

Samen in Zee: Israelis and Palestinians in the Same Boat Camp

by Sophie Schaarschmidt

Samen in Zee means “all in the same boat.” It was chosen as the guiding principle for a unique initiative of four students from the Netherlands who brought together Belgian, Dutch, German, Israeli and Palestinian youth. This initiative was carried with the thought that respect and understanding of divergent groups can only be achieved by getting to know one another - on equal terms - as individuals and cultural beings. The meetings were organized as a sailing camp, where participants were figuratively – and literally – in the same boat together.

The week’s programme consisted of learning modules of non-violent communication and conflict resolution, and a mediation training -- as the main constituent of the programme -- in addition to country presentations and sharing personal conflict experiences as well as more leisure and cultural events as sailing lessons, a multicultural evening, and a trip to Amsterdam with a canal tour, dinner at a Pancake Bakery, and visits to three religious houses (a mosque, synagogue and church) and the Dutch Amnesty International Office. The latter involved a courtroom activity creating opposing views of the universality of human rights.

Two “Samen in Zee” sailing camps took place: in August 2004 and a year later in August 2005. The camps were held in the small village of Uitwellingerga in the North of Holland at a small private sailing farm, chosen for its peacefulness and surrounding landscape, privacy, and access to sailing lessons. The setting, field visits, program flexibility, and open-mindedness and cohesion of the group contributed to the uniqueness of the experience.

The group in the first camp consisted of the youth, youth leaders, workshop facilitators, sailing instructors and organizing team. For the second camp, held in August, 2005, the organizing team consisted mainly of youth who had been participating in the first camp and were committed to reprise the project. Major factors remained consistent, including the setting, workshop leaders (myself and British non-violence trainer Marcus Armstrong), youth

Comment: There was one workshop leader (Marcus Armstrong, a non-violence trainer from Great Britain) and me, facilitating the workshops.

leaders who recruited the participants, sailing instructors, objectives and substance of the program, and countries of origin of the participants (Belgium, Netherlands, Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territory of the West Bank), but there were some changes in the youth organizations involved and some slight modifications in the programme (footnote 1).

Comment: The youth who were organizing the 2nd camp were more closely connected to other youth organisations and therefore they chose to involve those. Israeli Jewish organisation: Open House Ramle instead of Mofet. Israeli Arab organisation: Cegas instead of Baladna.

The third camp is being planned, again by former volunteer participants of the second camp.

This paper addresses various important issues concerning the process and outcome of these camp experiences:

1. What were the motivations and the objectives of the camps?
2. What happened during the camps, particularly with respect to reconciliation efforts between Israeli and Palestinian youth?
3. Were the camps successful?

While the framework of this paper is too limited to discuss in great detail the theories and success of conflict resolution trainings or to develop a new framework to evaluate such projects, some points and observations will be raised that are of interest to those working in the field of conflict resolution and peace-building.

BACKGROUND

The project idea developed from a discussion about intercultural training and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict between the author and a fellow student, Menno Ettema, both enrolled in masters courses in the psychology of culture and religion at the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands, and volunteers in the Euro-med Youth programme of the European Commission dealing with intercultural training, international voluntary service and conflict resolution. Both had participated in a Euro-Med Youth camp in Israel called “Beyond the Borders” which brought together Dutch, French, Israeli, Palestinian and Turkish youth in a kibbutz in Israel. This camp failed to decrease existing stereotypes between Israeli and Palestinian

participants, apparently due to the aggression and emotionality evident in the group discussions and on the visits and tours, despite the opposite objective of the camp. Returning from this camp fairly shocked from this interaction, the author and her companion developed their initiative and presented it at a workshop at a Euro-Med Youth seminar in Haifa in December 2003, with participants from mixed professional and cultural backgrounds (Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Turkey). The positive reception inspired them to develop contacts and submit a proposal in February 2004. In addition to that, the author had a more personal motivation, being a German woman educated about the dreadful history of WWII and the treatment of the Jews in the “shoah.” Worried about the lack of justice, equality and peace in the Holy Land and in the world, she believed that with this project she could make a small contribution towards understanding and respect – something that is missing in any conflict in the world. Admittedly, this thinking might seem naïve and romantic. Indeed, the experience of the two youth camps resulted in a more critical reflection on the initiative and its objectives .

