

“Of Course, I am a Human Being, Too”: Nationalism and Contact in the Republic of Turkey and State of Israel

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the secular and religious nationalisms in the Republic of Turkey and State of Israel as experienced by ethnic and religious minorities in both locales. This ethnographic work focuses on the embodied experiences of individuals in their religious, political, and social entirety, seeking to delve into their lives as an oft-neglected or feared group, and explore their contact (or lack thereof) with members of the majority culture. Semi-structured interviews revealed historical and present-day structures created and maintained through avenues such as media, education, literature, language, and politics that seek to define and separate groups that do not fit the prevailing nationalistic narratives. This is exacerbated by negative contact that is generally oriented around political disagreement and conflict. However, in some cases, positive intergroup contact served to facilitate fundamental changes. Therefore, despite its limitations, contact has the potential to not only reduce prejudice, but also inspire lives of political and humanistic engagement that can undermine the “single stories” stigmatization propagates.

Keywords: nationalism, contact theory, Turkey, Israel-Palestine

2014; Anderson 1991, 4; White 2013; Tessler 2009). These two nation-states now are engaged in a constant battle for identity and safety. For example, in Israel novels that explore the nuances and difficulties of Jewish-Arab romance are banned in high schools, while Turkey aims to define its nation “as a singular, unitary nation that is under continual threat from within and without (Or Kashti 2015; White 2013, 59).

“A Racist, Sick Country”

Conversation, shouts, and laughter filled the atmosphere of the non-profit organization in downtown Haifa as I sat in the side office to hear Karim’s thoughts. As with almost every conversation I had the privilege of sharing with religious and ethnic minorities in Turkey and Israel-Palestine, I was confronted with surprising, sometimes harsh realities. Karim is a masterful storyteller, and relayed his Palestinian family’s tumultuous history in the State of Israel with many smiles and creative flair, yet serious sobriety.¹ His tone took a dark turn as he said:

This is true in Israel. Everyone is your enemy unless he is of ‘your kind.’ It’s a sick, racist mentality. You can’t call it anything different than that. The more that you live in Israel, the more you understand the truth is not nice. It is what it is...it could be nice for some. And Israel is a racist, sick country. And our mentalities...we are raised like that.

Introduction: Nationalism and Contact

In stories like Karim’s, it became clear that the nationalisms of the Republic of Turkey and the State of Israel are created and maintained through avenues like media, politics, military, family, and language. Nationalist ideologies like this privilege groups that fit their conception of “an imagined political community,” forging spaces where homogeneity is desirable and difference is disdained (Anderson 1992, 6). They point to long histories, or, in the words of Benedict Anderson, “cultural artifacts,” be they the fragmented Ottoman past of the Turks or the tortured existence of Jews as a minority group under the National Socialists (Akçam

Of course, ideologies like Turkish nationalism and Zionism are far from homogenous; they are nuanced, diverse ideas that come from individuals with many political leanings. However, the structures of power and privilege in both locales tend towards militarism and fear. For example, in Turkey, “The orthodox Kemalist vision of the nation imagines solidarity as unity of blood and race...accompanied by intense fear of dissolution of racial unity and thereby national unity (White 2013, 3). Similarly, during the elections in March 2015, Israel’s Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu stated in a video message on Facebook, “The right-wing government is in danger. Arab voters are going en masse to polls. Left-wing NGOs are bringing them on buses...with your help and with God’s help, we will form a nationalist government that will protect the State of Israel” (Harkov 2015).

Through these kinds of beliefs and discourses, barriers are erected between people in both locales – be they religious, ethnic, or national – that serve to stigmatize those who do not fit the prevailing definitions of power, safety, and being. The literature of contact theory, with its focus on the effect intergroup contact has on the reduction of prejudice, is therefore an important body of literature to engage with. Gordon Allport’s *Nature of Prejudice*, first published in 1954, is one of the earliest explorations of contact, and has become a foundational text. In it, he defines prejudice as, “an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization...[that may be] felt or expressed...[or] directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group (10). Through an analysis of literature including studies on desegregation in New York Housing projects, Allport concluded that contact reduces prejudice when four conditions are met: (1) equal status between groups, (2) shared goals,

(3) intergroup cooperation, and (4) support of law, authorities, or custom (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006, 752).

To him, these conditions were essential. However, in a sweeping quantitative meta-analytic test of fifty years of diverse contact research, Pettigrew and Tropp argue that Allport's conditions "*facilitate* contact's reduction of intergroup prejudice," but that "mere exposure" between groups also tends to positively affect prejudice (2006, 753 and 766; emphasis mine). Therefore, they propose the data, "conclusively show[s] that intergroup contact can promote reductions in intergroup prejudice. Moreover, the meta-analytic findings reveal that contact theory applies beyond racial and ethnic groups to embrace other types of groups as well" (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006, 768). They conclude by pointing out that future research ought to focus on possible negative effects that limit the efficacy of contact, such as intergroup anxiety, authoritarianism, and normative restraints (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006, 767).

However, other key studies have identified limiting factors and even negative effects of intergroup contact. For example, an ethnographic study of Indigenous-White relationships in a Canadian mill town revealed that, although positive contact alleviated "old fashioned prejudice" (e.g. crude language or desires for segregation), under the right conditions it may fail to eliminate "group position prejudice" (e.g. sense of superiority as a White, and subsequent rejection of reparations) (Denis 2015, 230). Here, the author argues this is partly due to subtyping, where individuals "who disconfirm stereotypes are viewed as exceptions that prove the rule" (Denis 2015, 222). Furthermore, experimental evidence has shown that positive contact with dominant groups can undermine marginalized groups' engagement in collective action against systemic inequalities if the dominant individual expresses disagreement with the cause or the disadvantaged individual reports high levels of positive contact (Becker et al. 2013; Saguy et al. 2009). In short, these studies suggest that simply eliminating prejudice in response to injustice may not rectify the underlying inequalities that so characterize human societies.

