

**The Distant Reach of the Middle East:  
How Perceptions of Conflict Affect Jewish Israeli American and  
Palestinian American Identity**

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of  
Sociology in the Graduate School  
of Duke University

2008

ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

This interpretive study examines how narratives and collective memories about the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict affect the identities of Jewish Israeli Americans and Palestinian Americans today. In contrast to Charles Tilly's (2002) assumption that identity stories and their salience are chiefly generated at the boundary between groups, I demonstrate that perceptions of conflict, and not just direct experience with conflict, are significant in identity formation and maintenance processes. I bring together several literatures to make this argument. These include: conflict theory; segmented assimilation theory; social memory theory; transnationalism literature; and qualitative methods using accounts, narratives, and storytelling. I explore perceptions of homeland conflict drawn from various sources, such as direct experiences, stories passed down through the family, media coverage, and personal connections in the homeland. I then compare the effects these perceptions have on Jewish Israeli and Palestinian American identity.

Despite all the emphasized differences between these seemingly opposing groups, I will show how both Palestinian and Jewish Israeli Americans are greatly influenced by strife in their shared homeland. Both groups are tired of the violence and ready for peace. Beyond this overarching, and all too often overlooked, commonality, there are distinct group-level differences in how conflict shapes identity from afar—by generational status and by ethnic group. For first generation individuals, the major links are having been raised in a society permeated by conflict and maintaining social connections there. The second generation is mainly influenced by the stories imparted upon them by their parents. Palestinian Americans believe they have less choice in having their lives and

identities shaped by homeland conflict for three main reasons: first, their experience of having been forcefully exiled and refused the right of return or recognition as a nation; second, the perceived misrepresentation of and bias against Palestinians, Muslims, and Arabs in the American media; and third, their belief that their host country, the United States, is supportive of Israel and its military incursions upon the people of Palestine.

My claims are substantiated by the twenty-nine in-depth, open-ended interviews I conducted with first and second generation Jewish Israeli Americans and Palestinian Americans, all from the Triangle region of North Carolina.

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## **Dedication**

I want to give special thanks to several people who supported me throughout my career at Duke and specifically during the writing of this dissertation. First off, I am immensely thankful to have had a mentor and chair, Suzanne Shanahan, who was the perfect balance of encouraging, motivating, and kindhearted as I went through this new process. Second, I thank my dissertation committee—John Wilson, Edward Tiryakian, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, and Mary Hovsepian—for their enthusiasm and support for my research. I also have endless gratitude and appreciation for my colleague and mentor, Rebecca Bach, who has always gone out of her way to foster my teaching development and express her confidence in me. I look forward to continuing our relationship as we conduct research in the teaching and learning field of sociology together.

Luckily, no one goes through the long and arduous path of a PhD alone, and I had three particularly empathetic and encouraging comrades to assist me in getting through different phases of this journey. For that and more I will always be grateful to my cohorts, Liz Essary, Joanne Durchfort, and Denise Kall.

My parents have given me every educational opportunity in life. They have also given unconditional support for my academic choices and have always made it clear that I could accomplish anything, including building a career as a sociology professor. I feel fortunate to have a family so proud and appreciative of my work.

My North Carolina family has contributed much joy and affection to my life here. It is hard to imagine having gone through it all without the company of my feline children and my best friend, Scott, whose unwavering belief that I could make it to this day,



endless patience, and kindness are just a few of the things that make me so proud to be his partner. Writing a dissertation requires a lot of time alone, and having my wonderful, furry feline roommates there to keep me company all day long has been a true blessing.

Thank you to everyone who helped me out. I dedicate this first of many works to you all.

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# 1. Introduction

This interpretive study is about how memories and narratives of conflict affect identity. More specifically, it is about how the ongoing conflict in Israel and the Israeli-occupied territories affects the identity of Jewish Israelis and Palestinians living in the United States today. I argue that group conflict, even if it is not personally experienced, is a constitutive element of diasporic identity for both Jewish Israeli and Palestinian Americans. Through a series of twenty-nine in-depth interviews with both Jewish Israeli and Palestinian first and second generation immigrants, I identify the mechanisms through which perceptions of conflict affect identity. Going beyond variations in modes of reception, I assert that perceptions of violent conflict are independently significant in identity formation and maintenance processes.

The significance of this project is threefold. First is the timeliness of the study: the turbulent, violent history of this tiny piece of land has been a persistent object of international media-coverage, and it continues to be a pressing global concern today. Second, it uniquely looks at how conflict affects identity, despite the individual's distant location from the conflict. The study explores perceptions of conflict—derived from national media coverage, personal connections, and other sources of information—and compares the effects that these perceptions have on Jewish Israeli American and Palestinian American identity. Third, while the maintenance of strong connections between the diaspora and the homeland has been well documented in Israeli and Palestinian literature, there has been no research on the role that conflict and perceptions of conflict play in the creation and preservation of diasporic identity.

In this chapter, I give a basic overview of the study and briefly describe the overall dissertation structure. I first present a summary of the sociological literatures within which this study is situated, including research on conflict, competition, and ethnic identity. Second, I detail my methods—my approach, the sample, and my interview agenda. I demonstrate that both my theoretical orientation and my methodological design—which I will show is necessarily qualitative and inductive—are the best choices for capturing the historically and globally significant conflict between Jews and Palestinians over land rights. Lastly, I briefly describe my main findings and the chapter organization of the dissertation.

### ***1.1 Relevant Literature***

My research emerges from a critique of Charles Tilly's (2002) argument, in his book, *Stories, Identities, and Political Change*, that identity stories and their salience are generated chiefly at the boundary between groups. In his own study, Tilly viewed stories as a social construction—people tend to recall and reorganize their lived experiences as standard stories. He used these stories to better understand the social processes involved in creating and negotiating political entities and identities (Tilly 2002, x). The formation and sharing of stories accomplishes important social work, from promoting and justifying the actions of oneself and one's social group, to establishing order within social interactions and relations (Tilly 2002, 8-9). In regards to stories' specific functions for identity work, he claims, "Standard stories locate identities within individual bodies as some combination of attribute, experience, and consciousness, then derive collective

identities from the attributes, experiences, and consciousness shared by many individuals (Tilly 2002, 10).”

A specific example of what Tilly refers to as “boundary stories”—which group members use to delineate important differences between themselves and others—is that confrontations between Jews and Arabs become acute and standardized at the frontier between them, and that away from the boundary identities become less defined (Tilly 2002, 11). It is known that perceptions of threat augment the importance of social identities, decrease trust in out-groups, and increase in-group preferencing (Uslaner, Canetti-Nisim, and Pedahzur 2004). I argue that identity is meaningfully affected not just by direct experience with boundary maintenance and interpersonal conflict, but also by *perceptions* of group-related conflict and discord, which are often gleaned from media depictions or shared narratives. While the manifest function of the conflict over land rights is for both groups to be able to claim the land of Israel/Palestine as the sole homeland for all Jews or Palestinians everywhere, a potential latent function is that this conflict works to increase the salience of diasporic identities by keeping people invested in and connected to the homeland.

Sociological analyses of ethnic conflict and identity have proliferated over the past four decades, as comprehensive research has been done on a variety of societies across the globe. My study, which pertains to issues of conflict between groups, relates directly to the founding insights of Georg Simmel. Simmel (1955) noted that intra-group conflict is socially significant in its latent function of promoting unity. Lewis Coser (1956) furthered Simmel’s claims by examining a multitude of positive functions advanced by conflict—from bolstering group boundaries to preventing the departure of

individuals from the group. Their perspective illuminates how the never-ending presence or threat of conflict over land and citizenship rights in Israel facilitates group unification and the solidification of Palestinian and Jewish identity. The experience of being either the colonizer or the colonized, resulting in multidimensional social inequalities, also catalyzes the reinforcement of group divisions and identity (Memmi 1965). I reveal the global implications of Coser and Simmel's notions by showing the many ways that homeland conflict helps keep the dispersed population united.

The Palestinian cause is identified as the foundation for pan-Arab ethnic identity in the United States, and Israel is thus seen as a necessary antagonist that actually encourages Arab-American solidarity (Shain 1996). Several pan-ethnic organizations have been created on both sides to preserve connections to the diaspora in the U.S. and to promote their continued assistance to those still in the homeland. Examples of Israeli American organizations that foster pan-Israeli/Jewish identity are Hadassah and AIPAC (The American Israel Public Affairs Committee). Two examples of Palestinian American groups that serve this function are the Arab American Institute and the Arab American Anti-Discrimination committee. It has been argued that the proliferation of Arab satellite channels has also contributed to a sense of pan-Arab identity, as individuals across the globe watch the same programs simultaneously (Sakr 1999). In additional support of Simmel (1955) and Coser's (1956) claims is the idea that in anticipation of Israeli-Arab conflict resolution, camaraderie amongst Jews may further recede as they lose their common adversary (Smootha 1998).

Fredrik Barth (1969) argued against simplistic social perspectives asserting that geographical and social isolation sustain cultural diversity. He empirically established

that between-group interactions assist individuals in defining who they are by their perceived differences from others. The continuous Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a frontier where group-level identity is distinguished through interactions with the “Other” (Barth 1969). I argue that it influences each group’s diasporic constituencies as well as those directly involved, since perceptions of conflict are independently significant for diasporic identity (Barth 1969, Khalidi 1997). I use this perspective regarding how boundary-work builds community to illuminate why clear distinctions are drawn not just between Israelis and Palestinians, but also between Jews and Arabs throughout the world (Lamont & Molnar 2002).

