

Attitudes of Palestinians Toward Normalization with Israel*

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The Palestinian–Israeli conflict, originally a native–settler conflict, is one of the most durable and intractable conflicts since World War II. While the peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis has started, no final solution has been reached between the two sides, and Israel still occupies most of the Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Under these conditions, an interesting question is raised about normalization between Palestinians and Israelis. Based on data collected in 1994 from a total sample of 270 students in Birzeit University, this article studies the attitudes of Palestinian students toward cultural normalization with Israel. Despite the fact that Israel still occupies the Palestinian territories, a major part of Palestinian students support normalizing cultural relations between Palestinians and Israelis. Support for normalization is significantly associated with social class or father's occupation. Students from the working class are more supportive of cultural cooperation with Israelis than those from other classes. This is explained by the working-class families' greater experience of contact with Israelis and a greater dependence on the Israeli labour market.

Introduction

In recent years, and in light of Arab–Israeli peace negotiations, the question of cultural normalization between Arabs and Israelis has been highly debated by intellectuals in Arab countries as well as those in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

This article studies attitudes of Palestinian students toward normalization with Israel, focusing on the level of support and on the relationship between attitudes toward normalization and the respondents' social class and other background variables. As far as I am aware, this is the first empirical

work on attitudes toward normalization in the Palestinian occupied territories. Furthermore, sociological literature on normalization between occupied and occupying peoples is very limited.

Theoretical Framework

Normalization is closely related to concepts such as social distance, stereotypes and prejudice that describe and explain relations between ethnic groups, including those between occupied and occupying peoples. It is reasonable to assume that people under occupation keep their social distance from the occupying people. In a previous article based on data collected in 1994 (Mi'ari, 1998), I demonstrated that only a small minority of Palestinian students from the West Bank and Gaza Strip are ready for social

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relations with Israeli Jews. The lower the intimacy involved, the more ready the Palestinians are: 16% are ready to work in same office with Jews, 13% to have Jewish friends, 11% to live in same neighborhood, and 5% to marry a Jew. I also showed that father's occupation affects readiness: sons of workers are more ready to have social relations with Jews than sons of merchants and, to some extent, sons of farmers. This relationship was shown to be explained by the fathers' previous contact with Jews. The workers, most of whom are employed in Israel, have experienced a higher degree of inter-ethnic contact than other occupational groups, especially merchants and farmers. The merchants, by boycotting Israeli goods and products and being boycotted themselves by Israelis during the Palestinian Uprising which started in December 1987 and continued until the early 1990s, have hardly experienced contact with Israeli Jews during that period (Mi'ari, 1998: 59–65). Farmers, isolated in their villages, also experienced a lower degree of inter-ethnic contact. Thus, the fathers' experience of contact may explain working-class students' greater readiness to associate socially with Jews.

The contact experience explanation is in agreement with the finding that Israeli Arabs' previous contact with Israeli Jews affects positively their readiness to associate socially with them (Miari, 1983: 190–192; Yogev et al., 1991). Many other studies have also found that inter-ethnic contact undermines negative stereotypes and builds positive attitudes toward members of other groups (Amir, 1976; Sigelman & Welch, 1991), particularly when the interacting people are relatively equal (Desforges et al., 1991; Robenson & Preston, 1976).

The more positive attitude of working-class students toward Jews may also be explained by the resource dependency theory used by Yuchtman-Yaar and Inbar (1986). This theory maintains that the relationship

between any two groups is largely determined by their mutual dependencies with respect to scarce and valued resources. The dependent group tends to reduce its social distance from the other group, while the dominant group tends to widen its social distance (Yuchtman-Yaar & Inbar, 1986: 289). The notion of dependency in inter-ethnic relations is also the core of the asymmetric contingency approach used by Hofman (1972) to explain relations between Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel. Asymmetric contingency is a condition that arises when the interacting groups are not equally dependent upon one another. The dependent group, relatively speaking, has more to gain from reciprocity and cognitive clarity (Hofman, 1972: 249).

