

A Comparison of the Cultures and Communication Styles
of Israelis and Palestinians

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INTRODUCTION

The conflict between Israel and the inhabitants of the Palestinian territories (the West Bank and Gaza) is now more than six decades old and continues to fluctuate in intensity (with a significant contrast between Gaza and the West Bank's relationships with Israel). The third generation of children is now on the scene — and, therefore, many citizens on both sides are longing for peace even while doubtful that it can be achieved any time soon.

But past events and bitter narratives of injustice and victimization aside, it must be acknowledged that differences in culture and communication styles continue to fuel misunderstandings and conflict. Until these are understood, acknowledged and addressed — especially in negotiations — peace may well remain an elusive goal.

This paper will use principles of cross-cultural communication principles and cultural anthropology to uncover the differences —and similarities — between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

HISTORY

For thousands of years (especially since the Romans conquered Judea in 135 A.D. and most of the non-rural inhabitants were killed, enslaved or driven out), the common unifying ideology for Jews was religious. But beginning with the “Jewish Enlightenment” among European Jews in the late 1700s, this began breaking down. “The idea of a legitimate secular culture began to take hold among certain sectors, even while they retained certain religious elements. This secular mode of expression gave birth to Zionism and, eventually, to the State of Israel itself.” (“Eye on Israel”)

Within the Zionist movement — and the nation-state that followed — the proponents of rabbinic ideology and those who opposed them struggled for supremacy. Finally, the proponents of a Jewish secular (but humanistic) culture won out. Thus Zionism and the Jewish state developed within a framework in which religion and religious (Orthodox) Jews had a place but did not call the shots. (“Eye on Israel”) Many different influences have shaped

Israel, especially because of the immigration of millions of Jews (and non-Jews, even if simply as resident workers) to the fledgling state from all over the globe.... [T]oday the attitude of a sizeable part of the Israeli population is that America is the model to emulate and that, the more this happens, the better off Israel will be.” (“Eye on Israel”)

Early Zionism was a predominantly collective culture with a deep suspicion of individual goals and well-being that undoubtedly sprang from the Marxist proclivities of many of the early Zionists. “Eye on Israel” posits that “... the most significant moment of change in Israeli culture was almost certainly 1967. At that point, more than at any previous time, the country opened up to both the ideal and the reality of America [and Western values]” through a movement that began after a “... large group of [young] Jewish volunteers, largely from the English-speaking world, that flooded the country in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 War, particularly those who worked on the kibbutzim and moshavim.”

“Another crucial agent of change was the advent of television, which began to be broadcast in Israel in 1968.” (“Eye on Israel”) And in music/the arts, collectively-oriented songs about love of country, the Zionist cause, Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel), largely gave way to romantic love songs, art that expresses individual thoughts and identity, etc. (“Eye on Israel”).

Nonetheless, it was not a complete shift from collectivist to individualistic. After all, in what highly individualistic culture in the world do you find thousands of people (or, at least, Jewish people and some Christians) of all ages pouring into Ben Yehuda Street — the social center of its capital city — every Saturday night to celebrate the end of Shabbat (the biblical day of rest) together?

A brief history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in order to create a context before launching into a review (and comparison of) Israeli and Palestinian culture and

communication. There never was a Palestinian state in the land originally called Judea until a conquering Roman general renamed it “Palestina” ([land of the] Philistines) in 135 A.D. Until the late 1800s, the land called “Palestine” was, as Mark Twain observed during a trip there, a desolate wasteland with few inhabitants outside of Jerusalem except for wandering Bedouin tribes. Then Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe began arriving—driven by pogroms and, in some cases, drawn by prophetic promises. They bought land from the Arabs that was considered “worthless,” drained malaria-infested swamps, developed advanced irrigation techniques for desert agriculture, and pioneered the kibbutz movement (communally run farms and business enterprises).

The subsequent prosperity of the Jews soon drew Arabs from throughout the Middle East — Arabs who were very happy to pursue better lives than were available to them in their own countries. One reason why much of the Middle East today resents Israel is because it is so successful. (Venture capital last year in Israel was that of France and Germany combined.)