My study uses conflict theorists’ (such as Barth 1969, Simmel 1955, and Olzak and Nagel 1992) claims that ethnic identity, boundary maintenance, and internal organizational strength are promoted by competition and conflict. There are many instances of this: for example, the evolution of the Arab-American identity, which was amorphous before the 1967 Arab-Israeli war (Barghouti 1988, Shain 1996). This war over land, including territory in Israel/Palestine, also incited the creation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which until recently has been viewed as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian plight (Barghouti 1988, Shain 1996). The victory of the PLO in obtaining an official response—the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territory of Gaza in late summer, 2005—supports the resource mobilization theory, which argues that strong organizational resources foster collective action (Olzak 1992).

The competition theory maintains that ethnic violence and collective action are most prevalent during periods of increased competition between groups, and also when

ethnic inequalities begin to break down (Olzak and Nagel 1986, Olzak 1992). This trend is apparent amongst my populations in three main ways. First, it is observable in the Israeli-Palestinian violence constantly erupting over nationhood and ethnic inequalities in the form of citizenship rights. Both sides of the conflict endured sustained periods of bloodshed during the two Intifadas, and also shorter bursts of violent encounters, most commonly in the form of Israeli military invasions seeking out Palestinian militants, riots and protests on both sides, missile launches, and suicide bombings. Second, it is seen in the preservation of Palestinian identity and group solidarity within and beyond national borders.<sup>1</sup> It is thirdly seen in the increased demands made on behalf of the Palestinian group as Israel has made greater concessions over time (such as the aforementioned 2005 disengagement plan in Gaza) (Said 1979). I relate the competition theory to my conflict research by analyzing how ethnic solidarity necessitates both identification with ascribed status and the maintenance of strong ethnic networks—here in the form of diasporic connections between the homeland and the United States.

## ***1.2 Historical Context***

My research is important because of the recent course of this conflict and because of its continuing salience for millions of Jews and Arabs throughout the world. To analyze the effects conflict has on identity, one must first situate the conflict within a

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<sup>1</sup> It is imperative to note here that although national imageries do exert considerable influence over social relations and daily practices, a multiplicity of Palestinian identities, ranging from strong ties to the conflict to more attenuated ones, do exist and are affected by various factors, such as personal political positions, generational status, and assimilation experiences in the host country (Khalidi 1997, Khalili 2005, Said 1979, Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004).



historical context, thus demonstrating how conflict is shaped by the time when it occurs (Rumbaut 2002).

The long history of ethnic and political tensions between Israelis and Palestinians has facilitated highly visible conflict and a collective fear for safety within each group. International media coverage of the conflict has been broad and includes events in major cities (Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem) and in occupied territories (Gaza and the West Bank) such as bus and car bombings, military-related violence, terrorist attacks, interpersonal and political conflict, and riots and demonstrations in public spaces.

With the inception of the modern State of Israel in 1948 came the fulfillment of the founding Jewish myth that God ordained Palestine for the Jewish people (Davies 1991, Peled 1992).<sup>2</sup> The nation was also declared a safe home protecting all Jews and their descendants from anti-Semitism and persecution—a response to the recent Holocaust (Peled 1992). Israel as a sovereign state became an important symbol of Jewish solidarity and identity for Jews in the diaspora, who were guaranteed a home in Israel through the “Law of Return” and the “Law of Citizenship” (Don-Yehiya 1998). The establishment of a new nation also resulted in the creation of 700,000 Palestinian refugees, and 500,000 more after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War (Said 1979). The relatively recent loss of their country, which they refer to as “the Nakba” (translated as “the disaster”), is a salient memory amongst the Palestinian diaspora; it unites them as they live dispersed in exile from their historic homeland, without a territory to which they can return (Levinson & Ember 1997).

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description of the theological claims to the land of Israel by religious Jews and Zionists, please refer to W.D. Davies’ 1991 book, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism*.

An additionally important historical factor pertains to power relations and divisions created between the colonizer and the colonized. Assimilation is the opposite of colonization; thus, group-level divisions, distinctions, and identity effects become more salient through the process of colonization and conflict over land and human rights (Memmi 1965, 149, Simmel 1955). A related question asks in what ways the colonizer can impose meaning or identities on the colonized, and how the interrelations and violence between the two shape identity (Berezin 1997, Memmi 1965). In examining the real differences for individuals living under conditions of colonization, it is important to grasp just how economic and political exploitation has materially and spiritually devastated Palestinians living in the occupied territories.

As an illustration of the extreme disparity between Israel and the Gaza Strip and West Bank, I turn to statistics reported on the Central Intelligence Agency website (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>). The population of Gaza was estimated as of July, 2007 to be 1,482,405 living on 360 square kilometers, and West Bank estimates were 2,535,927 people living on 5,640 square kilometers of land. The unemployment rate as of 2006 was 34.8% for Gaza and 18.6% for the West Bank, and 2007 estimates claim that 80% and 46% of these two populations respectively were living below the poverty line. In comparison to the 4,018,332 Palestinians living on 6,000 square kilometers, the Israeli population as of July, 2007 was 6,426,679 people living on 20,330 square kilometers (this includes roughly 187,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank, about 20,000 in the occupied territory of the Golan Heights, and less than 177,000 in the Arab section, East Jerusalem). While the average GDP per capita for both Gaza and the West Bank was \$1,100 as of 2007, it was \$28,800

in Israel. The unemployment rate in Israel was 7.6% and 21.6% lived below the poverty line.

I use the term diaspora and refer to diasporic identity in my research because while the original term referred to expulsion from the homeland and being socially marginal in the receiving country while return is awaited, it is now used to describe those exiled or displaced to a number of different nation-states by a variety of economic, political, and social forces (Levitt 2001). In her attempt to clarify the concept of diaspora, Robin Cohen (1997) (in *Global Diasporas* (Gold 2002, 2)) identifies the criteria involved:

...dispersal or travel from an original homeland to two or more foreign regions; a collective memory or myth of an idealized homeland; a commitment to the maintenance of the homeland, including a movement for return; a strong, long-term group consciousness and identity; a belief in a shared fate; a range of possible relations (from troubling to enriching) with the host society; and finally, a sense of empathy and solidarity with coethnics in other places of settlement.

This definition applies to both Palestinians and Jews—the archetypal diaspora group—and hence also to Israeli emigrants (Gold 2002). The term diaspora works well to encapsulate how these constituencies retain ties and have identity effects related to their historic homeland. Although Israelis may not count as a diaspora per se, because of the brief length of their exile and their ability to return, they have been socialized in Israel, are intimately acquainted with the language of diaspora, and frequently use this term to describe their identity and experiences (Gold 2002). Despite condemnation received from Israel (which perceives of out-migration as threatening the ideological and demographic viability of the Jewish State), and despite their typically successful assimilation in the host country, Israeli emigrants retain strong connections with the

homeland, continuously longing for and visiting it (Gold 2002). They can thus be seen as both a diaspora and a migrant population, since they are building their lives in one land while identifying with another (Gold 2002, Stein & Swedenburg 2005, Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004).

Communities need to be situated and understood within concrete historical contexts, as they are influenced by historical relations between sending and receiving countries (Rumbaut 2002). Both Palestinians and Jewish Israelis/Jews collectively recall a history of victimization, persecution, and denial of rights. These memories remain salient for group unity and identity, especially considering their continuous violent experiences with each other. Despite these commonalities, the international response to each group has differed (Ellis 2002, Khalidi 1997). While the Zionist political project was successful in receiving worldwide recognition of their right to reclaim their ancestral land of Israel, Palestinians have always struggled for legitimacy and acknowledgement from the outside world (Khalidi 1997). As I demonstrate, particularly in Chapter Four (which focuses on participant experiences in the United States), this factor is of great import for diasporic individuals' identities, as their self-concepts are shaped by experiences with discrimination and either acceptance or delegitimization in the host country (Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004).

### ***1.3 Models and Methods***

My research goal is to demonstrate how perceptions of conflict matter in identity formation and maintenance processes. If I were to conceptualize my inductive, explorative study in terms of independent and dependent variables, the independent

variable is the individual's unique perceptions of conflict. The variation depends on whether these perceptions are derived from direct knowledge, such as having lived through the violence in the past or getting first-hand accounts of the conflict from family/friends (what Bonilla-Silva (2003) refers to as "testimonies"), or acquired from varying media sources and popular discourses (Bonilla-Silva's (2003) "story lines"). As I show in Chapters Two and Three, those who have personally experienced daily life in Israel and the occupied territories view the conflict differently than those who rely solely on news coverage, as they have had more proximity to the boundary (Tilly 2002).

In my research design, the "independent variable" is the amount and form of ethnic conflict perceived through varying direct or indirect sources, and the "dependent variable" is the contextually-driven effect that these perceptions have on identity. In explaining "identity" as an assessable outcome, the need to clarify my usage of the ambiguous term emerges.

I do not perceive of social identity as something to be discovered that involves rigidity and sameness among group members (Berezin 1997, Brubaker & Cooper 2000). Instead, I align myself with Tilly (1996), who conceives of identity as necessarily flexible for a social constructivist approach, yet "hard" enough to do useful theoretical work (Brubaker & Cooper 2000, 12). I am using identity to refer to the "unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the contemporary 'self,'" as it relates to a sense of belonging to a bounded group—a mixture between "identification" and "commonality" (Brubaker & Cooper 2000, 8). Identity is a socially-constructed process, where the individual varyingly focuses on "...language and narrative as communicative vehicles of identity" (Berezin 1997, 21). This perspective also notes that identity, as it relates to

ethnic group membership, has a “volitional dimension,” where the individual’s own background leads him or her to choose how and to what degree he or she identifies with the group (Nagel 1996, 20, Waters 1999).