Most research on contact is grounded in experiment or survey. Therefore, something that distinguishes this article is its ethnographic approach, which is rooted in the words and stories of those who live outside the nationalistic definition. I introduce the reader to these people, their stories, and the implications of their stories for both the possibilities and limitations of contact theory. Further, I undertake a broader humanistic engagement with the sometimes metaphysical interactions between people that – when they take place – can serve to undermine and even shatter boundaries forged through years of separation, xenophobia, and suffering. This study contributes to the body of literature exploring the nature of intergroup interactions and adds empirical experiences to the effects that contact (both positive and negative) may have on them. Finally, it explores the forces that serve to limit contact's potential.

I accomplish this by first introducing my ethnographic methodology and the locations of the study. Then, I share two vignettes that will serve as the foundation of these case studies, and subsequently let the stories of my friends paint their picture in a discussion concerning nationalism, fear, barriers, frustrations and, ultimately, subversion. Finally, I conclude with some words concerning their experiences, and the implications they possess for human identity formation and interaction.

Methodology

The relationships from which these stories were gleaned were established in the fall and winter of 2015-2016, at which time I conducted ethnographic field research among ethnic and religious minority communities in Istanbul, Turkey and Haifa, Israel. The goal of this project was to discover if (and if so, how) interpersonal interactions shape the conceptions people possess of the Other, a relation that is often one "of power, of domination, (and) of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Said 1978, 5). I chose to focus on the minority experience, for members of minorities are almost constantly made aware of their status, are in steady contact with people of the majority culture, and are often the voices least heard due to the dominating influences around them.

For this study, I conducted seventeen semi-structured interviews, each about 45 minutes to an hour long (see Appendix for interview questions). All the names I use in this paper are pseudonyms, unless I am referring to public figures. The pseudonyms are Arab, Armenian, or Kurdish names to reflect the culture of the individuals they refer to. I interviewed seven people in Istanbul: six Armenians (four female, two male; teachers, a priest, and a doctor) and one Kurdish man (a tour coordinator). I conducted ten interviews in Haifa with Israeli Arab citizens of the State of Israel: seven women and three men who were teachers or workers in a local non-profit organization; six of them were also students at the University of Haifa.



Figure 1: The neighborhood of Tarlabaşı, Istanbul. Photograph by author.

Istanbul is a bustling modern city of approximately 14 million people. It is rich in history and unique in its cultural mosaic. Most Armenians (40,000-70,000), Greeks (2,000-3,000), and Jews (17,400) that remain in Turkey reside within its limits. Ethnic groups tend to live in communities near one another. For instance, Armenians usually reside in neighborhoods such as one called Feriköy. I lived in an apartment in the neighborhood of Tarlabaşı, a neighborhood characterized by minorities such as Kurds, Arabs, and Africans, and made most of my contacts in the Armenian community through a priest I had met during

an academic trip with Wofford College in January 2015. I met other minorities, such as Kurds and Syrians, through contacts with local churches. In total, I spent a month in Istanbul in the fall of 2015

Haifa is the third largest city in the State of Israel, and is the largest in the north. Within its limits, there are approximately 277,000 people. It is lauded as one of the few “mixed” cities in Israel, with an Arab minority making up about 10% of the total population. This demographic is largely localized in the lower city in neighborhoods like Wadi Nisnas, Halisa, and Abbas. Haifa is built up around Mount Carmel, and as one climbs the mountain, the Jewish population rises, as well as socioeconomic status. During my time in Israel, I studied at the University of Haifa and interned at a local non-profit organization, and I met all my Arab interviewees through contacts established at these locations. In total, I spent four months in the State of Israel and the Palestinian West Bank.

Before delving into the case studies, it is worth spending a moment of reflection on my positionality within the study. As mentioned above, I established most of my contacts either through local faith communities I had met on a previous academic trip or through my studies/internship while in Haifa. As such, my interviews in each location were different based on how the contact was established. For instance, in Turkey, many of the interviewees were members of an Armenian community that is generally insular and wary of outsiders given their historical and present realities. However, I knew one priest, and spent my first few days sipping tea with him and discussing topics like politics, faith, and his young (very feisty) husky. We fast became friends, and he soon connected me to various people in the community. Since the recommendation came from a well-regarded referee, individuals were more than willing to participate. Then, I formally interviewed him on one of my final days in Istanbul. I found it to be a remarkably deep conversation as we had established a warm, trust filled connection. This was much the same for my conversation with a Kurdish man I met in a local church community; we spent much of the month swimming together in the Sea of Marmara and exploring Istanbul. When the

time came for an interview, he knew he could trust me as a friend to protect his identity, and we therefore covered topics like the Turkish ban on the Kurdish language (for which he was imprisoned and tortured as a younger man) and nationalistic school curricula.

Since I spent a longer period of time in Haifa, I had more opportunities to establish connections with the local Palestinian community. During my internship, I ate and worked alongside media coordinators, social workers, the residents, and the founders of the non-profit. We would take trips together to deliver Christmas presents to local schools, and put on programs in orphanages a few towns over. At the University, I spent time making meals, wandering the national forest, studying, and walking down the mountain to attend plays with my friends (internationals, Palestinians, and Jews). Therefore, in both of these facets of my experience, the interviewees were individuals I had established relationships with personally, or had been referred to by someone I knew.