The first camp

The first camp started off with a workshop including icebreakers and name-games, participants giving introductions and personal statements about hopes and fears regarding the coming week, followed by the first sailing lesson. One exercise, for example, was a sentence completion whereby participants put an ending to the phrase, “The sun shines on everyone who...” The afternoon workshop involved exercises to describe “cultural codes” and “cultural diversity,” as well as a group meeting in nationality mixed groups to reflect about the experiences, and an evening where participants engaged in “country presentations.”

Comment: I don't even know anymore how they were called. The evaluation of those games was that they were a bit boring and less important.

Comment: The group reflection meeting was for the participants to reflect about and evaluate what has been offered to them. The organizers picked up the comments and tried to take consideration for any special wishes.

The idea of the country presentations was to give the other participants facts about each participating country (its population, size, main income, etc.). In the planning sessions, the Israeli and Palestinian youth leaders had demanded to avoid political discussions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to restrict the week's programme to general education on non-

violent communication and conflict resolution. However, we were conscious of the fact that a presentation of “the Palestinian land” might never be apolitical since it by nature reports loss of land incurred by the state of Israel. Interestingly -- to the apparent surprise of the youth leaders whose objective had been to avoid a discussion about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- the Palestinians’ country presentation could best be summarized as a powerful demonstration of their deprivation and inequality, whereas the Israelis’ country presentation started very cautiously about geography and climate (i.e. non-political issues) but was completely taken over by a Palestinian-Israeli who raised political issues. Some Palestinians were clearly very eager to express their feelings and explain their situation. This evening evoked a lot of emotions and frustrations amongst the Israeli, Palestinian, and Palestinian-Israeli group members. The Israeli group felt betrayed since their nation was portrayed as “evil” by the two Palestinian groups, and were eager to defend their position and claim legitimacy and understanding for their situation.

In reaction to this, and to prevent dissention, we felt the workshop programme for the week needed some adjustment by holding workshops about “non-violent communication” and “conflict resolution” -- originally planned for the end of the week – earlier in the program, and abandoning the originally planned workshops on “identity” and “intercultural communication.” Two workshops on non-violent communication (NVC) were scheduled for the following two days in order to bring those principles into use in the mediation workshop where political issues would be back into the discussion. Principles of transactional analysis were taught by role-playing an agreement between a mother and her child. It was hoped that learning skills of non-violent communication and compassionate listening would help participants conduct a mock authentic mediation session discussing and negotiating issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on a rational, inter-group level rather than riddled with emotional and personal issues. The last thematic workshop, scheduled one day before departure, focused on the future: how to bring social change in a non-violent way into

practice. The question was asked, “What could be the role of youth in accomplishing social change in their environment?”

This approach seemed to work for most participants, evidenced by the decreased distress and animosity in the Israeli, Palestinian and Palestinian-Israeli participants. The workshops contained theoretical and psychological input about processes in conflict resolution and ways of non-violent communication which were put into practice using role-play, group and individual exercises, and moments of reflection. The work was on two levels: personal, in being encouraged to be him-/herself in the first place; and secondly, cultural in being encouraged to be Israeli, Palestinian, Palestinian-Israeli, Dutch, German or Belgian. Examples used in the workshops derived from various (mainly interpersonal) conflicts between partners in a relationship (e.g. colleagues at work, minorities and majorities in a society) with the aim of creating an understanding of conflict dynamics. Participants were allowed to discuss their personal conflict-related incidents, but boundaries were set to keep discussions on the political level well-defined and limited. Political discussions were initiated mainly by the Palestinians and Palestinian-Israelis, with the result that the Israeli participants sought to redefine the discussion to stick to the personal level. Occasionally personal issues became so intertwined with national issues that participants were confused, at the expense of the possibility for any meaningful dialogue – at such times the organizers intervened to stop the discussions.