Palestinian workers, most of whom work in Israel, are undoubtedly more dependent on the Israeli labour market than Palestinians from other classes, such as farmers, employees and merchants, most of whom are employed in the Palestinian economy. The dependence of Palestinian workers on Israel is reflected by the fact that only a small part of these workers can find employment in the underdeveloped Palestinian economy. Merchants, although they usually obtain part of their goods and products from Israel, boycotted Israeli goods during the Palestinian Uprising, and became less dependent on Israeli economy during that period (Tamari, 1989). The greater dependence of Palestinian workers on the Israeli economy may increase their support for building normal relations with Israel in all fields, since they have more to gain from normalization (primarily work opportunities and improvement of work conditions).

The contact experience and the dependency approaches are not contradictory, but rather are closely related. For example, a Palestinian worker employed in Israel, and who is more dependent on Israeli labour market, is more likely to experience various

forms of inter-ethnic contact (such as contact at work, in a shop, in a bus or in the street). The present article is not designed to separate empirically these two approaches.

The Arab–Israeli Conflict

The Arab–Israeli conflict, and its core, the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, is one of the most durable and intractable territorial conflicts since World War II. With roots in the early Zionist colonization in Palestine, which started in the late 19th century and intensified during the British Mandate period between the two World Wars, this conflict is clearly territorial in the sense that Palestine's indigenous Arabs (backed by neighbouring Arab countries) and Palestine's Jewish settlers (backed by world Jewish organizations) claim rights on the same territory.

By the end of the British Mandate period in 1948, the Palestine's Jewish settler minority, forming about 35% of Palestine's total population and owning only about 7% of its total area, called for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Palestine's Arab majority opposed the establishment of a Jewish state and called for an independent Palestinian state in which Muslims, Christians, and Jews could live in equality. The first Arab–Jewish (or Israeli) war in 1948 led to the establishment of the state of Israel in one part of Palestine. The West Bank was annexed by Jordan, and a third part of Palestine, the Gaza Strip, was administered by Egypt.

The 1948 war escalated the Arab–Israeli conflict and other wars followed (in 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982). The worst outcome for the Arabs was in the 1967 war, as a result of which Israel occupied the remaining parts of Palestine, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, portions of neighboring Arab countries, the Egyptian Sinai peninsula, and the Syrian Golan Heights.

A recent study on changes in the Arab–Israeli conflict shows that this conflict has wound down after 1973. The gravity of the crisis has been reduced, the number of crisis actors has become smaller, and the level of military and political involvement by the Superpowers has decreased (Ben-Yehuda & Sandler, 1998: 102). This trend has been accompanied by a move to more peaceful models of conflict resolution. The first peace agreement between Israel and any Arab country was signed in 1978 with Egypt. In September 1993, the Declaration of Principles (DOP) was signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to set up a transitional system of self-rule in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In October 1994, a peace agreement was signed between Israel and Jordan. The peace process has been reversed since the Likud party came to power in Israel in November 1995. The Syrian–Israeli and Lebanese–Israeli peace negotiations have not been pursued further. The DOP has been only partially implemented, so that the Palestinian Authority operates only in a small part of the occupied Palestinian territories.

Several studies of international disputes illustrate that territorial disputes are very likely to escalate to wars, to recur in a shorter period of time, and to evolve into enduring rivalries (Hensel, 1996; Huth, 1996; Kocs, 1995). The territorial issue would seem to be one important reason for the escalation and exceptional duration of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Both the Palestinians and Israelis claim historical rights to today's Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian–Israeli conflict differs from most other territorial conflicts since World War II (such as Iran versus the United Arab Emirates, Greece versus Turkey, and China versus India, where the states involved in each case disagree on the location of the boundary line) in having its

origin in a native-settler conflict, that is between the indigenous Arab population of Historical Palestine and its Jewish settlers. This aspect of the conflict makes it more complex and difficult to resolve.