Of course, I was still an outsider. My Arabic was workable to the extent of establishing rapport, and in Hebrew I managed nothing more than simple greetings. Some locals would think I was of American Lebanese or Jewish origin given by fair skin and beard, but after a few probing questions my lack of familial ties to the region became clear. As such, every conversation would have been influenced in some way by this fact, but I sought to mitigate its effects through engaging as faithfully as I could with the local culture. Furthermore, in each conversation, I stressed that there were no right or wrong answers, I was not conforming to a specific agenda, and I was simply there to hear their story. These stories powerfully touched me and influenced the focus of this essay.

Case Study 1: Istanbul

The muggy air was thick with smog and sunlight, and I had to move quickly through busy sidewalks as to avoid being late. I was on my way to one of my first interviews arranged



Caption: Figure 2: Facing north, looking down at Haifa's lower city from the famous Baha'i Gardens. The neighborhood of Wadi Nisnas is just west of where this picture was taken. Photograph by author.

by the Armenian priest I had reconnected with a few days before. The man with whom I was to speak, Goryoun, works in the medical field. I had met him during my first visit to Istanbul when he spoke to our Wofford group about the state of minorities in modern-day Turkish politics. I was anticipating this meeting mightily; at that time, he had struck me with his humorous, genial demeanor and serious knowledge of the history and current state of minority communities in Turkey. I knew I stood to learn much from him.

I finally located the building after passing it a couple of times, and made my way off the bustling streets of Istanbul up a flight of stairs. After a few minutes of waiting in the mercifully air-conditioned office, I sat down with Goryoun and his curious assistant; she was interested in discussing some of these topics for the first time was well. We sipped Turkish tea in its famous hourglass-shaped glasses, and a lighthearted, yet soberly illuminating, conversation began:

I grew up in Istanbul, but my ancestors are from middle Anatolia. My parents could not speak Armenian; couldn't go to an Armenian school. I believed that my grandparents couldn't either, until one day I heard my grandmother speak our mother tongue. I was shocked, "why did you not teach my mother or me?" Her response, "We did not want your mother to have an accent." It was a strategy to be in Turkey. Propaganda forbade the speaking of our language, and they chose to raise their children so that they would not be betrayed as Armenian. Furthermore, when I was growing up, Armenian history was banned by the board of education. Things have changed, but slowly.

He continued on to describe some divisive realities in the Republic of Turkey as it stands:

Today, Christians and Muslims are identified on their identity cards. This is a way for discrimination, for the police can use that and oftentimes tie Christians in with the United States and anti-Turkish ideas.

People think that to be an Armenian is not very good, and [Armenians] are therefore encouraged to change. To change yourself to "be Turk," assimilated. There exists an idea of the "Ideal Turk," which is made up of a special race and [a more cultural form of] Sunni Islam. There is also a fake history, and people have begun to be aware [of it]. However, recently fighting has broken out in the east again. Someone in the government said, "it is probably not a Kurd, but an Armenian," [essentially saying] "Kurds could not do this, only the 'bad society,' which are Armenians, could do something like that. [It is an] Armenian trick." It is shameful for the government to turn people [like this].

Our conversation continued on for an hour, spurred on by his assistant's intermittent inquiries and astounded reactions, and Goryoun's own gregarious personality. Tea abounded, laughter colored our language, and other people were called into or just stopped by the office to offer their stories. We seemed to have created a kind of "identity bubble" where all were able to freely discuss and question the backgrounds of each person, and the boundaries that color the Turkish mindset. I then asked a probing question concerning his experiences as an Armenian in daily life, to which he replied:

I am a doctor and a teacher, I have no accent, and my name is easily confused with Turkish names. Therefore, I am generally not identified as Armenian right away. Furthermore, when I teach, I wear no cross that betrays my identity as an Armenian. Despite all this, when I interact with people, I do not hide who I am. When they learn, their first reaction is very interesting.

"Oh, really?," he said, in a surprised voice for effect. Then, Goryoun moved his hands in space one above the other, leaving a thick gap of nothingness between them and continued:

These two words are worth a thick book of social meanings and

explanations. They mean that, “you are a good man, or you are a skilled man...how could it be?” For, to be an Armenian is to be worse than an enemy, it is used as a swearing word, [equated with] traitors.

Case Study 2: Haifa

Near the end of my semester at Haifa, I was close to exhaustion. Class work piled up, and last-minute interviews were at the forefront of my mind. My project had taken me from the Bosphorus to the Mediterranean, and my next interviewee, a teacher named Asma, had helped me process many of the nuances of the conflict, the emotional weight of distrust spurred by recent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians, and the stigma-laced rhetoric that colored political and media discourse. Her story was one that I had begun to piece together, but the opportunity to hear it in full was a prospect that both excited and humbled me. I settled into the now-familiar office, where pictures of the old city of Akka and other sights of what I had begun to call, “the Unholy Holy Land,” adorned the walls:

[My Palestinian background] means to me that I was born to parents who came from Palestine; they were kicked out and my mother was able to go back to Jerusalem until '67, but after 1967 she wasn't. They are both considered refugees, so that comes with a certain experience having grown up in a home that was very bitter about the situation. For instance, I grew up hearing about the big home my grandfather owned [in Palestine], which is still standing. I did not see a picture of it until I was older and somebody in the family found a great picture. Everyone in the family now has an enlarged picture of that home in their living room.

I then steered the conversation towards Asma's lived experience as an Arab Palestinian citizen of the State of Israel, asking her if it is hard to be who she is where she resides. She continued, without missing a beat:

Of course it is hard [to be Palestinian in Israel]. Just open the news. I don't have to open the news; I have Haaretz [a local news outlet] popping up on my iPhone. The parent of the guy who did the shooting the other day [in Tel Aviv] was now arrested. And another person is...I don't know what...a soldier hurt in the West Bank. This is a very political place, and you can't get away from being Palestinian. It's very hard because it isn't a place that is sympathetic at all. At all, if you ask me. Just open the news every morning and listen to it in Hebrew and how they speak. Very, very, very unsympathetic. So it's very hard.