I derive from this multitude of perspectives a complex reconceptualization of the term identity, and I use it in my exploration of diasporic identity as an ongoing process that is situationally and differentially affected by individual-level perceptions of conflict. Patterson (2006, 1896) discusses how among the multitude of identities we simultaneously maintain, racially/ethnically-based identities, and the socialization around them, affect the core of oneself more than transitory identities. This socialization occurs around emotionally-intense and influential issues, such as common ancestry, extended kinship networks, and collective myth experiences, which all further encourage group solidarity. Ethnic self-identification also includes situationally-based feelings that can vary over time and by place or surroundings (Zimmermann et al 2007). Recognizing the complexity and multiplicity involved in diasporic identity, I turn to Rashid Khalidi (1997, 34), who asserts that a possible pitfall in studying Palestinian identity is the... “tendency to see an essential Palestinian identity going well back in time, rather than the complex, contingent, and relatively recent reality of Palestinian identity, and to stress factors of unity at the expense of those tending toward fragmentation or diversity in Palestinian society and politics.” As the State of Israel is also relatively new and their population is extremely diverse and multifaceted, Khalidi’s counsel is useful for examining the identities of the Israeli diaspora as well.

Expanding on my discussion of the term identity, it is additionally important to look at the transnational dimensions involved in identity processes (Haller & Landolt

2005). Olzak and Nagel (1986) maintain that the forces of modernization spark ethnic movements, for example in the creation of transnational and migrant communities. Globalization and time-space compression, in the forms of increased worldwide travel and communication, has permanently altered the ties between space and place (Haller & Landolt 2005). These changes have created new possibilities for transnational and multiple identities, and thus they have had an immense impact on the way identity (including that of Israeli Americans and Palestinian Americans) is conceived. Extensive research on transnationalism has shown that migrant families continue to orient certain parts of their new lives around the sending country—they maintain their social ties there and travel back and forth (Haller & Landolt 2005, Patterson 2006, Portes & Rumbaut 2005, Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004, Zimmermann et al 2006). Emigrants have also traditionally been a major avenue for “funds, innovation, and technical expertise” for the homeland (Sakr 1999, 8).

In my analyses, I incorporate important insights from critiques by Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) and Zimmermann et al (2007), who note that previous studies tend to define transnationalism in terms of regular and sustained activities and view the attachments to both host and home country as mutually exclusive. These authors argue that several prior transnationalism studies have ignored the variance and multiplicity in the connectivity between host and home countries. Such variations exist due to several factors, including the interaction between the migrant population and state politics, and the fact that ethnic self-identification involves “situational” feelings which can shift across time and space (Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004, Zimmermann et al 2007, 769). Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) stress the need for a wider range of studies in this area

of transnationalism, as the limited sample of cases thus far considered makes the range of connectivity possibilities difficult to assess. Factors that matter for my study, as I will demonstrate in my analyses, are related to shifting perspectives across the lifecourse and power differentials between Palestinians and Israelis in areas such as: entry and exit in the homeland, citizenship laws, and national belonging.

In *The Changing Face of Home* (2002), Levitt and Waters pioneered a study which used transnational migration perspectives to study second generation immigrants' attachment to the parents' homeland, and the influence of these transnational connections on identity. I also incorporate transnationalism literature to examine how the identities of the second generation are differentially affected by homeland conflict as compared to the first generation. As Patterson (2006) acknowledges, diasporic or transnational ties can be as concrete as individuals dispersed from but still connected to the home country, or they can be based on an ideological, collective myth about a homeland that a person has never even visited, much less lived in. Patterson further notes that a transnational community member who has never lived in the sending country can have even stronger feelings about supporting the homeland than someone who was born there. This is especially true when the homeland situation involves conflict and a perceived adversary, such as is the situation in Israel/Palestine.

Forces of modernization and the resulting transnational ties assist both the Jewish Israeli and Palestinian diaspora in retaining connections to homeland conflict. This mainly occurs through transnational social networks, pan-ethnic group organizations, and prominent international media reportage. All of these aforementioned insights assist me in modifying and extending Tilly's (2002) claim that conflict influences identity



predominantly at the boundary, by showing that perceptions of conflict can and do have real identity effects.

The interview methods I use are influenced by and modeled after notable sociologists whose qualitative work necessitates descriptive and inductive methods. The use of personal, contextualized narratives/accounts/social memories and in-depth interviews to explore boundary-work and meaning in society is the model I follow as I examine the thoughts and experiences of American Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, inductively demonstrating how distant conflict significantly affects identity (Bonilla-Silva 2003, Duneier 1999, Dhunpath 2000, Edin 2005, Lamont 2000, Lee 2002, Swidler 2001, Waters 1999). In explaining my choice to use open-ended interviews, I rely on the insights of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003), who argues for this approach as the best way to understand individuals' beliefs, as they are produced and reproduced through communication and social interaction. I agree with his assertion that surveys are less useful than interviews in explaining the "how" and "why" involved in the development of ideologies, and that they tend to confine and guide interview responses. One brief example supporting this last point stems from my analyses: while most individuals I interviewed described themselves as not having biases against the Other, they would later reveal their true feelings by discussing each other in terms of crude categorizations and stereotypes.

Going back to my conceptualization of perceptions of homeland conflict being the independent variable and identity processes being the outcome variable, there arises a need to establish a way to assess the mediating mechanisms involved. Following the methodological undertakings of multiple scholars (Bonilla-Silva 2003, Duhnpath 2000,

Olick & Robbins 1998, Orbuch 1997, Tilly 2002, Verdery 1999), I use subjects' personal stories, also referred to in the sociology literature as "accounts" or "narratives," and their socially-shared memories as a way to examine the process by which perceptions of distant conflict affect identity. Narratives enter scholarly research in three ways—they are the object of inquiry, the method of inquiry, or the product of inquiry (Orbuch 1997). In this study, narratives, stories, and social memories are a means of inquiry.

Orbuch (1997, 474) discusses how many social scientists (Bruner 1990, Coles 1989, Polkinghorne 1988) maintain that narration or account-making is the foundation of all social action, yet despite this support for using stories in scientific inquiry, few sociologists have used them in empirical research. Tilly's (2002) work employed stories to investigate political identities. Social anthropologist, Katherine Verdery, used a chronological narrative to explain how and why political burials in Eastern Europe became political symbols, and how dead bodies were used to reconstruct meaning during rapid social change (Verdery 1999, 50). Dhunpath (2000, 545) argues for increased use of in-depth interviewing, as our lives and the way we represent our experiences are "intrinsically narrative in quality." I use respondents' accounts as a means of assessing and illuminating other aspects of the social world—namely how they conceptualize and are affected by conflict in the homeland (Orbuch 1997).

Definitions of accounts and narratives have been broadened for methodological and conceptual reasons, as they work better than instruments like standardized surveys to explicate the intricate stories that interviewees are now collecting, often with groups facing extreme stress (Orbuch 1997). This method works well for ethnographic studies, such as mine, which emphasize the construction of identity and the social world by the

individual (Bruner 1990). Several scholars (Crites 1986, McAdams et al 1996, Polkinghorne 1988, Somers 1994, Surra et al 1995) have argued that identity is both created and maintained via the storytelling process (Orbuch 1997).

Storytelling and accounts are sociological and anthropological tools used to extract from people their ideological beliefs and how they perceive of the social world. We use stories daily as a way to communicate to others and reinforce for ourselves our understanding of the social structure and our location within it. These stories thus cumulatively work to reinforce societal order in a subtle way. In the case of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, I found this notion to be true, as my subjects used stories about homeland conflict to explain to me why their own group should be viewed as the victim while the opposing group is the aggressor and wrong-doer. Orbuch (1997, 472) discusses how accounts are learned in the same ways as are other social behaviors—from parents, peers, and other social institutions (i.e., religious organizations and the media). I confirmed this pattern of acquisition in my own analyses. Especially in Chapter Two, I reveal the significant impact that stories of homeland conflict experienced by the first generation have upon the identities of the second generation.

Chapter Three examines the media's role in shaping the identities of those group members who have never personally experienced homeland conflict; they thus necessarily rely on the depictions of others in developing their understanding of distant conflict. In support of my choice to use stories to analyze the process by which distant conflict affects identity, Orbuch (1997, 474) asserts that accounts are useful for apprehending the human experience, the development of collective meanings, and understandings of other ethnic groups.

As Orbuch (1997, 465) mentions in his discussion of accounts and narratives, it has been theorized that despite stories mainly being recollections of past events, they also influence the way individuals currently see themselves and others. This is the crucial link connecting my use of storytelling/account methods with social memory theory as a methodological tool. Halbwachs (1992) makes a key distinction between actual history and collective memory—while history remains in the past, collective memories are the active past which form our identities. Burke (1989) warns that failing to pay attention to the collective leads us to ignore the important ways that we are influenced by the groups to which we belong. Noting this, I look for common themes in the stories of the past told to me by my subjects. As I discuss in Chapter Two, one major trend was for subjects from both sides of the conflict to refer to historical trends of persecution (i.e., the Holocaust, or the displacement of the Palestinians in 1948 and 1967) as a way of explaining why the conflict over land rights is so important to their people and to them. Halbwachs (1992) also notes that via social memories we can participate in the past and make it important for our own lives, even if we have not directly experienced it. Family, he says, is the crucial link for how we construct the past and acquire social identities. We learn stories from our parents, and they tell us what it means to be a part of the group.

Segmented assimilation theory is one of four main theories arguing how the adaptation process unfolds after emigration (Zhou 1997). Unlike the traditional assimilation, pluralist, and structural theories, segmented assimilation theory accounts for the multiple pathways and diverse experiences of recent immigrants and their children as they assimilate within their new home (Zhou 1997). Their experiences vary because of structural conditions (such as economic opportunities and modes of reception) and also

differ by generational status (Zhou 1997). I subscribe to this particular theory in my own analyses, as it best accounts for the observed diversity in identity development and maintenance processes, and it also emphasizes the role of parents and family as the institution with the greatest socialization impact on the development of ethnic identity amongst their children (Zhou 1997). Like Halbwachs (1992) and Schwartz (1996), this theory maintains that parental stories inform immigrant children about which homeland issues matter and what belonging to the group involves (Zhou 1997). I give many examples of this trend in Chapter Two, as I discuss the influence of stories about homeland conflict on the second generation.