Comment: Softening in the sense of decreasing or weakening the distress

In general, the youth were all very eager to learn about the NVC-model and different approaches to conflict resolution. They liked the activities and expressed the significance and value of this information for their personal lives. The group atmosphere during the workshops, sailing, and free time, was relaxed and joyful; the group mixed well and seemed to enjoy being together, interacting as human beings rather than as representatives of cultural agendas. The other “foreign groups” - Dutch, Belgian and Germans – clearly played an important role, in the way that these youth treated the Israeli and Palestinian participants on

equal terms, and stimulated discussions with individuals from both groups during free time. The European youth wanted to know more inside information about the conflict and hear the personal stories that the other participants could tell about how the conflict was affecting their lives. This created authenticity, in that true stories were shared and true feelings expressed in an atmosphere of “communal” caring. The interaction of the participants during the sailing lessons and the evening activities was not to be underestimated as a valuable source of relaxation and camaraderie between the participants.

The mediation session presented tense moments, as the participants were aware that the group would now switch to discuss political issues, thereby testing whether the participants had learned to develop relationships that would resist heated argument, or whether the discussion would again divide the participants into rival camps. The mediation consisted of two parts: (1) uninterrupted speech time for each group, and (2) the mediation between the two groups itself. Although we were aware of the fact that the Palestinians and the Palestinian Israelis faced different problems with the Israelis, it was decided during discussion with the youth leaders of all three groups that the two Palestinian groups should form one group for the mediation whereas all three groups would get the opportunity to speak during the uninterrupted speech time. The mediating group consisted of three spokespeople per group. In the Palestinian group there were two Palestinians and one Palestinian Israeli. The Dutch, Belgian and German groups appointed one person each to become a mediator. Altogether there were three mediators and three spokespeople per group participating in the round table discussion of the mediation.

During the uninterrupted speech time each group presented the story of its people based on hard facts that were illustrated by personal examples, which were presented in a very emotional way. The tone was not aggressive and none of the groups blamed another group for being responsible for the situation.

When, after a small break, the spokespeople took their seats in “camps” opposite each other at the mediation table, the atmosphere was so tense that one could hear people breathe. The youths who were acting as spokespeople kept calm but were obviously very nervous, and felt a burden to speak on behalf of their groups and negotiate existential questions (e.g. basic and significant to issues of existence, e.g. the life of an Israeli/Palestinian citizen in the Holy Land). The Israeli delegation was especially distressed, having to face two different sources of contention: from Palestinians and from Palestinian Israelis. Moreover, they seemed to feel inferior by the presence of these two Palestinian groups that were ready to negotiate their rights and needs – a situation that seemed to be the reverse of reality where Israelis would be perceived as the superior party in a negotiation.

Comment: significant to issues of one's existence (for example: the life of an Israeli/Palestinian citizen in the Holy land); the basic or primary questions

However, the parties managed to establish a dialogue with each other, using the methods they had learned in the NVC workshops: listening to each other and presenting their demands and needs in the least violent way possible. This opened new opportunities for more intense communication, and created an atmosphere of mutuality with two equal partners negotiating a common future. It was clearly observable (by how they talked about the issues) that the youths were aware of the fact that their futures were entangled with each other and that they could only solve the conflict together, when both sides accepted to move towards each other. The moment the Israeli group reduced their control over the Palestinian group and accepted their autonomy and legitimacy (listening carefully without posing opposing opinions), a dialogue of equality evolved which led the participants to search for solutions from which both parties could benefit. Although it was impossible to come up with solutions in such a limited time, the youths felt they had undergone a valuable experience with each other which laid a basis for their relation with each other during the rest of the week.