As Asma's past continued to unfold before my eyes, I could feel myself empathizing with her story. As I sat there, soaking in the responses I was hearing to my questions concerning personal identity, story, and struggle, I began to see just how deep one's national and ethnic identity can run, and the power it possesses when instilled by family and solidified through experience. After I asked her a question concerning her interactions or friendships with Jews, something astounding unfolded before my eyes:

Definitely, loads and loads. I am surrounded by Jewish friends and I live among Jewish people. But I can't really talk about that unless really going further. Where I came from growing up in Libya and Egypt, there were no Jews. The Jews were only the enemy. They were only the Satan, horrible people who took our land and made us refugees....so I have been going through a really long process over the years. I have gone through a long process.

She then carried me along the journey that led her from Egypt, Libya, England, and America to the chair in which she currently sat, a Palestinian professor in an Israeli university:

I can remember being unable to see a Star of David without cringing. I can remember going the other way when I was eighteen walking outside

a department store in London after seeing a Jewish family with a kippa and all that. Just turning the other direction because I didn't want...I had a bodily reaction. Heart palpitating and such. I can't even explain what was happening to me. It wasn't hatred. I was just very upset. I can trace it back to 1986 when I was at Georgetown University for the summer and was in class with a student who was Israeli. Then the teacher asked us to write a paper about the Arab-Israeli conflict together. It was my worst nightmare. I don't know if I had interacted with Jews at that point. But definitely never an Israeli, a "worse Jew," as some might say. Yet, if I had never met him and realized that he is a father and I am a mother, to see that you can have coffee together and sit together, to connect...I began to see that the human needs to meet. I think one of the worst things to do is to put up walls. Walls only make people wonder what is on the other side and make stories about them. You need to meet them. People need to meet. People are thirsty, they are curious.

Finally, she allowed me to see how these years of experience had culminated to influence her day-to-day life in this deeply divisive place:

[All of this] doesn't mean that I don't react when some right-winged, strongly Zionist statements are made. But, I can also see the human being behind them...I have to live here with people of different opinions and political stances than me, so I have to keep working on expanding my heart to include all of them. It's a daily challenge.

Unity, the "Ideal," and the Other

The fact that nationalistic ideologies color the prevailing attitudes and discourses of both Turkey and Israel became apparent early on in the interviews collected. They permeate media,

literature, and politics. These ideas influence the thought processes of individuals. Even though its rhetoric and ends (be they religious or secular) may be disparate, nationalism is, in many ways, assumed as the central unifying identity.

Dr. Goryoun conveyed that the "philosophy of the 'Ideal Turk...[which] tried to create a new society with a faked ideal...[is localized around a] special race, and [cultural] Sunni Islam." Fadwa, a student at the University of Haifa, when asked to define what "Palestinian" meant to her, said, "It means I don't belong to the flag of Israel. It is a Jewish state and I am not Jewish...I always have felt Palestinian, and never a part of the state of Israel." The frustration at her exclusion from the national identity was felt in the forceful, urgent tone she spoke with. Another student, Nadir, when elucidating his antipathy towards making generalizations based on national and religious identities, stated, "[take] Jews, for example. Judaism is a religion and also a nationality."

This lens can cast a new light when one considers the ethnic definitions of "Turkishness" and Zionism. They are constructed systems of thought, rooted in collective (sometimes fabricated) historical experience, that serve to build a homogenous understanding of race and religion. They, and the people who embrace (or unknowingly benefit from) them, are far from monolithic, and encompass a wide diversity of ideas and orientations towards the Other who does not fit the prevailing nationalistic ideology. However, I do hold that these beliefs may lead to the results revealed by a recent Pew research study in Israel, which indicated a forty-eight percent strong or simple agreement with the phrase, "Arabs should be expelled or transferred from Israel" (Cooperman, Sahgal, and Schiller 2016).

In light of these imagined boundaries, the themes of fear, besetting danger, and enemies "within and without" the national borders continually surfaced in these conversations. At one point, Karim remarked:

The people's mood in Israel is controlled by politics and the media. You can watch the news, it only speaks on one of two things: [1] The conflict, the

internal Israeli-Palestinian conflict and [2] enemies outside, like Iran, Daesh [ISIS]. All the “bad guys.”

He observed that this two-fold, yet remarkably singular focus served to shift the public conscience away from other problems like Israel’s shaky economic situation and drastic rises in what he called “non-democratic values,” instead offering, “the only thing in focus is terror and more terror and more terror.” In Istanbul, a Turkish priest named Father Avedis remarked:

Sometimes you feel bad because you notice that you are not accepted. You have that feeling sometimes...you will see that to use the name Armenian is to speak about “vital enemy,” whereas none of the Armenians are engaged in such kinds of problems. Because there are some problems and someone wants to find a solution by inflection, by seeing Armenians as the enemies of this country...

In both locations, therefore, those who do not fit the nationalistic narrative may become scapegoats when threats, whether real or perceived, arise. These threats possess a unique power to unify groups under one banner, as observed by Karim, who said, “Americans felt more American when 9/11 happened...it [nationalism] was a unifying identity.”