In summary, I rely on central ideas from all of these literatures—narratives, social memory, and transnational—to explain, through the usage of stories, the ways in which homeland conflict continues to matter for group members who have immigrated to the United States. I also use these theories and methods to elucidate how the identities of second generation members, some of whom have never even visited the homeland, continue to be affected by the conflict there.

#### ***1.4 The Sample***

My sample has been drawn from one community—the area referred to as the Triangle of North Carolina (including Chapel Hill, Raleigh, and Durham). It is not random or nationally representative, although I have attempted to include as much individual-level variation as is possible, given the constraints of a community study (Levitt 2001). I cannot generalize my results to the United States population with any

degree of statistical confidence, and instead my goal has been to conduct an in-depth, inductive examination of the perceptions and resulting identity effects of a varied sample.

The Jewish diaspora has a long history in the United States, while the largest wave of Palestinian immigrants arrived after the 1967 occupation (Barghouti 1988). Palestinians have thus had more direct experience with and connections to the conflict than the average non-Israeli Jewish American; therefore, I chose to interview only Jewish Israeli-Americans and their children in order to create more parity and control in my study (Barghouti 1988, Said 1979). There are significant, discernable differences between the Jewish Israeli and Jewish diaspora. Besides the extensive cultural, political, and language differences that exist, the Jewish Israeli diaspora view themselves as less materialistic, more collectivist, and more outspoken than the Jewish diaspora (Gold 2002, 10). Because their individual identity is embedded in their national identity, leaving can cause identity conflict for Israelis (Gold 2002, 10). For many Israelis, ethnic identity is secular and nationalistic; they link celebrating holidays and speaking Hebrew to “Israeliness” and not Jewishness, while diaspora Jews’ identity is more synagogue-based and ethno-religious (Gold 2002).

Interviewing two groups with more recent experience with conflict helps disentangle the effect it has on identity. Interviewing first and second generation immigrants also permits me to analyze the possible linkages between each group’s history of violence and their current experience with conflict. One of my initial interests was whether or not the individual’s sense of being a Jew or a Palestinian, in relation to the conflict in Israel/Palestine, is somehow linked to her or his collective long-term history of persecution and conflict. Examples of this history of violence include the

Spanish Inquisition, the creation and establishment of Ghettos across Europe, and the Holocaust as collective memories of the Jews, and the history of colonization endured by the Palestinians. As I expected, these connections between past and current conflict did exist in the minds of my subjects. This is one of the major themes of Chapter Two. I chose to interview members of both populations involved in this conflict in order to capture the entire story of how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affects diaspora constituents. This decision also assists me in overcoming my own bias and limited perspective as a Jewish American who has lived in Israel several times over the past ten years.

In gathering my sample, I followed specific guidelines that I developed, which detail who is considered to be a Jewish Israeli American or a Palestinian American for the purposes of my study. There are three ways to become a Jewish Israeli: make aliyah (become a citizen officially) or move to Israel from another country, be born there (a “sabra”), or be born outside of Israel to Israeli parents (Gold 2002, 22). As Gold (2002) explains, this definition of who is an Israeli is transnational in that it reflects the proliferation of migrants worldwide who preserve connections to their homeland while living in another. Gold (2002, 23) also notes the unique complexities involved in Israeli citizenship, since while some migrants in Israel are technically citizens of their country of birth, they see themselves and are seen by Israeli leaders as Israeli, and can thus also be viewed as Israeli emigrants when they leave the country.

I decided to emulate Gold’s (2002) method used in his study of Israeli emigrants in America, defining Israeli émigrés as those who identify themselves as such. However, due to the nature of my research, I decided to also add one caveat based on the literature

which found that short-term residents (such as tourists, students, and visiting scholars) tend to isolate themselves within émigré communities (Gold 2002, 23). I wanted to focus on the perceptions of individuals who have been distanced from the conflict, and so I only included self-identified first and second generation Israeli immigrants who: 1) are not short-term residents but intend to build a life in America without any firm plans to return, and 2) have lived in the United States for at least six months.

Palestinians are a very different case, as they are officially stateless and were widely dispersed (mostly across the Middle East and to a lesser extent throughout the world) as a result of the 1948 and 1967 occupation of their land and homes. In deciding who to include in my Palestinian sample, I again included individuals who self-identify as first or second generation Palestinian, since the only technical Palestinian identification comes from having UNRWA refugee status or living in the occupied territories. And again, I included the two specific criteria listed above for my Israeli sample, in order to ensure that these individuals are indeed Palestinian-Americans and not merely visitors.

My sample was drawn over the course of the 2006-2007 academic year through the snowball method, using the many contacts I made to people connected to and involved in the local Jewish and Palestinian communities. I made contact with several Triangle synagogues, mosques, ethnic food restaurants, campus groups, ethnic organizations, and social networks. This multitude of contacts allowed me to obtain a sample of twenty-nine individuals who are very diverse in important areas such as education, age, religion, occupation, and connections to homeland conflict. This sample variance is imperative if I want to have results that accurately reflect the actual Triangle



population. The final sample consisted of nine first generation and six second generation Jewish Israeli Americans, and five first generation and nine second generation Palestinian Americans. I have created a table of descriptive demographics detailing the most integral characteristics of my sample. Table 1 can be found on page 185.

Locating individuals was a daunting but not impossible task. It was easier to locate first generation Jewish Israelis and second generation Palestinians than second generation Jewish Israelis and first generation Palestinians. First generation Jewish Israelis were much easier to find and identify, due to their frequently higher rate of group associations and community visibility than the more typically assimilated members of the second generation. As expected, first generation Palestinians were more difficult to locate, due to factors such as language barriers and scarcity in the community. Most Palestinians were evicted from Israel either in 1948 or 1967, so the population is now quite aged and has thus dissipated over time.

The other reason why it was more difficult to locate first generation Palestinians was because of anticipated trust issues. I was warned by Palestinians I initially spoke with that it would be a challenge to get members of the Palestinian population to speak with me, due to their fears of giving me their names and consequently experiencing racial profiling, and their wariness of my own potential biases as a Jewish American. “Hassan,”<sup>3</sup> the man with whom I conducted a life history, told me that especially since September 11<sup>th</sup> people are hesitant to be active in Palestinian groups or talk about homeland issues.<sup>4</sup> Whenever Hassam is asked to help locate Palestinians in the community, he always contacts his connections first and ensures that they are

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<sup>3</sup> All subjects' names have been changed to an ethnically appropriate pseudonym to protect their identities.

<sup>4</sup> Hassam, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, September 18, 2006.

comfortable with him giving out their information. I took great measures to establish a trusting relationship with the respondents, mostly by relying on previously interviewed Palestinians to speak on my behalf and make the initial contact for me. I also worked hard to ensure that everyone was confident about the validity and confidentiality of my university-supervised sociological analysis.

### ***1.5 Chapter Themes and Organization***

My research examines how conflict involving one's group affects the identity of those who live far away from the conflict site. In particular, I explore the differential impact of homeland conflict on first and second generation Palestinian and Jewish Israeli Americans' sense of self, how they personally relate to the events, and whether or not and in what ways this conflict shapes the way they view their community and Others. I assert that my background makes me an ideal candidate for researching this important topic, since I have lived across Israel and interacted with both Israelis and Palestinians.

Robert Merton (1972) discussed the important distinctions between "Insiders" and "Outsiders" in relation to social scientists studying groups and accessing knowledge. Extreme Insiderism posits that one must be a member of the group in order to examine it, as they were socialized within it and thus know which issues matter. The opposite end of the spectrum, Outsiderism, holds that Insiders tend to glorify the in-group and thus cannot avoid ethnocentrism and chauvinism, particularly during times of intense social conflict between groups. Merton concluded that in reality, the boundaries between being an Insider and an Outsider are more permeable than these doctrines allow for, and agreed with Mannheim (1936) that some intellectuals can be a part of both categories, by having

diverse social backgrounds and by not subscribing to a particular side of the conflict (Merton 1972, 29). Simmel (1908) noted that refraining from claiming allegiances to either group helps one remain more objective.

I demonstrate support for Mannheim's claims, as I am partially a member of one of the groups I am studying, being Jewish, but I am also an Outsider in that I have intensely studied both sides of the conflict and do not maintain a position favoring either side. Being a partial Insider for one of the groups assists me in having greater insights on inner-group relations and conceptualizations as I create a "thick" description of Israelis' diasporic experiences (Geertz 1973). Being an Outsider who is not directly tied into the conflict helps me to both listen objectively to my subjects as they explain their viewpoints on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to draw unbiased conclusions related to their ethnic identities.

Analytically, I am not attempting to make a causal argument, such as one which anticipates that the stronger one's sense of conflict in the Middle East is, the more salient it is for one's ethnic identity. Discovering in my interviews that perceptions of conflict are not significantly constitutive would disprove my assumptions. It could be that identity is instead significantly influenced by other factors, like the current state of the Israeli economy or the Knesset for Israeli Americans, pan-Arab social issues for Palestinian Americans, or new concerns both groups now face as American citizens.

The identity construction and maintenance process is complex and dynamic (Berezin 1997). This factor, along with the fact that this topic is understudied and that there is a need for theory-building and exploration, makes qualitative and inductive research methods—which capture the individual's unique relationship with conflict

across time—the best choice. The mechanisms through which perceptions of conflict affect identity are not well-specified in the existing literature; therefore, my study is a pioneering exploration of how these perceptions are incorporated into concepts of the self and the other across the lifecourse. As I will show, particularly in Chapter Four, I questioned subjects not only about their current perceptions of conflict, but also about how their experiences with migration and assimilation in the United States have changed their views and identities over time.

