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Giving Alms, Not Arms

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of great complexity and anxiety. The peoples of the area have endured a long history of violence, discrimination, and overall instability that have heavily affected Palestinians, but has also tempered with the lives of Jewish Israelis. It is the purpose of this paper to explore the history of the conflict and emphasize the turmoil the peoples continue to face through a mainstream dependence on militant action. An additional objective is to show what efforts are being made to stay away from militaristic values and revert back to a restored sense of community and in that: Giving alms, not arms.

A Brief Background

Understanding the depth of the conflict relies on knowing a relatively strong base of the history. Tedious and complicated, the root of the conflict dates about 60 years back. The state of Israel started with the Balfour Declaration in 1917 that assured Jewish people a national home after World War I. This was issued by Great Britain, but it was made clear that it was intended to follow through with respect to non-Jewish Palestinians.

Give Alms, Not Arms

Years following, restrictions were made to cut down the immigration of Jewish settlers. With strong Jewish militant force, an Israeli national government managed to take over despite the guidance provided by advisors such as the United Nations. Allocated land of the Palestinians soon became property of the Israeli government. Here stemmed resentment from Palestinian citizens and the birth of a seemingly endless tension between Jews and Arabs in the region (Carter 2006).

After analyzing the history, some may deduce that the Palestinians have the right to fight back. While this claim holds some truth, a pattern of violent retaliations are becoming the norm; promoting a negative sociological network amongst the people. It is the views and actions of the extremists of each group (conservative Zionists vs. radical Arabs) that are essentially ruining the chance for stability for all citizens. This claim is supported by what occurred in 1993 when Israel officials and the Palestine Liberation Organization compromised with a peace agreement in Oslo: radical sides of each group immediately followed by trying to find ways to undermine the peace plan. This included suicide bombings on the Palestinians' behalf, and crude acts such as the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who had an important role in the peace agreement with Palestinian leaders (Carter 2006).

It should not be mistaken that no diplomatic attempts to resolve the conflict has taken place; there certainly have been *attempts*. Some of these efforts include: several land partitions involving the United Nations, U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194 (1948), U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 (1967), negotiations at the Arab summit

(1974), peace agreement in Oslo (1993), etc. Though enthusiasm by both parties was present at each point of progress, as the current state of Israel can depict, there has been much brainstorming, but no actions (Carter 2006).

Condition of Palestinians

Although it would be unfair to place the blame entirely on the Israelis, many Palestinians are oppressed and seemingly unheard with the ongoing situation. A number of the Palestinian population who once had stable homes in a state of Palestine, have been made into refugees. A majority of the peoples have been denied their land or have had to compromise their basic rights and endure inhumane conditions.

Within this section, I will discuss two different areas within Israeli occupied by Palestinians. Even though the regions are contrasting, one will find various similarities in regards to the conditions in which Palestinians are living in. Before getting into detail about the particular locations, it is important to discuss demographics as a whole and how two opposite situations are occurring in Israeli; both promoting tension for the most part. First, the Israeli government has established separate facilities for Arabs and Israelis. To put it simply, the government is trying to establish segregation between the two groups to emphasis detachment from one another. Not only does the overall separation hurt the relationship between Jews and Arabs, but it also worsened by the fact that Israeli resources are of better quality than that of the Arabs. The social gap has had an impact as it has been made possible for the citizens to go their whole lives without intermixing. On

the other side of the spectrum, Jewish and Arabs settlements have been constructed side by side one another. While the possible interaction promotes a sense of optimism by preventing alienation, it could in fact worsen circumstances even more. As mentioned before, Jewish facilities and resources are superior to the Arabs. Living in plane-view-sight, the Arabs witness the prosperous lifestyles of Jews. If one could imagine the psychological affects this has, they could conclude that tension rises with inequitable settings (Khouri 2008).

Urban

There are several urban settings in which Palestinians call home: The Gaza Strip and the West Bank (contains several cities within). Settlements such as these take an urban classification not so much for progressive technology or a prosperous economy; it is mostly because of the dense population the cities and towns have. Besides being enclosed by a blockade-like wall, Palestinians in these settlements are not considered Israeli citizens and therefore are “stateless” in regards to their passports. This factor creates complication when Palestinians pass through Israeli checkpoints. The time that it would normally take for a Palestinian to commute is usually doubled when taking the checkpoints into consideration. The following has had a negative impact on Palestinians in terms of identity, not only on paper but on a personal level as well (Carter 2006).