Learned Fear

I began to see that conflict and fear create an atmosphere where one can never truly feel safe. Enemies are constantly surrounding you, your family, and your way of life. The nationalistic voice becomes louder, calling the groups to unify in light of these threats, and those that happen to fall outside of a specific definition of ethnicity, race, and religious/historical origin become objects of fear that cannot be trusted. Another Arab student, Nawal, reflected this reality in very straightforward terms when asked about the general perceptions Jews possess of Arabs according to her experience, “[Arabs are] not trustworthy. Not at all. We [Jews] don’t care

how nice you can be; you will never fit in with us, and we will never like you.” The distrust of these potential “enemies within,” was a pervasive theme in my research and another study with Palestinians conducted in Tel Aviv (Lamont et al. 2016, 267). This “learned fear” can lead to violence, and even cause one to lash out against the wrong target; as Nadir observed, “Many Jews think that all Arabs are out to get them. For instance with the incident...where they smashed a guy’s face because they thought he was Arab but he was not. He was a Mizrahi Jew, of Iraqi or Moroccan background. Just looking like an Arab is dangerous here.”

These realities lead to the beginning of an interesting discussion as to how this fear and fervor is created and maintained in these locales according to interviewees’ experiences. One of the key examples that surfaced at both locations was education. Khalil, another worker at the non-profit in Haifa, said of the Israeli education system:

You see in Jewish schools that they always talk about Zionism, the Shoah [Holocaust], and so on. But, in the Arab schools you are not allowed to even talk about the Nakba [catastrophe], even though it happened to you and your relatives.

Therefore, the national curriculum is often oriented towards the collective history of the majority culture, even to the length of silencing the historical narrative of twenty percent of the state’s population. I witnessed a poignant object lesson in this disparity of language and narrative when walking with friends through a park in the Hadar, a neighborhood halfway up Mount Carmel in Haifa. My eyes moved towards a low-set black monument, and I froze. The words I read: “Haifa Liberation 1948” in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. This could not be farther from the “Nakba” that was 1948 (the creation of the State of Israel) to the Palestinian people, and provides a kind of metaphor for the education system of Israel as well. Further, in Turkey, a Kurdish man named Seriyas stated:

When you look at the Turkish education systems, it is an amazingly high nationalistic and

racist curriculum that tells them that Greeks and Armenians are the enemy...[in which they] teach the kids a one-sided false history to beware of those enemies that betrayed them

In fact, Başak İnce has shown that the Republic of Turkey's civic education, as recently as 2010, consistently "define[s] the nation as a union of language, religion, race, history, and culture, where the orthodox understanding of religion especially has begun to be counted among the basic characteristics of the nation. By doing this, hatred against non-Muslim citizens and people belonging to different sects of Islam is supported." Furthermore, these textbooks are not characterized by critical thinking, and serve to "create a phobia of 'the enemy' in the minds of young people. Unlike in previous periods, however, the texts warn not only of external enemies but internal ones" (İnce 2012, 124). Dr. Goryoun pointed to this reality when he said:

Recently fighting has broken out in the east again. Someone in the government said, "it is probably not a Kurd, but an Armenian," [essentially saying] "Kurds could not do this, only the 'bad society,' which are Armenians, could do something like that. [It is an] Armenian trick."

He was visibly frustrated when speaking, betraying exasperation and exhaustion at this fact: tiny minorities like Armenians are labeled as traitors by a public that has likely never met them.

These stories indicate that the structure of education in both Turkey and Israel reflect a perception of threats and differences that is interpreted through the lens of nationalism. This perception is maintained through obfuscation, altered history, or even silence. It works to orient the minds of youth toward the identity believed superior and necessary for survival. Language becomes an eraser or a sword, and power systems are put in place through words that maintain control over the Other.

Language, Military, and (un) Shared Stories

While at the University of Haifa conducting research, my eyes were opened to an interesting reality. After a few months there, I had begun to learn the markers of Jews and Arabs (e.g. olive-drab military uniforms for Jews and Palestinian Kuffiyehs for Arabs). The Israeli school system until university is segregated, as the government supports two separate school systems for Jews and Arabs (Lamont et al. 2015, 200). As such, one could imagine that attending university would be a prime opportunity for intergroup interactions to take place. Still, during my walks to class, I began to observe that Jews and Arabs rarely grouped, associated, or simply "hung out" with each other. One of the interviewees, Nawal, confirmed my suspicion. More interviews revealed that, alongside education, two other important realities were reinforcing the boundaries between these young people in the Jewish State: military service and the Hebrew language.

Both the Turkish and Israeli military play unique roles in the formation and maintenance of the national identities of both states. However, the interviews revealed some interesting differences in the military's influence on the minority experience in both locales. The Turkish/Armenian example I will save until later, while Israel-Palestine I will address here.

When asked if she had any Jewish friends, Nadia, a student at the University, said:

No...some I guess I learn with. But, I don't have any common ground with any Jewish students here. [Our relationships] don't get very personal. Most are older, usually twenty-three to twenty-four, because they serve in the military, take time off after their service [before entering university]...

Another student named Leila remarked, "[Jewish students] are so much older than us. They are twenty-five and older."

After high school graduation, every Jew, both male and female, is obligated to serve in the military (thirty-two and twenty-four months, respectively). Arabs (except for Druze), however, serve only on a volunteer basis and generally opt out of military service, for to serve is generally viewed as a deep betrayal to their people and the Palestinian cause. Also, Arabs and Jews often take a “gap year” before entering university, with Arabs generally arriving on campus at the age of nineteen and Jews twenty-one and up. Therefore, the life experiences of these students sitting together in classes and the same coffee shops are drastically different. Every Jewish student spent the last two years or more serving in the military: going through physical training, drill, and possibly working in violent areas of conflict between settlers and Palestinians in the occupied West Bank. Different stories are shared. Inside jokes, shared military language, and, as Nadia said, similar experiences within Jewish circles lowers the amount of “common ground” students from these two groups share. This doesn’t even take into account the antipathy many Arabs feel towards the military as a result of the occupation of the West Bank, frequent confrontations with Gaza, and the like. Therefore, the expressly nationalistic military requirement in the State of Israel serves not only to separate Jews and Arabs for a couple years of service, but also for years after in university and beyond, as some jobs make army service a pre-requisite, regardless “of its relevance to the work performed” (Lamont et al. 2015, 238).