Even Jews were called “Palestinians” up until 1948 — when British authorities affirmed the right of Jews to have a state of their own in what was their ancient homeland. The United Nations accepted and voted for this right. Nonetheless, when Israel implemented this decision by declaring its existence, she was immediately attacked by a five-army coalition of the Arab League. At the same time, the Arab League also announced that any so-called “Palestinian Arabs” who stayed in Israel would meet the same fate as the Jews. Therefore, a massive flight of non-Jews took place, as everyone expected the Arabs to win. But to everyone’s amazement, the vastly outnumbered, out-gunned, and relatively untrained Israelis — many of them mere teenagers straight from the death camps of Europe — defeated the crack troops of the Arab League.

Faced with tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees, did the Arab countries absorb their brothers and sisters? No — they turned their backs. Even Jordan, which was created by UN Mandate as a “Palestinian” homeland, would not take in most of the refugees but chose, later, to use their land as a staging ground for war against Israel in 1967. And, not surprisingly, Israel wanted nothing to do with those who had chosen to side with their enemies. Since then, the Palestinians have become the perpetual pawns (with hereditary “refugee” status, nonetheless) on the chess board of various countries hostile to Israel — along with corrupt overlords such as the late Yasser Arafat and internal terrorist groups such as the PLO, Fatah and Hamas. Ultimately, the responsibility for today’s Palestinian problem rests more on the shoulders of the Arab countries — and Islamic extremism — than on Israel. In fact, jihadist theology lies at the root of the conflict:

“It has very little to do with politics or peace agreements but everything to do with theology ... a radical jihadist theology that considers the whole Land of Israel and not just the West Bank as part of the ‘House of Islam.’ This theology dictates that all this land must be returned to Islamic rule, whether by peaceful, political or violent means of jihad.

“So from 1948 to 1967, when the Palestinians had everything they [or at least their leaders] say they want now, they neither protested against the illegal Jordanian occupation of the West Bank nor even remotely demanded a state of their own. They did, however, found the PLO in 1964 with the distinct mission of destroying the State of Israel. They subsequently launched a terror campaign to force this end and throughout the Oslo era refused to remove the infamous clauses from their Charter calling for the ‘elimination’ of Israel.

“The same jihadist theology drives Hamas and its affiliated militia al-Aksa Martyrs’ Brigades, as well as Hizbullah, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, and all the rest of the ‘resistance’ front.... For sure, the Palestinians have suffered and still do; but to place the blame entirely at Israel’s door is folly. Their failed and corrupt leadership, missed opportunities, and willingness to support violence and terror are also central causes of their suffering.” (Malcolm Hedding, ICEJ Special Commentary, 3/5/10)

There’s a pervasive victim mentality among Palestinian academics and spokesmen (which may be as much political role playing as an actual mentality). In the book *Living*

Palestine edited by Lisa Taraki, every problem in Palestinian society is blamed on Israeli “hostilities,” “occupation” and “discrimination.” Yet not once is there any mention of Jordanian responsibility for the 1967 War (which led to Israeli occupation of the West Bank as a defensive measure), the intifadas from the late 1980s into the new millennium (which targeted Israeli civilians), nor the regular terrorist activities and rocket attacks promulgated directed at Israel since then (from Gaza, in particular).

Granted, this history is one tailor-made to cause problems, but the issue of the significant cultural and communication differences between between both peoples (there are exceptions, which I will cover later) is one seldom faced by those who interface with each other on a regular basis. And these differences are, unfortunately, regularly brought into negotiations while making few, if any, allowances for them.

CULTURAL COMPARISONS

Palestinian Territories (West Bank and Gaza)

Cultures want predictability. Thus, every culture has norms for appropriate (and inappropriate) behavior. The problem with research studies of Palestinians to date is that:

“... they do not render Palestinian lives very approachable or accessible. Even the voluminous literature on the first intifada (1987 to the early 1990s) , with a few exceptions, treats Palestinians as one-dimensional political subjects. The internal dynamics, stresses, and contradictions of the social groups and communities within which people live out their lives, or the sensitivities and subjectivities of individuals as they negotiate their mundane existence away from the barricades have not received much serious attention from most researchers.” (Taraki, xi)

That said, it is clear that Palestinian culture revolves around the extended family:

“Although polygamy is a common practice among Arab men, with as many as four wives allowed, most Palestinian men have only one or two wives.... Extended families tend to live together in the same household. Frequently, married children also live with their parents. Elderly parents are nearly always cared for at home by the families of their children. A people with one of the

world's highest birth rates, the Palestinians care for their children with pride. Extended families help in caring for infants and young children.” (“Culture of Palestine”)