In an analysis of the dispute dataset generated by the Correlates of War project, Jones et al. (1996) showed that the duration of disputes is positively associated with the escalation of hostility (from threat to war), the number of states involved, and the participation (or involvement) of major powers in the dispute. All three factors are found in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: the escalation of the conflict to five wars, the direct involvement of a number of Arab countries (especially Egypt, Jordan, and Syria), and the involvement of major powers in the conflict (particularly the UK and France in the Sinai War of 1956). The two Superpowers, the USA and the USSR, were also politically involved in the conflict. All three of these factors have been weakened after 1973, and even more so after the end of the Cold War, but a great deal of their influence remains.

Normalization

The pursuit of normalization in Arab-Israeli relations is traditionally viewed from different perspectives by Israelis and Arabs. The Israeli perspective considers normalization as a basic strategic goal, and encourages cooperation with Arab countries in various fields, especially in economics, politics, and people-to-people contact. The Israelis actually aim to achieve normal multidimensional relations with Arab countries before, or even without, resolving the main issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arab perspective, in contrast, maintains that normalization with Israel should begin with the resolution of key political issues, and should proceed at a rate that matches political criteria. A popular theme among Arabs is that normal-

ization should not come until Israel gives up its occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories (Bowker, 1996: 87). The Arab perspective of normalization undoubtedly strengthened the Palestinian position and created a sort of balance. Israel's military power was balanced by the Arabs' rejection of normalizing relations.

Governmental attempts to normalize Arab-Israeli relations were made in the last two decades with the signing of a separate peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1978. The two governments have cooperated in tourism, trade, agriculture, and technology. More steps toward normalization have been taken since the signing of the DOP between Israel and the PLO in September 1993. Despite the obstacles in the peace process, Israeli and Palestinian officials have cooperated in certain fields, especially in security and the 'fight against terrorism'. The signing of the DOP opened the door for Jordan to sign a peace agreement with Israel in October 1994 and to cooperate in trade, tourism, and industry. It also encouraged a few Arab countries, such as Tunisia, Morocco, Qatar, and Oman, to exchange with Israel liaison offices or 'interest sections', a possible first step toward diplomatic relations. Israel and Arab countries have also participated in several fora and conferences held in the region, such as the First Women's Summit Conference held in Casablanca in May 1994 and the Middle East Economic Conference held annually since 1994.

Despite governmental efforts at normalization, almost all associations of intellectuals in Arab countries reject any normalization with Israel as long as Israel occupies Arab land and does not recognize the Palestinian peoples' right to self-determination. The General Union of Arab Authors and Writers, a pan-Arab organization, decided in 1997 to freeze the membership of the Union of Palestinian Writers and

Journalists because of its support of normalization (*Al-Quds*, 1997).¹ Similarly, local Arab associations of writers in almost all Arab countries, including Egypt and Jordan, oppose cooperation with Israelis. At its meeting in 1994, the Association of Jordanian Writers, for example, decided: (1) to refuse to meet Israeli intellectuals in Jordan or Israel or abroad; (2) to refuse to participate in any Arab forum (or international forum held on Arab land) in which Israelis participate; (3) to refuse to participate in any international forum which aims to normalize Arab relations with Israel; (4) to refuse to participate in any cultural, artistic, or research activity in which Israelis participate, or which is held in Israel or the occupied Arab territories; (5) to refuse to conduct any cultural, informational, or political visit to Israel or the occupied Arab territories upon an invitation from Israel or from the Palestinian Authority; and (6) to treat any Jordanian or Arab writer who violates these recommendations as an Israeli with regard to the cultural boycott (Shabana, 1994: 161–162). Well-known Arab intellectuals who support normalization, such as the writers Tawfiq Al-Hakim and Najib Mahfuz from Egypt, Zlaikha Abu Risha from Jordan and the poet Adonis from Syria, are attacked in the press (Shabana, 1994: 159). In extreme cases, the supporters of cultural normalization have been expelled from their organizations, which was the case with the Jordanian comedians Nabil Sawalha and Hisham Yanos (Peri, 1997).