The Hebrew language operates as another barrier to interaction. In the late 19th century, Eliezar Ben Yehuda championed and pioneered the Modern Hebrew language among the Jewish immigrants to Palestine, which is now the first language of every Jew in Israel (Tessler 2009, 67). It is therefore a key facet of the Zionist movement and, by extension, the nationalistic bedrock of Israel. This is especially important in light of Israel’s Arab minority, whose first language is the Palestinian dialect of Arabic. After commenting on the problem of military service, Nadia continued, “I also find it very difficult to express myself in Hebrew. It is hard to go deep. I don’t deliberately limit myself, but it just happens...I try and try, but

there is a barrier.” It seemed that her experience was one of frustrated communication. Another student, Nur, commented, “My relationship with the Jews in psychology class is not as strong because my Hebrew is not strong. When I start to speak, I start muttering.” When asked if she has Jewish friends, Leila answered:

I don’t have Jewish friends, because my Hebrew is too bad. Sometimes I think that the Jewish people don’t interact with us because they feel there is a line between Arabs and Jews. I mean, they talk to you, and if they approach me and I am able to talk to them, then great. But, my Hebrew is bad. I’m really bad.

In short, these three individuals found a pre-existing barrier to connection in the Hebrew language. I was astonished by some of the Arab friends I made who, at the age of nineteen, were fluent in Arabic, Hebrew, and English. Still, most Palestinians were not confident in Hebrew. Also, it is rare to find a Jew who speaks Arabic and, in conversation with Arabs, I found that Jews who speak Arabic are often distrusted, as it is (often correctly) perceived that the reason a Jew in Israel learns Arabic is because they served in military intelligence. Therefore, the Modern Hebrew language has served to bolster the nationalistic ideology of the Jewish State. Further, it widens and deepens the gaps between members of the majority and the ever-increasingly invisible Other.

“Oh, Really?”

Thus far, I have demonstrated that the deep-seated realities of the nationalistic ideologies that color the Republic of Turkey and the State of Israel are pervasive; they are created and maintained through education, media, political discourse, language, military, rewritings of history, and more. Fundamentally, these barriers are erected to maintain purity and power through defining differences between individual human faces, even if, phenotypically, they are essentially the same (Lamont et al. 2015, 196). Yet, despite all of the barriers that exist in these societies to prevent meetings, “different” human faces do meet. The language

of contact theory lends a helpful hand in analyzing these interactions.

As mentioned earlier, the interviews in Istanbul revealed an interesting relationship between the Armenian minority and military service. Although the military is a powerful proponent of the nationalistic ideology of Turkey, minorities like Greeks, Jews, Kurds, and Armenians are obligated to serve in the military after finishing high school at eighteen. This time therefore becomes one of the only opportunities for many Turks encounter these tiny communities, generally localized in major cities like Istanbul and Ankara. One young Armenian teacher, Aghavni, when asked about any positive changes she had seen in Turks after meeting them, said:

None personally, my friends are not people that I meet the first time. They already have Armenian friends and say, "I know you." But my friends in the military have told me something about their time. They have always said, people [Turks] said, "Oh, you are Armenian? We didn't know you are like us!" My friends and I think that this is because they came from families that talked bad about Armenians, or because in school, history lessons generally show that Armenians are our [Turks'] enemy. But when they meet us, they say, "Oh, you are like us!"

Another teacher, Nazeli, recounted, "When my husband was doing his military service, he had this friend who didn't know he was Armenian for a certain period of time. When he did find out, he said, 'No way, you can't be an Armenian.'" Therefore, obligatory military service in the Republic of Turkey can actually enable the face-to-face meeting of identities that might otherwise never connect. It is worthwhile to note that, in the case of the Turkish military, all four of Allport's conditions – equal status, shared goals, intergroup cooperation, and support of law – are met. The context of the military is, in fact, similar to the earliest studies on contact, which were conducted in the U.S. Merchant Marine and the Philadelphia police force (Brophy 1946; Kephart

1957). Therefore, the "facilitative" nature of his conditions is illustrated in this case (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006, 553).

A characteristic of these encounters the interviewees pointed to is the surprise that Turks exhibit after meeting Armenians. In the words of Father Avedis, "If we sit next to each other, you will not be able to notice who is Greek, who is Armenian, who is Jewish, who is Turkish...because we are all belonging to Anatolia." That is, there are no easy physical differences with which one can distinguish "origins," for each group possesses a long history in the same land. I kept hearing the word "mixer" when locals (Turks and otherwise) would refer to Istanbul's diversity in particular. Father Avedis continued on to say, with a measure of artistic flair, that when people realize he is Armenian, it is as if:

[They] are looking at you as a person from space, you are a lion...those persons are looking at you as if you are a lion. Coming from space. "Really, you are Armenian? Are you serious?" Of course, I am a human being too.

Avedis gave the same emphasis to the acute moment of encounter and realization that Goryoun did. That is, the, "oh, really?" moment, and Goryoun's assessment that:

These two words are worth a thick book of social meanings and explanations. They mean that, "you are a good man, or you are a skilled man...how could it be?" For, to be an Armenian is to be worse than an enemy, it is used as a swearing word, [equated with] traitors.

This acute moment of shock and surprise points to the undermining, and even reshaping, of the ethno-nationalistic barriers so reinforced in Turkish society.