Many Palestinian men are against women working outside the home, so most women stick to homemaking or cottage industries. Women are also discouraged from wearing Western-style dress, preferring them to wear the traditional Muslim jilbab — a long, jacket-like dress — along with a head covering.” As in other Arab and/or Muslim cultures, men are at the center of Palestinian life. The family patriarch makes all decisions regarding living arrangements, children's marriages, and money. Obedience to one's father or husband is one of the highest indicators of honor in an Arab woman's life.” (“Culture of Palestine”)

The extended family — and the influence of patriarchs within that — is core to Palestinian society. (Taraki, 103-184) And sharia law operates to such a degree in the more conservative areas that so-called “honor killings” (where one or more male family members will kill a female family member believed to have sullied the family honor — even if she was the victim of a rape) are not unusual (Taraki, 162-163).

Western cultures emphasize the primacy of the contract. Whereas, in high-context, collectivist cultures like that of the Palestinians, contracts only last for a moment. Personal commitments and one's word of honor (in front of others) are a face issue and, therefore, lasting unless you do something to break the agreement.

Nonetheless, the populations of these areas are undergoing dramatic shifts due to the influence of neighbor Israel (a Western-style democracy and technologically advanced country), the pervasive Western media, and an increasing tendency for certain young Palestinians to go to Western nations for higher education. One of the results is the growth of two sub-cultures with a growing disconnect:

“Adding to the frustration and anger of ordinary Palestinians is the fairly recent emergence of two distinct cultures within the Palestinian community. At one extreme are the Palestinians who were educated in private schools and often lived in the United States or Europe before their parents returned to their homeland in Palestine, many after the 1993 Oslo Accords, carrying their children with them. Many of the returnees get the best jobs through social or political connections, and many flaunt their money and automobiles. At the other extreme are the majority of Palestinians, those who have lived in Palestine throughout the Israeli occupation and who spend their days doing menial chores in poverty.

“Elite Palestinians often sport the trappings of privilege and political connection. They live in nice homes, often have two cars, and frequently employ maids. With their connections they can easily move freely in and out of the Palestinian territories, an extremely difficult proposition for the poor. To many, the gulf between rich and poor may pose a bigger problem than achieving the goals sought in negotiating the final sovereignty status of the territories.” (“Culture of Palestine”)

Of course, it’s easier — and undoubtedly safer — to rail against the Israelis across the border than the wealthy and powerful in one’s own town. And since few nations in the world community question the continual accusations against Israel, it’s a convenient way to vent frustrations over the inequities, injustices and inefficiencies of Palestinian society.

R.S. Zaharna of American University maintains that two long-time elements of Palestinian culture — the importance of “face” and submission to authority — are being challenged. From 1967 until the arrival of the exiled Palestinian leadership in the 1980s, both sides (leadership and people) idealized each other. When they began to have to live with one another, idealism gave way to disillusionment in light of certain limitations and realities:

“As a result, the communication between the two parties has become less cautious, less controlled, more demanding and, at times critical. The problem of rhetorical transparency in the direct contact between the people and leadership is particularly pronounced [especially since traditional Palestinian culture is a “face” culture].

“The following newspaper quote from a local resident commenting on a sewage project is not atypical: ‘the strange thing is that number of Palestinian officials visit us in the village and give us many promises. None have been carried out as yet’ (*Jerusalem Times*, August 21, 1998, p. 12).” (Zaharna, “The Competing

Systems of Values and Communication Styles in Contemporary Palestinian Society.”

Second, as the “Occupation/Intifada Generation” (the children aged 5 to 17 who were encouraged by their elders to attack Israeli soldiers with stones in the 1960s) came of age, their premature empowerment and exposure to trauma has led to a pervasive disregard for authority of *any* kind, including parental, patriarchal, political and religious authority structures in their own culture. Moreover, “... the communication skills and strategies they tend to employ are rigid, overly cautious, and restrictive. There is very little risk-taking or individual initiative.... [Yet] nation-building, such as the Palestinians are engaged in now, demands large amounts of cooperation, coordination, and communication in order to complete tasks on a large scale....” (Zaharna)

Zaharna proposes that the third major social change has been the return of the Palestinians from abroad (the “Returnees”):

“After years and for some, decades of living in foreign countries and cultures, these Palestinian “Returnees” bring with them not only their desire to contribute to the new state, but also new ideas and values from abroad. Many of these “new” ideas are really Western ideas that are clashing with Palestinian-Arab cultural traditions and beliefs. For example, among these new ideas is the notion of ‘individualism’ and ‘individual freedoms.’ Many of the Returnees ... openly enjoyed the personal freedoms such as dressing casually, speaking frankly, having privacy, and coming and going as they pleased.”