Palestinians in the Occupied Territories

¹ The Union of Palestinian Writers and Journalists was originally formed, outside Palestine, by the PLO and currently is dominated by the Palestinian Authority. The Union of Palestinian Writers was formed under Israeli occupation by local writers to represent Palestinian writers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Only the first organization had a membership in the Union of Arab Authors and Writers. This membership was suspended in 1997 for support of normalization. The other organization, known as the local organization, also supports, or at least does not oppose, normalization with Israel.

seem to be more supportive of normalization with Israel than other Arabs. Most Palestinian associations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including the two unions of Palestinian writers, support, or at least do not oppose, normalization, and in many cases cooperate with their Israeli counterparts. Many individual Palestinian intellectuals have taken steps towards normalization, such as joint research and symposia, the formation of circles such as the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information and the *Palestine–Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, and joint theatre performances which have been advertised in Arabic newspapers (*Al-Quds*, 12 June 1994).

Before the DOP, and especially during the Palestinian Uprising, cultural cooperation with Israelis was condemned by most Palestinian academics. After signing the DOP in 1993, the attitude toward normalization has changed drastically. Today, several Palestinian universities and research centres cooperate with Israelis in various projects, including research and training. A number of well-known activists who opposed normalization a few years ago are currently taking part in it. Opposition to normalization in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip seems to be limited to a minority of intellectuals. Rawia Shawwa, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, complains that normalization in the absence of a resolution of the conflict gives the world an impression that peace is present where it is not. Normalization can only take place between two equal partners in peace, and not between an occupying force and an occupied people (Shawwa, 1997: 10).

I suggest that contact between Israelis and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and Palestinian economic and political dependency on Israel have increased support for normalization. This is investigated empirically below.

Data and Methods

The Sample

Since the mid-1970s, seven Palestinian universities have been established in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the total number of students in these universities is about 30,000. Palestinian students have always been the most active force in resisting Israeli occupation. Their political activities, taking the form of strikes, demonstrations, and violent confrontations with Israeli forces, overshadowed those of trade unions, professional associations, women's groups, and other organizations (Sahliyah, 1988: 134). The students' fight against Israeli occupation reached its climax in the uprising which began in 1987. Between 1988 and 1991, students formed about 18% of the Palestinian administrative detainees and about 23% of Palestinians were expelled from their homeland by Israeli authorities (Mi'ari, 1994: 70–72).

The data for this study were collected in June 1994 using a systematic random sample of 270 Palestinian students from Birzeit University in the West Bank, which comprised about 11% of the total university students at that time. The data were collected two or three weeks after the start of implementing the Palestinian–Israeli agreement, including the entrance of Palestinian police forces to the regions of Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho. The sample was selected randomly by computer from lists obtained from the registrar's office of the university.

The students were interviewed individually through a structured questionnaire, which was composed of questions measuring several background variables, self-identity, readiness for inter-ethnic contact, support of normalization, political behavior and attitudes toward the Palestinian–Israeli agreement. The interviews were conducted by students in a sociological methodology course taught by the author.

Measurement

The dependent variable, support for normalization, was measured by the following questions:

- (1) Do you support or oppose holding scientific conferences in which Palestinians and Israelis participate?
- (2) Do you support or oppose holding political conferences in which Palestinians and Israelis participate?
- (3) Do you support or oppose students from the West Bank and Gaza Strip studying in Israeli universities?
- (4) Do you support or oppose Jewish students from Israel studying in universities in the West Bank?
- (5) Do you support or oppose the establishment of a joint Palestinian–Israeli theatre?

The answers to each question were measured over four categories, ranging from 'strongly oppose' to 'strongly support'. By summing up the scores of the five questions, an index was compiled, ranging from 5 (those who replied 'strongly oppose' to all five questions) to 20 (those who answered 'strongly support' to all five questions).