Comment: they were much more distressed about the situation and it was evident that they were not used to negotiate with 2 other camps. moreover, in advance of the mediation session, the youth leaders of the Israeli group (in both camps) were very tense and felt that they might not have been preparing their group well for such a discussion. In the 2nd camp the youth leader was so distressed that he nearly stopped the whole process of the mediation and he tried to put the condition that he himself could participate as a spokesperson in the discussion in order to be able to "defend" his youth in the discussion. We could solve the problem only by reminding him of the positive outcome of the mediation session the year before, where he had been a participant in the camp.

Comment: By the way they negotiated: how they talked about the issues. One of the Israeli spokespeople for example started the mediation saying: it's weird, here we are sitting and we know how the solutions looks like for us, but we don't know how to get there, meaning the 2 state solution for Israel and Palestine.

Comment: Let them speak without interfering, listening carefully to what they have to say and referring in their answers to what had been said by the Palestinians instead of just shouting out an opposing opinion.

Challenges of Preparing the Camps

Preparing the approach, method and content of the camps had not been an easy task. First of all, none of the organizers had prior experience in setting up such activities. Second,

although our studies provided us with basic scientific models of inter-group relations, and conflict and cross-cultural identity issues, we had not learned to put this knowledge into practice. Third, we had to fulfil the guidelines of the YOUTH programme of the European Commission which was funding the project, and we had to negotiate our ideas with the youth leaders of the four partner organisations involved in the project. An additional difficulty was that we could not benefit from the experience of other organisations that had been organizing a project like ours since we did not know of projects of this kind in Europe, Israel, Palestine or elsewhere. With all this in mind, we knew this project would be experimental. We spent many hours discussing the approach, goals and usefulness of our project, and were well aware that the overall goals might never be reached – to achieve “peace” itself. Short of that, we resolved that projects like ours could usefully raise awareness among participants and encourage them to build bridges instead of walls -- to engage in dialogue with each other in order to understand each party of the conflict better and accept each others’ reality.

This experience could also be valuable to the European partner groups, despite their peripheral position regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which could play a valuable role as observers and mediators, and could get a better picture of the different realities for Israelis and Palestinians and the value of stimulating dialogue between them. This appeared to be exactly the role they chose during the camp. Their presence helped to legitimize both identities and give them equal prominence. At the same time, the nature of the NVC workshops provided a good framework for learning about conflict resolution and non-violent communication in general which applied to the European participants likewise. As a result, those workshops were reported to be useful by the majority of the participants, regardless of their country of origin.

The Second Camp

The second camp was built on the framework of the first camp, including the relaxation activities, but with some changes the programme; for example, addressing the issue of the

national identity of the participants early in the first evening -- during the country presentations -- in order to stimulate a necessary group-defining debate between the participants right from the start. Since group-identity could be emotionally unsettling for the participants, we encouraged them to approach political issues from a personal background, for example, in verbalizing statements in this way: “The Israeli-Palestinian conflict impacts me, as an Israeli/as a Palestinian [~in Israel], in such (...) a way”. This process follows the principles of “Non-Violent Communication” and thus these workshops were scheduled early in the week, to prepare participants for the negotiation of political issues during the mediation session.

The second camp was hampered by the four-day delayed arrival of the Palestinian group because of visa procedures; only the Palestinian youth leader had been granted a visa in time to arrive at the start. This forced us to reschedule the programme once again; continuing the NVC workshops at the beginning of the week, but postponing the mediation session until the arrival of the rest of the Palestinian group. The country presentations were kept on the first evening, with the Palestinian presentation done by their youth leader. As expected, an emotional discussion evolved from the subject matter of that presentation; however the group atmosphere stabilized during the following days. The group awaited the arrival of the Palestinian group with great excitement, preparing a special welcome on the main plaza in Amsterdam.