The problem is that their ideas and values stand in stark contrast to Palestinian culture, which is collectivist, hierarchical, and places a high premium on public “face” and reputation. Those who deviate from traditional values face social censorship. This tactic worked with the resident population but had the opposite effect on Returnees, who became defiant. And because, in general, they were better educated and more affluent than the resident population, they quickly moved into leadership positions in Palestinian society and pulled their friends and family members along with them. (Zaharna)

Another key difference between the Returnees and the locals is the Returnees' "activity" and "achieved status" orientation in the face of a long-time "being" and "ascribed status" culture. "Nowhere has the conflict over "activity" and "being" orientation become more tense than in the competition for jobs.... The issue of 'wasta' — or using one's social connections to obtain privileges — has become a particular point of contention for both locals and Returnees." (Zaharna)

Finally, a disconnect in time orientation is not only very significant but highly sensitive: Returnees have acquired a Western (and, therefore, ostensibly American/Israeli) "future" orientation that values progress and change. Traditional Palestinians, however, have a "past-oriented" perspective that uses a historical context "... as a basis for determining relevance and meaning.... [B]ecause ... future activities do not come 'naturally' to the locals, while they do come 'naturally' for the Returnees, both tend to become tense and frustrated with the other when they must work together on such activities as writing funding proposals or developing strategic plans." (Zaharna)

Lastly, there is an ongoing and highly controversial study by Tsvi Misinai, an Israeli IT entrepreneur-turned-researcher that could either open a veritable Pandora's Box of complications or help produce a solution to the endemic "Jewish-Arab" conflict in the Land. Based on rather astonishing cultural and genetic studies that Misinai has done among Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and Jordan (which reveal Jewish cultural practices in many homes, Jewish surnames and town names, Jewish family histories, and genetic profiles that are Jewish rather than Arab), Misinai maintains that 90 percent or more of the so-called "Palestinian Arabs" in the West Bank and Gaza are *not* Arab but, rather, the descendant of indigenous Jews and Samaritans (offspring of the ancient "northern kingdom" Israelites and their Assyrian conquerors). His work has been publicized in *The Jerusalem Post Christian*

Edition (magazine) and on *Wikipedia*, which says:

“Recent [genetic evidence](#) has demonstrated that Palestinians as an ethnic group represent modern ‘descendants of a core population that lived in the area since prehistoric times,’ largely predating the Arabian Muslim conquest that resulted in their acculturation, established Arabic as their sole vernacular, and over time also Islamized most of them from various prior faiths.” (“Palestinian people,” Wikipedia)

“[Misinaï] claims that the majority of the Palestinian people — including Arab citizens of Israel and the Negev Bedouin — are descendants of the ancient Hebrews, and that they themselves are aware of this fact. According to Misinaï, unlike the ancestors of the modern day Jews who were city dwellers to a large extent, the Hebrew ancestors of the Palestinians were rural dwellers, and were allowed to remain in the land of Israel to work the land and supply Rome with grain and olive oil.

“As a result of remaining in the Land of Israel, the Palestinians partially converted to Christianity during the Byzantine era. Later, with the coming of Islam, they were Islamized through a combination of conversions, mostly forced conversions, mainly to avoid dhimmi status and less frequently out of genuine conviction.” (“Tsvi Misinaï,” Wikipedia)

Since Palestinian attitudes toward and descriptors of Israel and the Jews tend to be extremely negative, yet Misinaï alleges that at least 50 percent of the population know about their Jewish identity, this raises an interesting question: Does that inherent disconnect lead to a kind of self-hatred and therefore a self-defeating, self-destructive lifestyle? Even if not, if one suddenly finds out that one’s long-time enemy is actually one’s long-lost brother, the dynamics and emotions of the situation are likely to change substantially.

