we have enough people that have this MEP experience, and also become influential enough; then we really change the area."

Even if the work they have done still involves only a small group of people, their network is continually growing, making their experiences known also to people who trust them in their own communities. As reported by the participants, the process of bringing peers into the program has not been difficult, as people tend to show interest in the initiatives made by the MEP. The interest in joining the program was also strong in the initial selection phase, suggesting as reported also by Fisher (1997: 198) that the willingness to cooperate and make joint efforts to build peace is there.

7.2 CONCLUSION AND GENERAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE MEP

7.2.1 The Propositions of the Research Question

Answering the research question, this study is not contrasting former assumptions made by the contact strategy. Yet, the reported experiences from the MEP strengthen the conclusions, made by Dixon et. al (2005), that there is a need for additional knowledge addressing the issues of contact work in intractable conflict. Knowledge

about the context of the people involved and the problems and issues they are facing are best understood through conversations and relations to people in the region. In addition the need for third parties facilitating meetings between antagonist groups are obvious and their role in such conflicts could even be extended by adding to it the importance of a 'neutral ground' outside the region representing a non-hostile environment that are not easily found in areas of intractable or protracted social conflicts.

Sensitivity also has to be shown regarding which issues to address in such programs, and at what point in time. This may be a contribution also to traditional conflict resolution workshops, or suggest that peace and reconciliation programs like the MEP could complement such workshops through its focus on relationships and building of trust, rather than primarily addressing the political issues and controversies. Disturbing issues, embroiled in the identity of both the Israeli and the Palestinian societies, seem to be dependent on gradual, long-term efforts like the MEP, showing patience and understanding regarding the emotional distress related to this part of the conflict.

In addition the study supports the notion made by Pettigrew that intergroup friendships may depend on long-term efforts. Based on this study, one can not say whether or not it is a necessary condition, but prolonged contact certainly seems to strengthen the relations built through group processes in the first three gatherings.

7.2.2 Narratives in Research and Recommendations

Adding to the specific propositions of the research question, I found the narrative perspective to be very useful, highlighting much needed aspects of research on conflict resolution and peacebuilding. As mentioned also by Asgeir Føyen, much of the knowledge needed for conflict resolution workshops are already *in* the participants. The objective of the facilitators should be to create an open and trusting atmosphere where the ideas and thoughts of the people involved can be put forward and discussed. The participants of the MEP are possibly representing a larger portion of their respective societies that have already made reflections about how they want

things to change even if it means cooperation rather than a continuation of the fighting, thus listening to their stories is an invaluable way of examining these issues.

Many of the participants also gave positive feedback regarding the interest in their program shown by this study. The interest *they* showed in sharing their experiences strongly strengthens the assumptions also made by Fisher that participants and the affected parties show to be *positive* towards such efforts. In this study, this showed to be even more so for interviews than questionnaires, maybe assuming that interviews make it easier for the people involved to articulate what they truly think and feel. In my opinion, interviews as a way of measuring and exploring issues of intractable conflicts and peace processes should be given value also in relation to its potential positive effects on the interviewee.

7.2.3 The Validity of the Findings

Relying on the consistency between the reports of the participants that were interviewed and also the responds from the program manager, a high degree of internal validity may be assumed for the study. As the participants reported that they had not actually read the questionnaire before my interviews, there is a very low possibility that conversations about the issues discussed prior to my phone calls have contributed to this consistency. The long time that has past since the last gathering is adding to the reliability of results, as the responds are probably due to own reflections rather than the actual 'spirit' of the time of the gatherings.

Because the findings are not disconfirmed by prior theories and research based on similar efforts, but rather add to some of the knowledge, one might assume that there also is a degree of external validity to the study. This though is not readily measured in these kinds of studies. Hopefully, the study may also show to have *pragmatic validity*³⁸ contributing to ideas and motivations for future organizations and programs addressing attitudes and human relations in conflicts.

³⁸ As explained in chapter two.

Overall Conclusion: Lessons for Peace Work, in Israel/Palestine and General

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict has been characterized as an intractable or protracted one, due to its ongoing nature of disputes that are deeply rooted in the history and identity of the Palestinian and the Jewish people. By this it shares features with similar conflicts that have started out as disputes regarding the rights to own land, but has become complicated by the more complex issues involving religion, identity, security and other basic human needs. Representing a threat also to international security, it has become a conflict of symbolic value to actors surrounding the region as well as actors in other parts of the world.

This study specifically addresses the question of how knowledge of the Middle East Program for Young Leaders (MEP) may contribute to the theory and recommendations for conflict resolution practices in intractable conflicts. This is done through interviews of the participants and the program manager of the program, and results are compared to prior recommendations of the optimal contact strategy, coexistence work and theories of conflict resolution. The review of the literature reveals that psychological mechanisms in such conflict resolution work is not given enough emphasis, particularly in intractable conflicts, where conflictants experience extreme conditions of threats, fears, and sufferings.