Rural

The Negev is located in the southern region of Israel. Bedouin tribal communities filled out the majority of the area. People of the land, they revolve their lives around sustainable living: being producers, not consumers. Traditionally, the Bedouins were able to live cooperatively without the need for officially claiming territories. This changed when the Israeli government slowly transformed these freedoms by first demanding that all Bedouins document their land ownership with the government. While some did follow this procedure, others did not; *What would be the difference if they did not? This had been their land, and would remain their land; no one would be able to take what was rightfully theirs.* These values did not matter to the Israeli government; soon after they took over the land once belonging to the Bedouins, and established Jewish settlements, leaving smaller and less equipped settlements for the Bedouins. It was estimated that about 10% of the Bedouin population were able to remain where they were (Al Mickawi 2008).

Although considered Israeli citizens, the Arab Bedouins do not receive the same treatment as Jewish Israelis. For instance, it is not uncommon for a Bedouin family, forced into occupied territories to be denied electricity. This creates a problem when family members are sick and do not have the proper equipment for refrigerating medication or powering necessary machines needed for home-care patients. Another issue is the availability of water. Arabs are not given sufficient amounts of water by the government, yet are not permitted to dig wells to supply for themselves. The government is also tempering with the land overall. Redeveloping once desert land, they have

destroyed the sense of traditions. Trees have been planted to serve as barriers between Jewish and Arab settlements and recreational sites such as golf courses are in effect to be built (Al Mickawi 2008).

An Indestructible Hope

Though there have been a number of failed efforts of compromise and cooperation among politicians, there are groups of people who continue to be determined for bringing better status to Palestinians as well as overall peace to the region. The two organizations that will be further discussed are Hand in Hand and Bustan. Both groups utilize the combining efforts of Israelis and Palestinians working together in order to bring understanding for one another and ultimately: peace.

Hand in Hand Schools

Hand in Hand schools were established in 1997 in Jerusalem and the Galilee region of Israel. Since then schools have been opened in other parts of Israel. What is so special about these particular schools is the emphasis on bridging the gap that exists between Jews and Arabs in the region. Jewish and Arab students that attend are taught in a classroom that contains a Jewish teacher and an Arab teacher. They are taught Arabic and Hebrew, Jewish and Arab traditions, and how to interact with one another. The school's administration is also equally represented with Jewish and Arab co-principals. With the children raised in a society where separation of the two cultures and inequality are encouraged by the government, the Hand in Hand schools try to break away from this

frame of mind in hopes that interaction among Jewish and Arabs in Israel will promote a peaceful and understanding future for the country. The set up and initiatives of the school does not just stay on school grounds; it reaches out to the entire community when the children take the values they learn at school home with them. The parents then in return are encouraged to interact with one another at school functions; little by little breaking the barrier that once existed between Arabs and Jews in the area (Hand in Hand 2008).

Bustan

Devorah Brous founded Bustan in 1993. The mission of the organization is to bring Jewish and Bedouin communities together in the Negev to work along-side one another to break barriers and care for their environment. “Bustan” in both Arabic and Hebrew means a fruit-yielding orchard that has the ability to survive in a sustainable lifestyle. Symbolic for the unity the group strives to bring form within the community, Bustan encourages citizens to revert back to age-old traditions of sustainable living by being producers of the land, and not consumers. Bustan’s efforts include educational and action orientated programs. Learning sites have been created to assist in teaching the community green ways of living. For instance they constructed a medicinal herb garden in relations to educating recently in 2007. Bustan has also taken the initiative to establish programs such as The Children’s Power Project. With this they supply solar-powered medical equipment to families of children who are “off-the-grid” and need electricity. The program originated in 2005 when Inas Al-Atrash (a three-year old cancer patient)

was in need of power to run a refrigerator to house her medicines required during chemotherapy. Not wanting to use a non-ecofriendly, noisy generator, Bustan supplied the family with an efficient solar-powered refrigerator. After her treatment was finished, the paneled energy was handed down to a two-year old who needed energy to power an oxygen machine necessary for a serious case of sleep apnea (Al Mickawi 2008).

Conclusion

Despite the hopelessness for peace in the air at times and the discouraging years of struggle in the region of Israel-Palestine, it is obvious through groups such as Hand in Hand schools and Bustan, the hope still lives within the people. The time to bring resolution to the region is needed now more than ever. The ongoing distrust between the groups is breeding even more so in the radical parties. It is a shame to see two cultures so similar in their passion to preserve their ethnicity, history and religion fight one another. The most important step to peace in the situation is the interaction and acceptance of one another's existence. The rest will follow if the people can look to restorative dialogue and positive actions instead of war in the greater interest in bringing peace by: Giving alms, not arms.

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