Of course, this analysis cannot assess whether subtyping takes place in these above interactions; that is, after Turks have this moment of surprise, whether they subsequently rule out the encounter as one where "the exception proves the rule". For, instead of exploring majority group opinions and prejudices, this study focuses on the

experiences of historically marginalized groups (Denis 2015, 222). This is why I shared Asma's story above. As can be seen, she grew up in a reality that, for understandable reasons, cast the Jewish people, especially Israelis, as "the Satan, horrible people that took our land and made us refugees." The Other, the Jewish people, were rendered invisible to her world. This was accentuated by the reality of the refugee camp; no Jews ever resided or entered a place like her home. Her upbringing, with stories like that of her grandfather's beautiful yet unreachable home, cast the only vision of them.

This changed when she moved from the Middle East to London, where this contact with the Jewish family at the department store spurred a kind of, "bodily reaction. [With my] heart palpitating and such." The mere sight of this family resulting in a literal physical reaction. Then, when required to work with an Israeli in a class concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict (Asma's self-described "worst nightmare"), her first true interaction with her people's "enemy" helped her realize, "that he is a father and I am a mother, to see that you can have coffee together and sit together, to connect..." This, among other key encounters, led Asma to believe and truly live out this phrase: "the human needs to meet." Furthermore, she has oriented her life around a path of compassionate listening, where you learn to "explore your own responses" to a myriad of stories, beliefs, ideas, and the people behind them. In this case, Allport's conditions again facilitated a change.

What is truly remarkable, however, is the response she had. One story Asma shared described an encounter at a conference where she heard the story of an Israeli woman in her twenties whose role in the military was to:

Pick up the pieces of bodies after a bus explosion...I find it hard to even talk about. At the end, when we give feedback to the people we listened to, I remember looking at her and saying that I am so sorry this has been her experience. That I had kids her age that are spending their time exploring the world, going out with friends...and I just couldn't imagine

her at such a tender age doing the kind of work she was doing. And she immediately teared up, and you could see that there was a connection made between her and me on a human level. I was somebody who got her suffering. For me, this was an eye-opener. When looking at somebody who was a soldier, it would be easy to say "big deal" or "serves you right" [for serving] or whatever. "You want to steal somebody's country..." I could have gone that route. "You will pay the price." Or, you can really see the suffering. Asma's unique, hard-earned ability to "see the suffering" reflects a receptive heart and mind that has grown to see through the definitions of ethno-nationalism and the myriad of stories it tells. The Other that had so characterized her experience simply became "another." Furthermore, these contacts have inspired Asma to dedicate her life to the breaking of barriers, all the while advocating for justice in a society that is characterized by deep structural inequalities.

"...How Really Beautiful Life Is"

Khalil, the director of a local non-profit organization, told a story about his father that illustrates an active, ethically motivated intergroup contact:

One of the first stories that my parents had to deal with was a Jewish homeless man. He basically would curse my father every time he passed by, because of him [Khalil's father] being an Arab. Then my father succeeded in making contact with him, and his anger toward Arabs was not because he knew Arabs but because it is what he grew up with, that Arabs are our enemy... [and] he had lost so much from personal problems. Once my father started talking with him, getting in touch, the person opened himself

and started talking about his struggles and how he needed treatment.

After that, Khalil remarked, "He [the man] no longer cursed, was happy to get support and was eventually placed in an elderly house. Yet, he continued to visit us here, so this was only the beginning." A similar type of engagement was echoed by Father Avedis, who remarked:

My aim is, when I wake up every morning, to go to school to teach the students how to be a person, a person who is just, a person who in any case [even if he has enemies], loves, to be a person learning about the culture, about the identity, and using the culture and identity of his own, mixing to the culture of the community of the land where he lives.

Therefore, interpersonal interactions, whether sought out or stumbled upon, can have a profound, powerful impact on the participants, sometimes going so far as to dramatically reshape one's conception of reality, even if all four conditions of contact theory are not perfectly met (such as equal status, shared goals, and, some may argue, support of law and culture) in the case of Khalil's father. And, again, these altered conceptions may facilitate a change in lifestyle (whether substantial or small) that reflects a continual commitment to resisting interpersonal prejudice and politically reinforced conflict. However, this is by no means placing the onus on less advantaged groups to somehow shoulder this responsibility. It is simply an example of contact's potential effects on the lives of both privileged and historically disadvantaged groups.

I will share one last experience. Nawal told me a story of protest, violence, tear gas, sound grenades, and horses that left

scars on, and in, her. She shared this memory with suspense, pride, and sadness. I could tell that the reality of near-constant conflict was beginning to weigh on her just as it is on so many others (both Jews and Arabs), a weight that is reflected in Khalil's words; "it [the conflict] makes a daily struggle. Instead of investing more time in developing your situation, your children, your surroundings, you invest most of your powers in dealing with this conflict." In short, these political realities (of police brutality and consistent marginalization) consistently exacerbate the divisions of these societies. Furthermore, these particular types of negative, antagonistic contact may serve to reinforce prejudice. As such, there are very real cases of violence, injustice, and disregard, that, when coupled with face-to-face interaction, actually deepen wounds and "inhibit the potentially positive effects of contact" (Pettigrew and Tropp 2015, 767).

Yet, Nawal's demeanor changed when I asked about her relationships with Jews. She told me, "I have two really good Jewish friends. We are very close. I met them when they were fourteen and fifteen. One is from Haifa, so could have many interactions with Arabs when growing up, and the other is from a town that doesn't have many [Arabs]." When they met, they were surprised to learn that Nawal wasn't Jewish, which she revealed to them by stating, "stop occupying me," in her self-described "super straightforward, hurtfully straightforward [manner where] I often use the conflict as a subject of humor."