Toward this end, I have conducted a series of twenty-nine open-ended interviews with subjects drawn from the local Palestinian American and Jewish Israeli American communities. I began the process by conducting two life histories, one with a first generation Palestinian American and one with a first generation Jewish Israeli American. I chose to start my interviews this way based on an important insight from Olick and Robbins (1998). They discuss how oral historians view their enterprise as a means of giving history, a voice, and thus power, back to the people involved—incorporating democratic methods. I wanted to understand the conflict from the viewpoints (through their words) of those involved, thus going beyond media generalizations and stereotyping. As Dhunpath (2000, 550) puts it, “insight...is best achieved by trying to understand how life is seen by those living it rather than by accepting uncritically perspectives of those administering the system...We have to change the established canon of research to give audience to marginalized voices.” This was my goal in initiating the data collection process by conducting life histories.

I used information garnered from the long, unstructured life histories I conducted to construct my main interview questionnaire. The final questionnaire was framed

around three main areas of questioning, which correspond to the structure of my three empirical chapters—1) personal definitions and conceptualizations of conflict; 2) sources of information about conflict; and 3) experiences with migration and reception in the United States. A copy of the interview questionnaire can be found in Table 2 on page 186.

Durkheim-influenced research has shown that individuals' attitudes and perspectives are significantly influenced by both primary/informal (i.e., family, friends) agents of socialization, and also secondary/formal agents (i.e., schools, churches, mass media) (Phelan, Link, Stueve & Moore 1995, Janoski & Wilson 1995). Noting the rapid diffusion of television since the 1950s and major research contributions (Hagen and Wasko 2000, Livingstone 1998), few scholars today would deny the powerful influence of mass media on the way we understand our social world (Gandy Jr. 2001, Weaver 1996). It was thus logical to assume that the groups would differentially conceive of and be affected by homeland conflict, based on generational differences in actually experiencing homeland conflict, and also because of the dissimilar ways that the conflict is typically discussed in Palestinian and Jewish Israeli literature, by the family, and in public discourse.

I originally anticipated that Palestinians and Israelis would have different relations with the home country, as Palestinians have unequal experiences in important areas like the struggle for nationhood and citizenship rights, their fight for outsider legitimization and political representation, the Palestinian international image, and also their involuntary refugee experiences (Khalidi 1997, Said 1979). Based on the relevant literature, I expected, and confirmed in my interviews, that conflict for an Israeli more often takes the

form of a bus bombing or military-related violence, while for a Palestinian it is more centered on the military usurpation of homes and land, and forms of inequality related to personal rights, such as denial of access to work or border patrol harassment (Barghouti 1988, Ellis 2002, Grossman 1993, Khalidi 1997, Khalili 2005, Roy 1995, Said 1979, Stein & Swedenburg 2005, Uslaner, Canetti-Nisim & Pedahzur 2004). These experiences were the bases of Palestinians' conceptualizations of homeland conflict—for them it was something that happens all the time and is unavoidable. The first generation's memories and accounts of experiencing these divergent types of homeland conflict, and the transmission of these memories to members of the second generation, are the basis of Chapter Two, which examines these stories' varying impact on identity.

The second area explored through my interviews was the source of information about homeland conflict and how it affects identity. The influence of media sources of information about homeland conflict are the central theme of Chapter Three. Knowledge that precipitates an attitude is conjured either from direct contact or word of mouth (the press) (Guttman & Foa 1951). I therefore expected respondents to generally rely on two main sources of information about homeland conflict: personal networks and the mass media. I anticipated that the source of information chiefly used by the individual shapes both their definition of conflict and its resulting effect on identity. This assumption led me to believe there would be significant variation between first and second generation immigrants. Specifically, I hypothesized that while first generation immigrants often retain more personal homeland connections and have been more directly involved in the conflict, second generation immigrants, who have not spent as much time, if any, in the country of origin, rely mainly upon mainstream media portrayals of military and Intifada-

related conflict for information. Those who have little or no contact derive their attitudes from those with more contact, such as the press (Guttman & Foa 1951). In general, I did find that media portrayals had more of an influence upon the second generation than the first; however, I discovered that memories, accounts, and narratives about personally experienced conflict in the homeland, which were passed down from the first generation to the second, were by far the most influential source of information. This is the major conclusion of both Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

As I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, various cultural repertoires and narratives, which are the basis of individuals' perceptions of conflict, have differential effects on ethnic identity. People use culture in a multitude of ways to define themselves, through social events deemed vital in conceiving of the "self" and the "Other" (Barth 1969, Lamont & Molnar 2002, Swidler 2001, Tilly 2002, Wagner-Pacifici 2000). Martin Gilens (1999) examined the process by which media overrepresentations of certain events elicit attitudinal changes in the overall population. He determined that media exaggerations do influence the attitudes of those consumers who have no alternative direct experiences (Gilens 1999). It has been noted that mainstream, international mass media mold attitudes, and that coverage of Israel/Palestine centers on and exaggerates violence and inter-group conflict (Ackerman 2001, Gandy Jr. 2001, Kamalipour 1997, Weaver 1996). The media construct a distinct social reality through their culturally-framed interpretation of events. In this case, the media's social construction of reality works to instill associations between living in that territory and having one's life threatened on a daily basis (Binder 1993, Jacobs 1996). In accordance with the findings of Jennifer Lee (2002), I discovered through my interview subjects that violence is more

sporadic in reality, and that the media intentionally augment the sense of conflict in order to create a more sensational story.

As I anticipated, using personal connections as sources of homeland information serves to help keep diaspora members informed about the many other aspects of daily life there, in areas such as culture, politics, and economics. I expected to discover the following association between source of information and the effect of conflict on identity: for those respondents who rely on personal networks or direct homeland experiences from the past (thus accessing a wide array of homeland-based experiences), conflict will be less central in the formation and maintenance of their self-concepts than it will be for those who predominantly rely on mass media (and their overrepresentations of homeland conflict). What I found in reality was much more complicated.

My assumption was upheld by the Israeli American respondents, who consistently noted that conflict was only one aspect of daily life in the homeland. As for the Palestinians, their homeland reality was always shaped by their experiences with conflict, as it touched upon almost every area of their daily life. Being delayed by the border patrol on the way to work, having severely restricted access to most geographical areas and limited rights as non-citizens—all of these daily hardships made conflict pervasive in the lives of those Palestinian Americans who lived in or traveled within the homeland. In their case, the media's emphasis on violence in that region of the world was not an over-dramatization. Everyday life is a conflict for those Palestinians trying to survive in extreme poverty under the forces of colonization.

The third area of exploration, which is the basis of Chapter Four, was respondents' relationships within and experiences with the host country, and the effect



they had on how distant conflict shapes identity. The two groups' transnational experiences differ based on their encounters with the United States. This is due to factors such as the exclusively Jewish right of return to the homeland, the historical precedence of America being a key player in the Peace Process and ideologically pro-Zionist, and negative portrayals of Arabs in the media and popular culture (Don-Yehiya 1998, Reich 1991, Said 1979, Shain 1996, Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004). As Zimmermann et al (2007) note, ethnic self-identification can be partially imposed upon someone, depending on the way the dominant culture of a society labels a particular ethnic group.

In America, Palestinians have experienced less acceptance than Jews and Jewish Israelis; therefore, I expected the Palestinian subjects to describe more incidents of discrimination (at both the individual and institutional level) since migrating than the Jewish Israelis (Ackerman 2001, Barghouti 1988, Khalidi 1997, Shain 1996). Palestinian American immigrants who face stigmatization and sometimes persecution and unequal treatment in America see it as part of a pattern of injustices committed against their people. This leads them to align themselves alongside their ancestors and those continuously confronting conflict in the homeland, and this fortifies their ethnic identity despite their out-migration.

All of these central themes—experiences within the homeland, generational differences, media and alternate information usage, and divergent encounters within America—work to contextualize my assessment of how perceptions of conflict in the homeland affect Jewish Israeli American and Palestinian American identity. This novel exploration uses insights gathered from one community to explore far larger, substantial sociological phenomena related to transnationalism, conflict, and ethnic identity.

## **2. Differences in Perspectives on and Experiences with Homeland Conflict by Generation and Ethnic Group**

The land dispute between Palestinians and Jewish Israelis in the Middle East has undeniably created group-level divides and antagonism that transcend the conflict site (Lamont & Molnar 2002, Khalidi 1997). A common claim of conflict theorists is that competition and conflict between groups facilitates boundary maintenance, internal organization, and ethnic identification (Barth 1969, Simmel 1955, Olzak & Nagel 1986). My aim in this study is to explore *how* perceptions of conflict occurring in this region continue to shape the lives of group members, even when they migrate elsewhere and build their lives in America.

In this chapter, I use conflict theory, segmented assimilation theory, social memory theory, and transnationalism literature underpinnings to ground my analytical arguments. My theoretically-supported claims are articulated within the methodological frameworks of accounts, narratives, and storytelling. These sociological foundations collaboratively assist me in demonstrating, through my interview data, some of the ways that distant conflict continuously affects identity.

Despite all of the perceived and emphasized differences between these seemingly opposing groups of Palestinian Americans and Jewish Israeli Americans, I will show how they are both influenced by strife in their shared homeland. Both groups want an end to the violence and a peaceful resolution. Despite this important commonality, there are observable group differences in how conflict shapes identity from afar—by generational status and by ethnic group. These interesting and important distinctions are the analytical basis of this chapter. I begin with a brief analysis of how collective memory and

storytelling are mechanisms that can be used for assessing the ways in which homeland conflict affects identity. I use narratives as a means of inquiry in assessing both the development of the self and how respondents understand their social world (Orbuch 1997). I apply these methods to my interview data, paying particular attention to the different ways they work, depending on ethnic group and generational status.