The background variables included in the study were *gender*, *father's schooling* (recoded by assigning the mid-points of grouped categories of years of schooling), *family income* (similarly recoded), *religion* (Muslim versus Christian), *religiosity* (from 'not religious at all' to 'very religious'), *fight against occupation* (a three-point scale based on the questions 'were you arrested during the Palestinian uprising?' and 'have you been injured by Israeli forces?'), *place of residence* (dummy variables for village, refugee camp, and town as the reference category), *party support* (dummy variables for Islamic organizations, Marxist organizations, independent candidates, and Fatah as the reference category), *support for the Palestinian–Israeli agreement* (four categories ranging

Table I. Palestinian Students' (%) Support of Normalization with Israel by Father's Occupation (1994)

<i>Field of Normalization</i>	<i>Farmer</i>	<i>Worker</i>	<i>Employee</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>p</i>
Joint Scientific Conferences	75	76	83	73	77	0.46
Joint Political Conferences	69	73	77	71	73	0.72
Palestinian Students Studying in an Israeli University	65	75	69	67	69	0.67
Israeli Students Studying in a Palestinian University	55	57	54	43	51	0.41
Joint Palestinian–Israeli Theatre	33	44	45	52	43	0.30
Normalization Index	33	49	46	42	44	0.43

The percentages include the respondents who answered 'strongly support' or 'support'. The remaining respondents answered 'oppose' or 'strongly oppose'. The respondents answering father's occupation as 'other' were excluded (3%). The normalization index sums up the scores on the five questions and ranges between 5 and 20. Figures indicate the percentage of the respondents scoring 15–20 on this index.

from 'strongly oppose' to 'strongly support').

The main independent variable of the study is *father's occupation*, with dummy variables representing farmer, employee, merchant, and worker as the reference category.

The results are first presented as a univariate frequency analysis of the independent variables, followed by a bivariate cross-table analysis of support for normalization by father's occupation, and subsequently a multiple regression analysis of the attitudes toward normalization as a function of the independent variables.

Results

Independent Variables

The majority of the respondents are male (60%), Muslims (85%), and from families with a high socio-economic status: Father's average length of schooling is 8.4 years, the average family income is 486 Jordanian dinars (about US\$675), and most of the fathers work in white collar occupations or in a trade (35% are employees, 24% merchants, 23% workers, 15% farmers, and 3% other). The respondents are moderate in their religiosity (a mean of 2.8 in a five-point scale ranging from 1 to 5). Half of the respondents come from cities or towns, and

the other half come from villages (39%) or refugee camps (11%). In response to the question 'if general elections were held to the Palestinian Council, which party would you support?', 41% would support Fatah, the ruling party, 26% Marxist organizations (especially the Popular Front, Democratic Front and People's party), 12% Islamic organizations (Hamas or Islamic Jihad), and 21% independent candidates. Some 67% of the respondents say that they have not fought against the Israeli occupation (not arrested or injured by Israeli forces), 23% have fought moderately (either arrested or injured) and 10% have fought actively (arrested and injured). Finally, the respondents are not clearly supportive of the Palestinian–Israeli agreement: 49% support the agreement and 51% oppose it. The agreement is supported primarily by Fatah supporters, and opposed by most Islamic and Marxist organizations.

Attitudes Toward Normalization and Father's Occupation

Table I shows that a great majority of the respondents support holding scientific and political conferences attended by Palestinians and Israelis, a smaller majority supports Palestinian students from the West Bank and Gaza Strip studying in Israeli universities, slightly more than a half of the