The two-day visit to Amsterdam served as an effective get-acquainted opportunity providing an amiable atmosphere on return to the farm for continuation of the workshop programme -- introduction to mediation and the mediation session. Despite that the Palestinians missed the NVC workshops; the mediation session went well; however, the mediators had to interfere more often – compared to the first year’s camp – to clarify the ground rules (e.g. of being open, no verbal or physical aggression, no blaming or judging).

In addition, while the participants made serious efforts to establish a dialogue, the dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian spokespeople of the second camp was less deep and more confrontative with less mutual listening (requiring more intervention by the mediators) compared with the year before. As with the year before, the time was too short for the development of any solutions. Yet, the participants expressed relief and increased awareness about the issues from this experience.

The task of the mediation session was to come to a written agreement reflecting some common view – not as a political paper but to raise awareness about what the other side experiences (e.g. that an Israeli youngster sees what occupation means to a Palestinian) and rethink their opinion. The spokespeople in the first camp agreed that the occupation has to end because it stands in the way of peace. In the second camp, the Israeli spokespeople slightly changed their view of suicide bombers (not the action but why they do it, as a desperate way to get attention for the situation). One Palestinian girl said during the mediation: If there were no suicide bombers, there would not be a Palestinian issue anymore; this made a deep impression on everyone, realizing that for the Palestinians this would have meant death for their nation.

Evaluation

After the week, the organizing team met to evaluate and share impressions and observations of the camp. Discussions covered broad issues and critical evaluations, including that activities should be imbedded into a conceptual framework. The short-term success of the camps was evident from the reports of the participants, and from their ratings on an evaluation form. In a round-table discussion of the participants at the end of the camp, and in a questionnaire which was used in the 2nd camp to evaluate the project, the youth were overly positive about their experience. Suggestions were made for some little things to be improved, mainly about practicalities like providing more comfortable beds and serving dinner earlier

and including more international food like rice and pizza. Yet the approach, method, and workshop content, was neither criticized nor challenged by the youth or youth leaders.

After the communication sessions, participants noted that the experience was “powerful,” “enriching, and “moving,” and that they “learned a lot,” and “got to know different opinions.” Others noted that they felt “unfinished,” “tired,” “self-conscious” and “needed more training and practice.” Overall, the participants liked the camp very much. In two particularly moving comments, a Palestinian girl said this was the most moving experience of her life, and an Arab-Israeli said, “You give me the hope back.”

However, the long-term success was less obvious. The youth had created an internet forum as a means to keep in touch with each other, and thought about various ideas for further action and awareness-raising in their own communities (for example, to raise white balloons in the cities where the participants lived). However, few proposed ideas were implemented, and after half a year, most of the youth lost contact with each other. Discussions on the internet forum became more and more apolitical with time, and led to sharing personal stories, jokes or songs. Although a few enthusiastic youth took responsibility to plan another camp, the organizers felt that the efforts to create ongoing relationships had failed. The question arose whether the camps really contributed to a more differentiated understanding about the existing realities in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For that reason, one of the organizers posted the following questions on the internet forum:

“However, I was thinking about the camp and about you, and about the situation in your countries, especially the situation in Israel and Palestine. I was thinking about what the contribution of the camp was for you. Did it really help you to find hope for the future? Did it help you to be able to look at the "other side" less biased or did you decide for yourself that THIS Israeli named [...], and THIS Palestinian named [...] is okay and a good person, but

the groups (THE Israelis or THE Palestinians) are not? Did it help you to become aware of the power relations in your conflict with one party clearly holding the power over the other [...]? Did you become aware about the fact that this conflict which might have developed from a fight about land and resources in the first place became a conflict about national identities? And what are you doing now with this awareness? What does this mean to you as being a member of your national group, either the Israelis, Palestinians or as a Palestinian in Israel? [...] If a sailing camp only resulted in having nice friends somehow, or knowing that we can eat hummus together as human beings, what implications does this have for the conflict? I can imagine that the Palestinians and Palestinian-Israelis liked the camp in its nature but might question the usefulness of it. Nothing has changed in their bitter realities, so where do we go from here? And for the Israelis, how helpful is it to have met a Palestinian who behaved like a human being whereas in the media Palestinians are all terrorists?“

The struggle of the organizing team to evaluate the success of the camps underlines the need for a conceptual framework in which group encounter approaches are discussed and reviewed.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Existing models

The search for a conceptual framework for the group encounter approaches was challenging. Although many such encounters have been happening (with various conflict groups throughout the world), it was difficult however to find documentations of evaluations

used by these approaches. The following is an overview of some classifications of group encounters in the psychological literature, and their differences.