The study suggests that coexistence work in intractable conflicts like the one in Israel/Palestine encounter challenges that are not sufficiently addressed in the recommendations made by the optimal contact strategy. All the recommendations may not be equally necessary. E.g. the condition of regularity and frequency of contact has in this particular study shown to be of minor importance, as some of the participants connected quite instantly, emphasising also the importance of the personality variable. This, in addition to other findings of the study implies that the conditions of the optimal contact approach also are not *sufficient* for prejudice to be replaced by cooperation, friendship and trust. This is particularly due to the extreme conditions of the Israeli /Palestinian conflict. Comparing the findings to the contact literature, much of the recommendations are confirmed to have positive effects on cooperative patterns between the participants in this study, yet some additional specifications are needed.

One is the long-term perspective that is necessary for the development of relations that are strong enough to handle the emotionally challenging issues of the conflict. This assumption is strengthened by emphasis made in prior coexistence work by e.g. Salomon, addressing the importance of collective narratives and legitimizing the views of 'the other'. In the MEP case, a gradual approach seems to have given effects, mentioned by Salomon to be early steps of change in the susceptibility to such changes.

In relation to the prior recommendation, the study also shows the importance of avoiding difficult and disturbing issues in the initial phases of such programs. Even if the recommendations from the contact approach propose that the environment should be friendly and free of competition, this is not sufficient for the recommendations needed in intractable conflicts where the affected societies are consumed by issues that represent quite the opposite. Thus, as chosen by the participants and organizers of the MEP, it might be necessary to *avoid* the political issues of the conflict in such programs.

In the MEP this is made possible through the ground rules of the program. These have shown to contribute to a predictable and trusting atmosphere where opinions can be shared while at the same time avoiding hostility. The ground rules are agreed upon by all the parties involved and may be adjusted as the relationships are getting stronger, thus other programs may have to invent their own rules and boundaries. Yet, the ground rules from the MEP may give guidance to such procedures.

The meetings on neutral grounds, outside the region, were also reported to have positive effects adding to the less hostile atmosphere and helping to keep the minds of the participants off issues and difficulties of their everyday lives.

Another part of the MEP, relating also to the personality aspect, is the process of selecting participants. The participants selected for the program showed to be quite open to change and cooperation. Being given the opportunity to meet and connect with people on the other side of the conflict that shared some of the characteristics as themselves was reported to be of great value.

The selection of participants may also show to be important for the transfer effects to larger spheres of their respective communities, even on the level of higher diplomacy and decision making. As mentioned by Asgeir Føyen, though, the independence regarding political positions and formal obligations in parliaments and decision making offices is contributing to the continuity of the program. It may be important for such programs to be successful over time that participants selected for the programs, even when being in governmental offices, have a long time perspective on participating and a personal commitment superseding the time they remain in office.

The success of the MEP program in building long lasting intergroup friendships is all in all based on a joint effort by the Abildso team and the participants themselves. The long-term and open ended process is based on sensitivity regarding issues and needs of the various parties in the program. The various conditions mentioned in the contact literature, of contact involving e.g. a balanced number of in-group and out-group members, being with representatives of a counterstereotypic group and with persons deemed to be a typical member of the other group, be free from anxiety or other negative emotions and be normatively and institutionally sanctioned seem to have contributed to the success of building cooperation, empathy and trust among the participants. Though, the study strongly suggests that conflict resolution workshops in intractable conflicts confront additional challenges. Friendship formation and building of trust in such conflicts seem to depend also on some skills as active practitioners. According to the Abildso team, these can be brought forward through facilitation or learned through active participation in a continuous process.

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Appendix: Interview Guide for Interviews with Participants

The interviews of the five participants were open ended, but based on the following questions:

1. Has the MEP brought about a change in how you see the other participants?
How?
2. Where there moments where you specifically experienced that your relationship to the others changed? Describe: What were you doing? What did you feel? How if at all, were the experiences tied to the program?
3. In your view: Has any of the processes of the program been specifically important in bringing about cooperation between the participants? Which ones? Does this involve activities led by participants? -Facilitators from the Abildso team? - Guests?
4. In your every day life, have you had any experiences that challenge your views of the other participants? What kind of experiences? How do they challenge these views?
5. Would you say that any of these experiences are more difficult to handle as being a part of the MEP? - Or do you handle them or think of them differently after being part of the MEP? How were your views of Palestinians, Norwegians and Jordanians before you entered the MEP?
6. How is your relationship with the other participants in the time between MEP gatherings?
7. During the first gathering in Jordan there was an incident that was chocking to all of you. What happened? How did this affect the group and the program of the gathering?
8. You have had a MEP workshop leading to three different projects that you have been working with in the second and third phase of the program (ethics in conflict, documentary, school project) How would you describe the importance of these projects? What do they mean to you? What has bringing in peer groups meant to you so far?
9. How do you see the MEP in the future? What are your visions for the program? How will your relations to the others be in the future?