Beginning in 1980 with the rise of multiculturalism, academia and the general public were inundated with references to social and collective memory (Olick & Robbins 1998). Within sociology there was a shift from analyzing social structures to “practice,” moving beyond seeing culture as the classical functionalist triad of norms, values, and attitudes by also noting its foundational role underlying all social processes (Bourdieu 1984, Olick & Robbins 1998, 108). Social memory theory—a theoretical tool I use to understand the ongoing process by which homeland conflict affects diasporic identity—thus fits well into the reorientation of cultural sociology. But what is collective memory?

Halbwachs (1992) differentiates between history as the remembered past we no longer have ties to and collective memory, which is the active past that constructs our identities. He notes how we can relate to that which we have not experienced directly through collective memories, thus keeping the past alive. Schwartz (1996) uses the metaphor of a mirror and a lamp to explain how collective memory goes beyond merely reflecting our past by orienting us—it’s a model of and a model for society (Olick & Robbins 1998, 124). I will discuss subjects’ collectively-held memories, which are passed down from parent to child, and show how these recollections demonstrate to current and future generations that caring and being informed about homeland conflict is an integral part of belonging for both groups.

Of course, there are differences in how these shared memories mediate the process by which homeland conflict affects identity from afar, depending on generational status. Having experienced violence and threat firsthand has a different long-term impact on a person than simply hearing about it. These distinctions are the crux of this chapter. But first I must discuss how storytelling works to link Jewish Israeli Americans and Palestinian Americans to the *current* state of conflict in the homeland, since social memories are constituted by past experiences and I am exploring how the ongoing conflict there continues to affect group members post-migration.

“Accounts and other related concepts, such as stories and narratives, represent ways in which people organize views of themselves, of others, and of their social world (Orbuch 1997, 455).” Orbuch (1997, 465) cites several scholars (Crites 1986, McAdams et al 1996, Polkinghorne 1988, Somers 1994, Surra et al 1995) who likewise maintain that identity is generated or maintained through the process of storytelling. In *Racism without Racists* (2003), Eduardo Bonilla-Silva claims that stories transcend the individual interaction-level and work to determine the social structure by reinforcing the status quo (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 75). Stories are seen as both social products and ideological social tools—they represent consensus, which makes them seem factual, and their repetition augments the collective’s shared social perceptions (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 76). Applying this perspective (and also collective memories) to tenets of conflict, transnationalism, and segmented assimilation theories, I use my interview-based data to explicate two main themes in this chapter. The first theme is generational and group-level differences in how stories and shared memories about homeland conflict help individuals explain the

conflict's perpetuation, and the second area examines how subjects use these recollections to reinforce notions of "us" versus "them" and victim versus oppressor.

## ***2.1 Perspectives on the Historical Foundations of the Conflict***

### **2.1.1 First Generation Jewish Israeli Americans**

When explaining why the land is so important to both groups and why it is worth fighting for—thus justifying group involvement in the conflict—individuals I interviewed relied upon often-told stories about the history of the territory and their peoples' place in it. First generation Israelis frequently mentioned how the history of the Jewish people and Zionism were heavily-discussed topics throughout their youth. "Efrat"—a forty-four year old woman from whom I gathered a life history—grew up mostly in Israel, all the way through her military service, after which time she moved with her husband to the United States to attend college.<sup>1</sup> She recalls being raised with a strong sense of Zionism in Israeli schools, and was even encouraged as a teenager to dress androgynously so as to appear "like a Zionist pioneer."

"Maytal" is thirty-eight and married with four children, two born in Israel and two in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> She has lived in both the United States and Israel since birth. She was in Israel all through high school, did her mandatory military service, and attended college there. Having been in North Carolina as a post-doctoral student for the past five years, she and her husband are currently trying to decide where in the world to begin their careers. As a parent, Maytal is worried about the safety of her family should they choose

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<sup>1</sup> Efrat, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, September 18, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Maytal, interview by author, Durham, NC, June 12, 2007.

to live in Israel, but she feels culturally isolated and lonely in the United States. “Really, I feel I have the choice between living without a soul and being alone and being kind of miserable but knowing my family is safe, or living with a soul but all the rest is gone.” She remains connected to the conflict in Israel because “...what happens there is part of me.”

Maytal learned throughout her schooling that Jews have always been hated wherever they go, and based on her reception of anti-Semitic comments from her coworkers here, she is not sure that has changed all that much. Living in Israel she never felt different because everyone around her was the same, but here she feels pressure to represent Jews and Israelis well so people will not think badly of them. Sometimes she wishes that she were not a part of this group, so she would not have to carry the burden of historical persecution and the conflict with her wherever she goes.

“Noam,” a sixty-four year old immunologist with three grown boys, has lived in America since he finished his PhD almost forty years ago.<sup>3</sup> He was raised in Israel by Revisionist Zionists<sup>4</sup> who fought fiercely for Israeli independence in 1948. Over time he has become “...even more convinced that that’s the right direction,” based on what he sees as a “lack of true commitment to peace by the Arabs.”

Mainly drawing upon the Holocaust, several Jewish Israeli members of both generations explained how they feel that the continuing existence of Israel is crucial for

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<sup>3</sup> Noam, interview by author, Durham, NC, April 9, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Revisionist Zionism was created by Ze’ev Jabotinsky, who promoted a “revision” of the “practical Zionism” developed by David Ben Gurion. While the latter focused on founding the independent nation of Israel, the former emphasized “political Zionism.” Jabotinsky led a movement aimed at garnering British aid to Jews in settling the land during the early Revisionist period. Later on, Revisionist groups working independently of Jabotinsky implemented violent tactics to drive the British authorities out of Palestine so that the Jewish state could be established (Kaplan 2005).

Jews' survival. For the first generation Israelis, this was based on their similarly-stated memories of feeling safe and protected back in Israel. Collective myths and stories about ancestral heritage help reinforce group solidarity and ethnic identity, and the more often the stories are told and retold, the stronger the sense of unification with the group becomes (Patterson 2006). Therefore, continuing to remember the Holocaust, as is encouraged by the popular Jewish discourse "never forget," helps maintain a sense of group loyalty and camaraderie in the face of perceived outsider rejection from anti-Semitic populations. Several of my subjects spoke about the historical and ongoing persecution of Jews and connected it to their sense of self and group allegiances.

"Liat" is a thirty year old woman who lived in the United States from age seven through eighteen but otherwise lived her life in Israel.<sup>5</sup> She moved back to the U.S. just last fall to obtain her PhD and is currently pregnant with her and her husband's first child. For her, Israel is the only safe place in the world for Jews, because it is their sole real home. As she put it, "...like Israel's your homeland, it's like your mother and father—they'll accept you whatever happens to you...Everyone else will be anti-Semitic, just like they were." Israel's existence makes her feel safe, even in the United States, and she plans to go back one day. This sentiment expresses both a diasporic connection to the ethnic group worldwide, and the maintenance of ties to the homeland despite migration.

"Rachel" is thirty-nine, working on a PhD, and has lived in the U.S. for the past twelve years.<sup>6</sup> Her two children and husband live with her. She connected a history of Jewish persecution to why the conflict is a necessary evil—in order to secure a safe Jewish homeland. "...I'm sure there's a huge effect of everything the Jews have been

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<sup>5</sup> Liat, interview by author, Durham, NC, May 7, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Rachel, interview by author, Durham, NC, June 19, 2007.

through, especially the Holocaust, to everything that's going on in Israel right now." She also noted how she was shocked by the racism directed at her here (she has been lumped by Americans into one racial category—Mediterranean—which includes anyone of Arab or Middle Eastern descent, and to her this is racist) because it never happened in Israel, where she was usually only surrounded by other Jews.

"Moshe" is a forty-two year old stay-at-home father of two who moved here when he was twenty-four.<sup>7</sup> He expressed more direct frustration with the Arab nations surrounding Israel who he says will not let Israel live in peace, and he linked this current violence to historical precedents.

I mean, Jews never have an easy life in history. Everybody was against Jewish people, no matter what. Finally we made a country, a state for the Israeli, and still we have conflicts with Arabs around it. I mean, this had to be a Jewish state, in Israel, and instead of letting us live in peace, all of the Arabs around us decided to go against us and destroy us. I don't know why.

Moshe's storytelling works to reinforce the commonly-shared group ideology that positions Israelis as perpetual victims surrounded by numerous larger Arab nations who want to annihilate them. His articulations help validate canons of the conflict theory by showing how conflict between groups creates perceived divisions—an "us" versus "them" mentality—and it also helps keep the dispersed diaspora united.

"Tzipora" is a forty year old mother of two who was raised in Israel, lived all over South America, and moved to the United States nine years ago.<sup>8</sup> She is so passionate about the conflict and Israel's need to exist that she works for a national organization promoting relations between Jews in Israel and America. Tzipora sees living in Israel again as a strong possibility because she views few places as safe for Jews, having

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<sup>7</sup> Moshe, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, December 12, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Tzipora, interview by author, Durham, NC, March 21, 2007.



experienced anti-Semitism in South America (such as the 1994 bombing of a Jewish center in Buenos Aires). She linked the conflict to her past: “I have family who died in the Holocaust. I have family who built Israel...and I have another cousin who was killed in the War of Yom Kippur.” Again, here we see the pattern of shared legends of persecution—past and present—working to tie group members to a common heritage and group identity, despite their removal from the conflict site.