A useful classification of such camps [group encounters] is provided by Katz and Kahanov (1990) with the following two social psychological theories forming its basis:

(1) The first theory --“**Realistic Conflict Theory**” (Sherif et al. 1961) -- proposes that a real conflict develops from a lack or shortage of resources or significance of land for two or more conflicting parties, leading to stereotyping, prejudice and hatred towards the other(s). When two or more conflicting parties interact with each other, competition increases these perceptions whereas cooperation and the just distribution of resources between them.

(2) The second theory -- “**Social Identity Theory**” (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) -- proposes that personal identity is defined by belonging to one or more groups that we give significance to, and conflict derives from differences between two or more of these different significant identities. Personal values and self-esteem are gained from “positive distinctiveness” - the attempt to distinguish oneself as having positive qualities separate from others. This distinction leads to “in-group favoritism” – the valorization of the own (salient) group identity at the expense of an “out-group” identity perceived as inferior, and less positive. Stereotyping, according to this theory becomes a “human condition” whereby people will always be prejudiced against one another and favor their own group above another, especially in a conflict situation with the other group.

For their classification, Katz and Kahanov (1990) arrive at the following three “types” of group encounters: (1) workshops in the spirit of “**human relations**” tradition; (2) workshops emphasizing **cross-cultural learning**; and (3) workshops based on the **conflict resolution** approach.

The **human relations approach** focuses on -- as its name suggests -- relations between individuals in conflicting groups. Many such approaches focus on a super-ordinate identity -- an identity everyone could identify with, for example, being European, Muslim or a human

being. Negotiation becomes less salient in such an approach because commonalities are emphasized which do not have to be negotiated.

The **cross-cultural approach** focuses on raising awareness about cultural differences believed to account for tension and conflict between cultural groups. If those cultural groups meet on equal terms, negotiation is not necessary, since it is believed that understanding the differences would lead people to accept them. This can be challenged, given what might happen if cultural differences are perceived as threatening to one's own culture?

The **conflict resolution approach** focuses on negotiating the needs and goals of the conflicting groups with efforts to bridge existing differences and reach a compromise. Group members are seen as representatives of their respective groups and negotiation happens on the inter-group level; individual differences are unimportant for the negotiation. Understanding is considered of little help in the negotiation, since it concerns goals and needs which the parties want to see achieved or satisfied.

Workshops in the tradition of "Human Relations" usually focus on dialogue on the individual level, whereas workshops emphasizing cross-cultural learning and workshops based on the conflict resolution approach focus normally on dialogue on the inter-group level. Whereas the first two "types" of the above classification are based on (different) conclusions drawn from the "Social Identity Theory" (1) in order not to prejudice we have to create a common identity; and (2) in order not to prejudice we have to raise awareness about cultural differences, the last "type" is based on the "Realistic conflict theory" that a fair negotiation will satisfy our needs and therefore we will experience less inter-group problems which will lead to less prejudices.

On a more basic level, Katz and Kahanov's (1990) typology reveals a difference between the types outlined above with regard to their primary goal which is: understanding vs. negotiation. Models directed to understanding are based on the assumption that enhanced understanding of one another's situation and perspective encourages mutual dialogue which

will eventually help to settle a conflict. Models directed to negotiation are based on the assumption that a conflict would be settled by having adversaries negotiating their needs in a dialogue on the political level. Two of the three “types” described by Katz and Kahanov (1990) would, according to this division, be categorized as “understanding models” [workshops in the spirit of “human relations” tradition and those emphasizing cross-cultural learning] whereas workshops based on the conflict resolution approach would be categorized as “negotiation model”.