In spite (or perhaps because) of her bluntness, they are friends to this day. This then led me to ask her what difference she sees in these two individuals, as opposed to the majority of Jews she interacts with. She answered:

That is a difficult question. I think

it's them; their personalities. It wasn't the context in which we met [at a conference], because I met other nice people there but I have kept in touch with these two. Both won't serve in the army, which is a big deal...one is male and the other female. They're doing something less than the army, not IDF but still serving the country.

I continued to press, asking Nawal if it could be their parents:

No, no, their parents are very very... no it isn't their parents. The girl, when she told her mom [that she wouldn't serve], she said "if you don't go, I will kick you out of the house." The guy once invited me over but decided against it because his father is a policeman, and therefore wouldn't like me that much. I don't know...it's a very interesting question. They're both very, very unique. They both have gone through hard things in their lives. To answer your question fully I would have to know everything in their life. Yet I have seen them growing and have grown with them for two, three, four years now. They're just, they're very nice. They're very kind. They have gone through really hard things but love life. It sounds really cliché but they really love life and see all the goodness...they love the world and love life. I think when someone really understands the point of life and understands how much beauty is around us, I don't think he would get stuck on...I don't like calling the conflict a little thing...but compared to the huge things around us it's really a little thing. Come on. Love each other. Settle down. Khalas [Arabic for stop/enough], it's been sixty years, let's just stop and take a moment to appreciate how really beautiful life is. I think my two friends really understand that.

I will not (and, frankly, probably cannot) add

much to these words. However, Nawal and her friends are further examples of how, despite the deep-rooted nature of nationalism, individuals can transcend such definitions and boundaries to, in her words, "stop and take a moment and appreciate how really beautiful life is" through embodied, transformational intergroup contact.

"I Think I'll Just End With That"

Nigerian novelist, nonfiction, and short story writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie once stated in a talk, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (Adichie 2009). This concept of the "single story" sheds much light on the experiences of the participants. Through these interviews and a myriad of other interactions, I began to see just how powerful and deep the simple, stereotypic stories of the Other run. Armenians become "traitors" and Palestinians become "terrorists," and are thereby perceived to lack deep, basic human yearnings such as safety, meaning, and belonging. However, it appears that positive intergroup contact can facilitate fundamental changes in the minds and actions of individuals; in this case, those who live outside a position of power. And, furthermore, I argue that these changes motivate ways of life that seek to communicate an alternative to the "single story" through political action and simple friendship.

This idea can be applied to human experience in every culture and nation, as human institutions and thought are remarkably adept at defining and dividing. They utilize religious belief, socioeconomic sequestering, racial prejudice and disdain, and, as pointed to in this paper, secular and religious nationalism to foster these imagined boundaries. For example, the concept of race and ethnicity is unintelligible to science; they are modern conceptions that possess no grounding in empirical reality. These constructions are motivated by a desire for safety and simplicity, both of which require a "single story" of the Other that can be easily grasped, understood, generalized, and applied.

These stories resist competing narratives, eliciting surprise, disbelief, anger, and even deep physiological reactions, as was the case for Asma. However, this resistance, if overcome (or transcended, if I may), can open the individual to a world beyond his or her own: a world that is characterized by a compassionate self-awareness, thoughtful engagement, and appreciation for beauty found in the story – and the face – of another. Again, it may not solve every aspect of political disparity and systemic injustice, as it is important, “both in theory and in practice, to recognize that intergroup harmony per se does not necessarily lead to intergroup equality” (Saguy et al. 2009, 120). But, I would argue it is an important step in that direction. Future studies might continue to expand upon the potential negative aspects of positive contact, types of contact that exacerbate prejudice, and the ways in which intergroup harmony can be deepened to include justice-motivated political advocacy.

In light of the findings of this study, I also believe that ethnographic forays into the complexities of human contact might benefit from the inclusion of other humanistic disciplines such as philosophy and theology, which may lend lenses and language to stories like the one Asma told about the moment she shared with a young Jewish veteran:

...she immediately teared up, and you could see that there was a connection made between her and me on a human level. I was somebody who got her suffering... [Now I seek to be one who] can really see the suffering.

Then, as we closed, she shared:

In fact, I will tell you – as I know you are interested in religion and spirituality – compassionate listening...is, to me, a spiritual path. That is spiritual work. Even though I am not a practicing Muslim, Christian, or Jew, there is still a very strong spiritual way to how I see the world. I think I’ll just end with that.

So, I will seek to end in a similar way, with some

words from the 20th century Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. His treatise, *Totality and Infinity*, explores the divisive nature of totality; that is, systems of thought, belief, and power that render the Other essentially invisible, and the transcendence of the human face, which, for him, possesses an infinite power to resist and undermine totalistic construction. He writes that we, “receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity... [which] brings me to more than I can contain” (Levinas 1979, 51). Perhaps, then, the answer to the power of the “single story” lies in expansion. That is, the introduction of a new narrative – a human one – that opens one’s world to the tapestry of stories that shape and characterize the various complexities of lived experience.

Appendix A

I used semi-structured ethnographic interviews that pertained to the individual's ethnic/religious identity and personal relations with the majority culture.

Questions:

1. What is your religious/ethnic background?
2. Where are you from?
3. Where do you practice your religion?
4. Is it easy to be you where you live/where you are from?
5. What, if any, difficulties have you as a religious/ethnic minority?
6. Do you have many friends outside of your community? If so, where have these relationships formed?
7. Have you found that these friendships have changed how people of the majority view your religious/ethnic community? Vice versa?

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Endnotes

1. In this paper, I use the terms “Palestinian” and “Arab” interchangeably. In both cases, I am referring to “Palestinian Citizens of the State of Israel;” Palestinians who have Israeli Citizenship and comprise twenty percent of the state’s total population.

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