Because of Jews’ historical experiences with persecution and prejudice, Maytal feels an obligation to move back and fight for Israel to remain the one safe place for Jews worldwide. She also worries that one day Jews may no longer be welcome in the United States. In response to being asked what it is about the conflict that makes it important to her even though she no longer lives there, she had the following to say:

Well it’s my country, it’s my homeland, it’s my people, it’s my history. You know I feel like there’s a big burden on my shoulders, and not just here, you know in this world, to live and that’s it. Because all my grandparents had to come to Israel from a very wealthy and good life in Europe and they had no choice. They had to leave everything and come to Israel. My grandmother was even fifteen when she came to Israel, she had to build her whole life and never saw her family again. All this came for some reason. I feel like I can’t totally disregard that and say, well that’s their problem, they built that country for them, and I want a better life in the States. It haunts me all the time. I think one day somebody might come here and tell me that Jews are no longer wanted. So I feel a big responsibility to go back and maintain Israel...It’s an immediate worry and also kind of a historical view of worry, knowing that there’s a reason for that country.

Both she, Tzipora, and Liat claim that distancing themselves from the conflict has allowed them to see that Israel must do whatever it needs to in order to survive, and they feel less critical of Israel’s actions now than they did while living in Israel.

“Gil” is a twenty-seven year old who always lived in Israel until he came to North Carolina for graduate school almost four years ago.<sup>9</sup> He describes himself as someone who hates “...the whole group thing, as I call it. Like creating these artificial divisions between...like making unbreachable divisions based on nation, ethnicity, race, gender sometimes...” He feels connected to the conflict because all of his family and friends are in Israel, because he thinks it “has its own unique culture which...is worthwhile of continuing in existence,” and because he always wants to have a place to escape to if necessary, although he does not plan on ever moving back there as of now. He, like Noam and several others, says, “I think it’s important to have at least one state for that nationality, partly because of historical persecutions against Jews.”

In all of these examples, we can clearly see how collectively-held memories of the Holocaust and Jewish persecution are used by first generation Jewish Israelis to defend their need for a homeland, and thus their involvement in the conflict over land. In his discussion of Jewish memory versus historiography, Yerushalmi (1982, 95) notes that collective memory is drastically selective. Certain memories live on while the rest are discarded, and the collective memory acquires a mythological component. This explains the somewhat simplistic way that the history of Jewish persecution is used by these subjects as grounds for the existence of Israel. Social memory is discussed by Burke (1989) as “a convenient piece of shorthand which sums up the rather complex process of selection of interpretation (Olick & Robbins 1998, 110).” Historical factors, such as the overall successful integration of Jews in America, are deemphasized in favor of those experiences like the Spanish Inquisition, the Jewish Ghettos in Europe, and the

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<sup>9</sup> Gil, interview by author, Durham, NC, November 10, 2006.

Holocaust, which all work to convince the audience of the need for a safe place belonging to the Jewish people (Brodkin 1994).

The concept of testimonies (Bonilla-Silva 2003) works well here to delineate the historically-framed accounts of first generation Jewish Israelis from those of the second generation. As opposed to socially-shared story lines (more akin to social memories), testimonies are a kind of storytelling where the narrator is directly involved. Testimonies are useful in that they give the story an aura of authenticity and emotionality that only firsthand accounts can provide, thus making their claims more convincing to an audience (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 76). With Maytal, for example, she described feeling safe and free from discrimination while in Israel, and then compared that to her many anti-Semitic encounters in the United States (such as a story she recalled about her coworkers joking with her that Jews love money). Her intimate stories are more effective in convincing the audience of the need for a Jewish homeland than are generalized claims of oppression and anti-Semitism.

### **2.1.2 Second Generation Jewish Israeli Americans**

“David” is a thirty-four year old dentist who visited Israel frequently as a child but has not been there since 2000 and does not plan to return.<sup>10</sup> He connects the conflict to historical conditions because “...god, there’s so little land that’s available there and it’s the only place where I guess Jews consider themselves having a homeland...I hate to see them lose more land, you know?” “Sasha” is twenty-five and works in the high tech

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<sup>10</sup> David, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, April 10, 2007.

field.<sup>11</sup> She has lived most of her life in the United States—her mother moved her to Israel from age fourteen to eighteen, at which point she returned to the U.S. Both her mother and younger sister remain in Israel. Describing a collective memory we heard similarly articulated by Moshe and David, Sasha mentions “...you look at Israel’s history and it’s always been one of the little guy trying to fight off all the big, bad Arab countries around it. So it’s kind of like, yeah, root for the underdog.” David and Sasha do not directly mention the history of persecution in their explanation of the need for a Jewish homeland; they allude to the history of the conflict more in terms of Arab-Israeli discord.

“Shai” is a twenty-six year old graduate student who grew up in Israel, England, Hong Kong, Botswana, and moved to the United States when he was twenty-three.<sup>12</sup> He identifies himself as a second generation Israeli. Shai volunteers in the West Bank every summer to promote peace in that region. He ties his volunteerism to the way he sees himself—“So my identity is very much tied with activism, and my activism is very much tied with Israel and Palestine work. So it’s very much shaped my identity.” What is interesting in his case is that he did link the history of Jewish persecution to the existence of Israel, but instead of seeing it as justification for involvement in the conflict, he sees it as an ironic shift where Israelis (and thus Jews) moved from “the state of being oppressed to being oppressors.” Efrat shares this outlook. “Zionism has come to mean occupied, you know, people who have been occupying a piece of land for almost forty years now.”

In congruence with Hobsbawm (1972), Shai and Efrat demonstrate that being a member of any community and having a group-related identity involves situating oneself in light of the community’s past, even if only by rejecting it. With greater access to

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<sup>11</sup> Sasha, interview by author, Durham, NC, February 15, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Shai, interview by author, Durham, NC, November 14, 2006.

money and power (largely funded by the United States in the form of economic and military aid) Shai believes that the Jewish population is now repeating the same discriminatory actions historically brought against them towards the Palestinians (Patterson 2006). He expresses this viewpoint with the following:

And there was a wonderful line from poetry, I can't remember exactly, but an Arab Jew was in conversation with a European Jew and the European Jew asks, "Who are you?" and the Arab Jew replies, "I am an Arab Jew", and the European Jew asks, "How can you say that when they want to kill us all?" and so the Arab Jew says, "How can you say you're a European Jew when they already have?"

Foucault (1977) discusses the notion of counter-memory in social memory theory, which are those memories that challenge dominant discourses. Shai and Efrat's perceptions of their group's actions are a good example of counter-memory, and they are powerful in that they directly challenge the common assumptions of their fellow group members.

"Leah" is thirty, married without children, and is currently in medical school.<sup>13</sup> She visited Israel every few years during her childhood but has not been back for six years. Like the first generation Jewish Israelis, she made the collectively-shared historical connection to the ongoing need for a Jewish nation:

*Leah:* I mean there's kind of an undertone driven home to any Jewish person, and the Jewish education of—Jewish people were persecuted throughout history and this is just another example of that persecution. So it taints how Jewish people view this conflict. It doesn't help when the Iranian president says we'd like to wipe Israel off the map.

*Interviewer:* And you personally feel that's affected your relationship to [the conflict] as well, having that historical precedent?

*Leah:* Sure, yeah. I mean I'm not thinking oh the Arabs are the same thing as the Nazis. I mean I don't think that's the same thing, but it's like, I mean there's like a historical background that is kind of reinforced over and over in Jewish education and holidays and stuff like that. I'm sure it affects the way that I view the conflict in Israel right now.

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<sup>13</sup> Leah, interview by author, Durham, NC, November 12, 2006.

She later discussed how her opinions on the conflict were shaped by her parents' views and experiences there. Her father has told her how he had Arab friends as a child, but the ongoing conflict has deepened the divide and made those types of relationships rare. This type of testimony occurred frequently—nostalgia for a time when Jews and Arabs lived in peaceful coexistence, before the Balfour Declaration and the following creation of the State of Israel (Said 1979). It is powerful in that it convinces the audience that peace was once there and could conceivably exist again.

Interestingly, other respondents recalled the more widespread, media-derived notion that Jews and Arabs have been fighting for thousands of years, and thus cannot and will not ever get along (Ackerman 2001, Kamalipour 1997). “Ofer,” a restaurateur and father of three children who grew up on a kibbutz in Israel and moved here eighteen years ago, articulates this collectively-shared myth.<sup>14</sup>

I mean enough is enough. You're going to kill my side, we kill your side. This started in the bible, but generations change, things change, so maybe let's sit down and come to a conclusion and really have peace that everybody will be happy and everybody will live with each other... I mean we had this for years. If you look in the bible this is where Amalek is; it's always an area with trouble, long, long ago.

While both of these collective myths and memories are based on oversimplifications and distortions of the past, they are powerful and contradictory tools that work to either create hope for an end to the conflict or fear that it will never cease, depending on one's outlook. They also work to keep group members attached to the diasporic community and to their ethnic identity. These opposing future-related views can both be held by one person, depending on her or his stage in life or the current state of the conflict (Zimmermann et al 2007). For example, as I will discuss later on, several interviewees

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<sup>14</sup> Ofer, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, November 28, 2006.

described how they felt optimistic during the Peace Process in the early 1990s, and then were even more disappointed than before once it fell apart after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. Memory is not a static thing carried from the past to the present, but is instead a fluctuating process that works differently over time (Zelizer 1995). Bruner (1990) and Calhoun (1994) warn us against essentializing identities; instead, we should regard them as undergoing a continual process of construction in narrative form.

Halbwachs (1992) and Zerubavel (1996) note that collective memories can be self-incorporated even when they were not part of a direct experience; this explains how second generation individuals can have their identities shaped by homeland stories, despite never having lived there (Patterson 1996). As for how this process unfolds, Halbwachs (1992) explains that family is the crucial link between memory and identity. As we discern from the accounts/narratives literature on how individuals learn stories, and also from the respondents' own words, second generation Jewish Israelis (like Leah and many others) learned how to reconstruct the past from their parents who lived in Israel (Orbuch 1997). Schwartz's (1996) social memory metaphor of a lamp—illuminating what is involved in belonging to a group—is useful for understanding how parents impart upon their children the importance of remembering why it is that Israel was created in the first place, and why it is so important for it to continue to exist.