Israel

Ironically, much like its hegemonic patron and protector, the United States, Israel has become a kind of melting pot:

“Though Israel is defined as a secular state and is dedicated to being an open, pluralistic, egalitarian society, religion has been an integral element of its politics and it is divided by ethnicity and religion. Israeli society has integrated millions of Jewish immigrants from an enormous range of diverse countries, invigorated an ancient language to form a common basis of modern

communication, and developed a rich culture of literature, theater, film, and scholarship. “ (Goldscheider, 3)

As mentioned previously, Israelis are collective in their identity as Israelis (therefore, their collectivism is limited to nationalism) but very individualistic otherwise. They are very low-context, to the point of seeming rudeness — qualities that can threaten and offend those in high-context, collective cultures (such as the non-Westernized Palestinians):

“Differences in communication style are the cause of many cultural conflicts between Israeli and non-Israelis. Israelis prefer to communicate in a way that is direct—very direct. Interests are mostly expressed in terms of ‘*I want*’ or ‘*I need*’ and more indirect phrases such as ‘*Would it be possible*’ or ‘*It would nice if...*’ may well be misinterpreted, if not missed completely.

“Likewise, a difference in opinion may well be expressed simply as ‘*You’re wrong*’ rather than using the more subtle approach of ‘*In my opinion...*’ or ‘*You may be right, but...*’ Although directness may seem crude, tactless and even arrogant to those of an indirect persuasion, in Israel, it is very much the accepted and appreciated norm.

“Furthermore, Israelis often view indirectness as difficult to read and unnecessarily polite and prefer it when people just clearly say what they think.” (Jacobs, “Understanding Culture: Part Two”)

The Israeli attitude toward time reflects the complicated factors that continue to shape Israeli society. Israelis have a more relaxed attitude to time and timekeeping than a lot of other industrialized cultures. However, time is acquiring an additional face. The nature of Israeli society is increasingly a “deliver it now” culture. (Petzal, “Etiquette Lesson: Israel”)

Also, Israeli speech patterns and attitudes toward “personal space” and time tend to share far more in common with those of collectivist, high-context cultures than with the western cultures that they emulate in so many other ways:

“Anglo-Saxon cultures generally have a preference for conversing using ‘paralleling’ speech —one person speaks and when s/he finishes the next person starts and then when they finish someone else continues, etc. Israelis tend to demonstrate ‘overlapping’ speech patterns — where one person speaks and

before they have finished another person starts and so on and so forth.... Where many cultures may be very sensitive to interruptions and consider them to be rude, in Israel, interruptions are quite normal.”

“Physical, as well as personal, boundaries are also far less defined than they are in many other cultures. Israelis generally are very comfortable being in close proximity to each other. When using a cash machine or ‘queuing’ at the supermarket it is not uncommon to turn around and find yourself *literally* face-to-face with the person behind you. When clothes shopping, be aware that private changing cubicles are rarely private—assistants often enter unannounced to offer their opinion or readjust your outfit.... (Jacobs)

Israel is a strongly familistic society — especially compared to other industrialized societies (a factor which has its pluses and minuses in a country with so many emigrants who arrive on their own or in very small groups):

“The country's small size permits relatives to live in close geographic proximity and have frequent personal contact. Holidays and life-cycle events are generally celebrated through ceremonies and customs that bring family members together. Intra-familial involvement and assistance (from baby sitting through major financial help) are the norm. Key indicators of Israel's familism include relatively high marital and fertility rates and low divorce rates, compared to other postindustrial countries.... The downside of this familism is that people without family may suffer social isolation, lack of social support, and a sense of not belonging. (“Israel: Factors ...”)

While a very “masculine” country, Israel is not patriarchal. For the most part, Israeli men and women relate on an egalitarian basis. In fact, all Israeli citizens, both men and women, are obligated to serve in the Israeli Defense Forces for at least two years — and women can serve as fighter pilots and in more than 90 percent of combat field positions (a somewhat dubious “privilege” but one which, at least, shows the general lack of stereotyping about female roles and abilities). (“ICEJ Report,” 3/9/10)

Family law in Israel comes under both religious and secular jurisdiction, with two parallel legal systems working in tandem. These state-supported courts rule in accord with religious laws, which restrict interfaith marriage, encourage family stability, and place obstacles in the way of divorce. The rulings of the religious courts are subject to the laws

passed by Israel's parliament. These forbid child marriage, polygamy, and the husband's one-sided, nonjudicial divorce of his wife, which are permitted by Muslim religious law. They allocate legal guardianship for the children of a union (whether in or out of wedlock) to both parents. In divorce, custody is to be awarded on the basis of the best interests of the child, and non-custodial parents receive visiting rights and pay child support. Teen marriage rates are very low in Israel. Even among the Muslim population, only 15 percent of young women marry in their teens. And, unlike Western countries, most all unmarried people live in family settings. (*Israel's Changing Society*, 198)