A different typology was proposed by Ben-Ari and Amir (1988) who classified group encounters according to their intention : (1) to reduce fear of each other and create familiarity by getting in contact with the rival group [contact model]; (2) to get to know and understand the rival group by learning about the culture and specific problems the group is facing [information model]; (3) to understand one’s own (individual) stereotyping and the psychosocial dynamics of the conflict [psychodynamic model]. All models are aimed at understanding in one way or another, by either becoming familiar with each other on the interpersonal, intercultural or intra-personal level.

Our Unique Model

Our camp experience leads us to add the two dimensions – understanding and negotiation -- to the above three existing types. This is based on the hope that (1) enhanced understanding of each other’s situation, perspective and needs encourages mutual dialogue and that (2) this dialogue will open up the opportunity for the conflicting parties to negotiate their needs on a more political or inter-group level.

Our camp encounter is therefore a combination of the different approaches. The NVC workshops are clearly interpersonal and intra-personal, demanding individual reflection and awareness of psychological dynamics that play a (key) role in conflict situations. Our workshops gave a lot of attention to feelings in a conflict which are obviously non-negotiable. In contrast, the mediation session is based on negotiation on an inter-national or political

level, moving inter- or intra-personal issues to the background. The NVC workshops, visits to religious houses, country presentations and the intercultural evening aimed at providing information and therefore creating understanding of each others' (ethnic, religious or personal) background. In contrast, the mediation session aimed at negotiating needs between the conflicting parties regardless of the understanding that the participants developed.

However, it was predicted that mutual dialogue (as defined in the mediation model as a dialogue in which both parties would be open, concentrating on solutions and agreements, and listen to each other carefully without blaming or judging or using verbal or physical aggression) would evolve more easily if the participants could do both – that is, define the existing realities not only in terms of needs and goals of the respective groups, but also in terms of different realities of the groups.

Our observation was that the Israeli and the two Palestinian groups came to the camp with different needs: whereas the Israeli group had the need to get to know the “enemy” in order to reduce their fear, the Palestinian groups had the need to get recognition for their suffering and discrimination and to get legitimization for their threatened national Palestinian identity (as being equal to any other national identity in the world) and raise awareness about this in the whole group. Therefore, the Israeli group was more comfortable with the approach of the “understanding model” used in the NVC workshops, further because it served their need to be treated as individuals and not to be called “a people”. In sharp contrast, the Palestinian groups were more comfortable with the approach of the “negotiation model” used in the mediation session, which served their need to talk about the conflict as a real and bloody battle for the right of existence fought between the two peoples. This vast difference has implications for follow-up projects. The logic of the “understanding model” would suggest that the youth would benefit from a well-built follow-up program that kept them actively involved with each other to deepen the friendships that would develop during the camp. The logic of the “negotiation model” however, would suggest the opposite: those participants should come to

the camp well-prepared with strengthened (national) identities that allow them to negotiate their needs and goals (self-) confidently.

In conclusion, the youth might benefit from both approaches despite the fact that it is difficult to conclude whether our camp encounter integrated both successfully, or could satisfy the needs sufficiently in the future (e.g. the Israeli need to reduce their fear by “meeting the enemy” and the Palestinian need to get recognition of their suffering and be accepted by the “other side” with regard to their “national identity”). We are in the process of improving our model through thoughtful reflection and evaluation of our experience. Yet, our model holds hope for raising awareness about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – on the political, interpersonal and intra-personal levels – for Europeans, Israelis, Palestinians and the public elsewhere in the world.

FOOTNOTE 1: Two German females replaced two Dutch participants who could not come in the first camp. And youth organizers of the second camp involved the group they were more closely involved in, i.e. Open House in Ramle instead of the Mofet Institute.

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