Table II. Multiple Regression Coefficients of Support of Normalization with Israel for Palestinian Students (1994)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Support of Normalization</i>	
	<i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i>	<i>Standardized Coefficients</i>
Gender (High Score is Male)	0.173 (0.117)	
Religion (High Score is Christian)	0.154 (0.144)	
Father's Schooling	0.004 (0.014)	0.022
Family Income	0.000 (0.000)	0.020
Religiosity	-0.171 (0.055)**	-0.228**
Fight Against Occupation	-0.103 (0.085)	-0.083
Place of Residence (Town is Reference)		
Village	-0.053 (0.129)	
Refugee camp	-0.372 (0.199)*	
Father's Occupation (Worker is Reference)		
Farmer	-0.372 (0.181)*	
Employee	-0.233 (0.149)	
Merchant	-0.417 (0.152)*	
Party Support (Fatah is Reference)		
Islamic organizations	-0.403 (0.207)*	
Marxist organizations	-0.768 (0.168)**	
Independent	0.029 (0.130)	
Support for the Palestinian-Israeli Agreement	0.230 (0.076)**	0.248**
Constant	2.981 (0.346)	
<i>R</i> ² 0.381 (0.675)	0.381 (0.675)	

Standard errors are given in parentheses. Standardized coefficients for dummy variables lacked substantive interest and were excluded.

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$.

respondents support Israeli Jews studying in Palestinian universities and a large minority support the establishment of a joint Palestinian-Israeli theatre. The respondents' support for normalization seems to increase in fields where the intimacy involved is low.

Table I also shows that respondents belonging to different occupational categories do not differ significantly in their support of normalization in the various fields or in their scores on the normalization index, although sons of workers appear to be a little more supportive than others. However, the relationship may be obscured by other suppressor variables (Babbie, 1983: 400-402). Table II presents a model of multiple regression coefficients, estimating the effects of several independent variables in support of normalization. It shows that four variables

are significantly correlated with support of normalization: father's occupation (workers are more supportive of normalization), party support (Fatah supporters are more supportive), religiosity (negatively correlated) and support of the Palestinian-Israeli agreement (positively correlated).

Sons of workers tend to be more supportive of normalization than others, especially sons of merchants and farmers, after controlling for all other independent variables. This finding could be explained by fathers' previous contact with Israelis and a dependency on the Israeli labor market. The finding that Fatah supporters favor normalization with Israel more than Islamists and Marxists is in support of the policy of Fatah, headed by Yassir Arafat. The negative correlation of religiosity with support of normal-

ization is in agreement with a previous article which demonstrated that religious respondents tend to be more prejudiced against Jews than non-religious respondents (Mi'ari, 1997: 119). As expected, respondents who support the Palestinian–Israeli agreement support normalization more than those who oppose the agreement.

An unexpected finding is that fighters and non-fighters do not differ significantly in their support of cooperation with Israelis. Palestinians with experience in fighting against the Israeli occupation are only a little more negative towards cooperation than others.

Conclusion

A relatively large part of the respondents support normalization with Israel despite the fact that Israel still occupies Palestinian and Arab territories. Since the data were collected in June 1994, less than one year after the signing of the Palestinian–Israeli agreement, it seems that the start of the peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis bolstered Palestinian support of normalization with Israel. It is my impression that the Palestinians' support of normalization has increased further in recent years, although there are no data to support this.

Support for cultural cooperation with Israelis does not indicate a desire to associate socially with them, as shown in my earlier work (Mi'ari, 1998). The greater intimacy involved in social normalization may explain this finding. Support for cultural cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis also differs according to the intimacy involved in joint cultural activity. Support is higher for cultural activities in which the intimacy involved between participating Palestinians and Israelis is low, such as conferences, than for activities in which the intimacy involved is relatively high, such as the theatre.

No comparable empirical studies have

been performed in Arab countries as far as I am aware, but a greater support for normalization among intellectual associations in Palestine compared with elsewhere in the Arab world might also be explained by their greater contact with Israelis and their political and economic dependency on Israel.

Generalizing from the present case, I venture to suggest that occupied peoples support normalization with occupying peoples because they expect to gain, politically and economically, from normalization. Support for normalization may increase when a peace process begins and the two peoples interact with each other. Those who have experienced more contact with the occupying people (especially at work), and those who are economically dependent upon them, support normalization more than others. Students from the working class are more supportive of normalization with Israel because working-class families have a greater experience of contact with Jews and a greater dependency on the Israeli labor market. More research is needed to differentiate between these two explanations, contact experience and dependency.

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