Much like that in the Palestinian territories today, Israeli culture in the first half of the 20th century was collectivist, traditional and generally religious. However, the influx of large numbers of secular Jews and the development of the kibbutz movement — along with a growing desire to emulate the United States — has transformed Israel into a diverse and largely non-religious society. “Eye on Israel” posits that “... the most significant moment of change in Israeli culture was almost certainly 1967. At that point, more than at any previous time, the country opened up to both the ideal and the reality of America [and Western values]” through a movement that began after a “... large group of [young] Jewish volunteers, largely from the English-speaking world, that flooded the country in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war, particularly those who worked on the kibbutzim and moshavim.” Another agent of change (as elsewhere in the world) was the advent of TV, which began to be broadcast in Israel in 1968. (“Eye on Israel”)

The ultra-Orthodox Jews are much like their devout Palestinian Muslim counterparts (or even the Amish communities here in the United States), but they constitute a very small percentage of the total population. Moreover, “... ultra-Orthodox women have always worked (in feminine occupations, such as secretary and teacher) so as to enable their husbands to

study. In addition, there is increasing cooperation with the secular authorities to deal with family problems that were traditionally kept within the community.” (“Israel: Factors ...”)

Israel is a strongly familistic society, and family law comes under the jurisdiction of two parallel legal systems — secular and religious. The state-supported religious courts rule in accord with religious laws (applied according to whether the parties are Jewish, Christian or Muslim) — which restrict interfaith marriage, encourage family stability, and place obstacles in the way of divorce. However, the rulings of the religious courts are subject to the laws passed by Israel’s parliament. “These forbid child marriage, polygamy, and the husband’s one-sided, nonjudicial divorce of his wife, which are permitted by Muslim religious law. They allocate legal guardianship for the children of a union (whether in or out of wedlock) to both parents. In divorce, custody is to be awarded on the basis of the best interests of the child, and non-custodial parents receive visiting rights and pay child support.” (“Israel: Factors ...”)

“[Israeli] marriage is based more on emotional bonds than on economic or social considerations. Family functions such as childcare and caring for the elderly have been transferred to the community. Independence from the family of origin is encouraged from an early age.... The Israeli family also shares the stresses of other modern families: spousal tension over roles and tasks brought about by increasing gender equality, and difficulties, especially among mothers, in balancing childcare, work, and personal interests and goals.

“Among Israeli Jews, the great majority of families, of both European and Afro-Asian origin, combine traditional Jewish family values and norms with modern features. These are medium-size families with an average of three children. Marriage is seen primarily, though not only, as a framework for raising children. The man is expected to be the major breadwinner and the woman to fulfill the duties of wife and mother. Although 70 percent of the women work outside the home, work is secondary to child-rearing. [And] ... under the impact of feminism and Israel’s egalitarian ideology, the men in these families are increasingly involved in childcare, decisions are made jointly, and resources are divided democratically.” (“Israel: Factors ...”)

Independence from one’s family of origin is encouraged from an early age. The monogamous nuclear family is increasingly becoming one model among others. The major

values that people expect to realize within the family are less the good of the family than the good of the individual. The Israeli family also shares the stresses of other modern families: spousal tension over roles and tasks brought about by increasing gender equality, and difficulties, especially among mothers, in balancing childcare, work, and personal interests and goals. (The man is still expected to be the major breadwinner, and the woman is expected to make her work secondary to child-rearing.) As a result, familism is decreasing, birth rates are falling, and divorce rates are rising — except among the Christians and the Druze, who only are seeing a decrease in birth rates. (“Israel: Factors...”)

COMPARISON OF COMMUNICATION RULES AND STYLES

Kass (76-77) has identified six elements of cognitive dissonance between the Israelis and the Palestinians:

(1) Diverse language styles and communication structures. The Palestinians are high-context and indirect in communication because they are a “face” culture. (See Appendix A: Communication) The Israelis are the exact opposite: low-context and extremely direct. “The result is two different negotiating communication styles hindered by translations between at least three different languages (Arabic, Hebrew, and English).”

(2) A pattern on both sides of “... entrenched positions, dubious motives, poor timing, uninspired leadership and psychological obstacles’ (Schulze 1999: 96).

(3) In times of crisis, radicals on both sides take control.

(4) Israelis and Palestinians are wired differently with respect to decision making.

Using Hofstede’s model (1997), the Israelis are individualistic and generally make decisions using flat decision-making hierarchy. Conversely, the Palestinians are collective and exhibit a hierarchical decision-making style.

(5) The leadership of both societies have been poor managers of their citizens’

expectations. No one seems to want to follow Anwar Sadat's example in making peace with Israel — and lead. This is further complicated by the fact that "... all the players on both sides know each other quite well and have broken bread with each other in their homes on numerous occasions." (Kass, 77)

(6) They are two peoples vying for the same land.

Something that the Israelis and Palestinians share in common, however, is that they are very *expressive* in communication:

"A friendly discussion can quickly develop into a passionate verbal exchange with participants shouting and waving their arms in the air. Those unaccustomed to Israeli expressiveness would be forgiven for running for cover or expecting a [fight] to break out at any second. In reality, it is extremely rare for arguments to turn into physical fights and more often than not they end with smiles and friendly slaps on the back. It is often said that 'arguing' is an Israeli's favourite pastime—though this may be a slight exaggeration, Israelis *do* value greatly the open expression of opinions ... and will happily join in — even with complete strangers and on matters that they know little, if anything, about." (Jacobs)

Among human beings, there are four possible responses to conflict: **avoidance** (the primary tactic in a collectivist culture because it helps save face and maintain harmony), **compromise** (the so-called "win-win" approach — works well in collectivist cultures because willingness to compromise shows the largeness of your soul and the generosity of your spirit), **competition** (the win-lose approach — the primary mode of American negotiators), and **accommodation** (lose-win approach — you just give in). (Class notes, Cross-Cultural Communication, Winter Quarter 2010)

Face offenses are usually dealt with violently — even in cultures that are otherwise very gentle. Criticism must be approached in an indirect (very diplomatic, circuitous) manner. A two-second pause before responding to a question, comment or order can speak volumes to the other person (i.e., you have a concern or disagreement). Therefore, when you're dealing with someone from the Middle East, it is very important to have an intermediary. In the

Middle East and East, “code switching” is important when audience dynamics change. Arabs go for *effect* over *accuracy* (which is important to remember in order to correctly assess Arab propaganda). The “Arab street” (public grief after a death/killing) is actually highly stylized — it is not the frenzied chaos it appears to be. The men express wild grief over political situations; the women about family situations.

According to Kass (76), “... Palestinians and Israelis have arrived at a dynamic in their conflict resolution negotiations with each other that does not facilitate peace.” He refers to Bernard Lewis’ book, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (2003) where Lewis cautions “... Westerners, and by implication conflict resolution practitioners, [to] understand the reach of Islam in Muslim societies.” (78) Kass explains that “the martial interpretation of jihad can have implications that deter conflict resolution efforts since its tendency is exclusive rather than inclusive, and does not necessarily seek reconciliation as either a tactic or a strategy.” (Ibid.)

CONCLUSION

The following table summarizes some key differences between Israelis and Palestinians:

PALESTINIANS	ISRAEL
Traditional	Modern
Ascribed status (this is morphing somewhat)	Achieved status
Sentiment	Reality
Collectively oriented	Individually oriented

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the complexities of communication and negotiation between them, have caused even the most wise and seasoned experts to throw up their hands in exasperation. This paper has delivered an overview of the cultures and

communication styles of these two peoples, but its scope is limited. So it will end with this: The Israelis and the Palestinians share at least one key similarity: They are family-oriented and passionate about their family relationships. This similarity alone, should Tsvi Misinai's research pan out, could play a significant role in helping to resolve the arguments about land, borders, and identities.

No matter what, encouraging the Israelis and Palestinians to understand each other at a deep, specific level — and to put as much effort into practicing culturally relevant and sensitive communication as they have into attacking each other and defending themselves — will, hopefully, trickle down to their rising generations and help them build bridges of reconciliation and cooperation toward a brighter future for all.

APPENDIX A

Communication Strategies in Face Cultures

1. Non-confrontation (go to extremes to not strip face from another person)
2. Compliance strategies (Can you do this? *I can't see why not* [but that doesn't mean they will]).
3. Provisional responses
4. Reciprocity (huge reciprocity networks)
5. The use of intermediaries to preserve face (both people inside the culture and those outside)
6. Gossip is particularly important (way of dealing with disagreement in non-overtly-public settings, one-on-one (manager with subordinate, etc.)).

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