### **2.1.3 First Generation Palestinian Americans**

Religious stories about the history of the land and people were frequently mentioned in the interviews, but in unexpected ways. Jewish Israeli American subjects

rarely alluded to Israel being ordained as the Jewish homeland by god, as it is written in the Old Testament, despite there being many religious individuals in my sample (Davies 1991). I found this interesting, since it is often claimed that Jewish identity and the symbolic importance of Israel to Jews worldwide, especially religious Jews, is intimately tied to these theological territorial claims (Davies 1991). It was actually the Palestinian American subjects who frequently mentioned this Jewish collective myth as a reason why the Israelis feel a sense of ownership over the land. These subjects also frequently used Islamic principles to frame their historically-related stories of conflict.

I conducted a life history with Hassan, a forty-four year old father of three who was forced out of Gaza in his youth, fled to Kuwait as a refugee, and moved to the United States after high school to get a college education. Hassan is Muslim and sees everything in terms of Islam, which he says is centered on peace and coexistence. In contrast to the common perception that Jews and Arabs have always been fighting, he recalled a history of Jews and Arabs living and working together. He alleges that those who deny this past are those who benefit from the continuation of the conflict.

And even the prophet Muhammad, the first thing, when he starts spreading the religion of Islam, he was telling the people, his followers, to make sure to give the people of the book—the Christians and the Jews—a safe haven. You protect them, you protect their holy places, you protect their identities, no ethnic cleansing, because they could've done it if they were savages back then when they had the power. They could've ethnically cleansed everybody non-Muslim. But that never happened. They left the identity of the Jews, they left the identity of the Christians, and they created harmonic coexistence... They got safe havens among the Muslims when they were escaping from the persecution in Europe. When they were persecuted in Europe, they were coming to the Middle East and living with the Muslims. So don't tell me now the Jews and the Arabs hate each other and they cannot live, and therefore we have to create a separated...we have to put a wall between them. Those people who preach that kind of thinking are the, the people who support segregation, people who support prejudice, and



people who support superiority of one race over another race. And here we go back to Hitler's stance.

Hassan also mentioned the history of Jewish persecution as a reason why they had to flee Europe and come to Israel. While his story is similar to those of the Jewish Israelis, the explanation for how it has influenced the land's inhabitants turns from one about safety and protection to one of unquestioned colonization and persecution. A commonly-held collective memory in Jewish history speaks of pioneering Jews venturing into a barren and empty desert in Palestine and making the land and life there flourish (Peled 1992). A crucial element left out of this tale was the thousands of Arabs living in towns and villages there for hundreds of years (Said 1979). For the Palestinians I interviewed, this is the role the past plays in the current conflict—they collectively remember generations of their families living on the land, and see the inception of the State of Israel as a cataclysmic interruption in this history which changed Palestinians' lives forever. With the creation of a safe homeland for Jews escaping the Holocaust came the usurpation of their land and forced exile of their people.

In reference to what he calls the “subhuman element” of the treatment of Palestinians, Hassan says, “And the Jews went through that in Germany. That's what kinda really makes me wonder, I mean. I mean, especially with the Israelis, I mean a lot of the population living in Israel who came from Europe who went through this, who had seen the Holocaust.”

“Gameel” is a forty-three year old father of two.<sup>15</sup> He grew up in Jerusalem before his family was ejected during the Six Day War in 1967. He was a very successful

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<sup>15</sup> Gameel, interview by author, Chapel Hill, NC, March 16, 2007.

business man until he realized that his achievement of the American Dream was empty because his people were still suffering back home in Palestine. Gameel described how enduring the conflict has shaped his identity and life trajectory.

*Gameel:* I think conflict is something that when you grow up in that part of the world you can't help but be aware of it all the time. So for me, what it's meant is trying to figure out ways to educate people around alternative approaches other than conflict.

*Interviewer:* Such as what?

*Gameel:* Well, educating people to really what's going on over there. I recently made a documentary film about Palestine and about my family and their experiences there.

While it has been demonstrated that immigrants and their descendants frequently participate in organized diasporic action on behalf of the homeland, the form and mobilization of these organizations are significantly determined by political constraints, both in the host and home country (Sakr 1999, Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004). As I learned from the respondents, difficulties with visitation rights in Palestine and with garnering United States' support for the Palestinian cause has greatly hindered their ability to help. Actions such as sending remittances back home or creating documentaries, as Gameel has done, become some of the few viable options for them to provide support. As "Asim," a second generation Palestinian American, put it, "It's really the misery of how the occupation is making it hard for us from the outside to associate with the inside. And for the inside to be able to survive as humans without us having to hear over the phone struggles, but then be helpless, you know, we can't be really able to help."<sup>16</sup>

In comparison, the Jewish American diaspora has successfully developed immense support for Israel and Zionism through their powerful and well-organized

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<sup>16</sup> Asim, interview by author, Morrisville, NC, November 28, 2006.

nonprofit and advocacy institutions (Patterson 2006). Israel receives \$3 billion in foreign economic and military aid each year from the United States—the greatest amount donated—despite their high ranking among the world’s richest nations (Patterson 2006). These Jewish-Israeli diasporic relations are uniquely significant because of their crucial necessity for Israel’s survival. Without America’s economic, military, and intelligence support—made possible in part by the strong influence of the Jewish American lobby—the nation would have ceased to exist long ago (Patterson 2006). The two groups’ diasporic encounters, which greatly contrast in terms of power, support Waldinger and Fitzgerald’s (2004) claims that transnationalist social ties and experiences can take many forms.

Gameel sees the previously-mentioned historical precedents of the Holocaust and the following Palestinian occupation as the foundation of the conflict there today.

It’s so sad really—of course they’re terrified with everything that’s going on in Europe after World War II, and they’re told look there’s this place you can go where there are no people. It’s that whole land without people myth. So they sell everything, they go and they’re all excited, and they show up and they’re like, oh, there are people here. Well what do you do at that stage? Now that is a tragedy. It’s like, what a sad situation because now it sets up a conflict right there for political purposes for somebody else’s desire.

“Mansur” is fifty-five and married with three children.<sup>17</sup> He moved to America thirty years ago with a PhD and works in the health research field. He too expressed this collective memory of Palestinian history.

I mean the fact that the Jews came from persecution—that earned them tremendous sympathy. And unfortunately the world in this arena where they were trying to sort of compete with who is giving to the Jewish people after the suffering they had in Europe over the years, so there were a lot of people in countries trying to sort of make up for it. So essentially in that rush to make it up for them and sympathize, they looked the other way from what they are doing to

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<sup>17</sup> Mansur, interview by author, Research Triangle Park, NC, May 22, 2007.

the Palestinians, to the local inhabitants of the land, to the natives of the land if you will.

“Safia” is married with three daughters and is in her late thirties.<sup>18</sup> She grew up in Palestine and moved to the United States at age seventeen. Like the others, she linked her views on the conflict to these historical circumstances; however, in congruence with Bruner (1990) and Calhoun (1994), who see the identity process as continuous and shaped by changing narratives, she is able to acknowledge shifts in her perspective over time.

Even viewing the Holocaust, growing up there was completely different than viewing it here. Over there it's like, it's the excuse to take our country and kick us all out. Okay the Holocaust was terrible, but why is it the justification for what's happening to us? You don't feel the pain that's going on behind it until again here in the United States you talk to the Jewish friends.

For Safia, interacting with the Other, even though it was away from the conflict site, was crucial in evoking her compassion and changing her perceptions of the opposing group. As she put it, “The expression is: an enemy is someone whose story we have not heard.”

Like Hassan, Safia recalls the collective story of how Jews and Arabs historically coexisted in the land, and contrasts that with the Jews' experiences in Europe.

As a minority you always complain, but Jews in Arab countries for centuries have prospered—they are affluent, they're educated, they have good positions. Okay, the religion of the land is not their religion, so you feel sensitive about that. But they were part of the countries and they were never massacred. There was no Holocaust; there was no putting them in ghettos. They were part of society. They didn't have ghettos in the Arab countries.

Several first generation Palestinians I interviewed questioned how Israelis cannot see what are, in their eyes, glaring parallels between the Holocaust and the Palestinian occupation.

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<sup>18</sup> Safia, interview by author, Chapel Hill, NC, June 6, 2007.

#### 2.1.4 Second Generation Palestinian Americans

Thirty-seven year old “Ahmed” was raised in Jordan and moved to America twelve years ago.<sup>19</sup> He owns two restaurants with his brothers. Like some of the first generation Palestinian Americans, he refutes the notion that Jews and Arabs have always been fighting, and thinks these stories only work to perpetuate the conflict and dampen hope for its cessation.

*Interviewer:* Do you think there’s any connection between your opinions and reactions to the conflict and the history of your people?

*Ahmed:* No, the history has nothing to do with my reaction. The conflict is sixty years old, it’s not 2,000 years old. That’s my answer right away—oh you guys have been fighting... It’s sixty years old! Before that there was nothing called Palestinians or Israelis; before that there were Jews, Christians, and Muslims that lived under different occupation—either Roman or Greek or Crusades or whatever. They were all occupied; they were all together part of the same thing. Prior to that, yes, you have Babylon but that was 2,000 years ago. You cannot put that with the current day; it has nothing to do with it.

Like the first generation Palestinian Americans, Ahmed has opinions on the Israeli explanation of the Holocaust as justification for their claim to the land.

And that’s why I don’t like the Israeli approach which says that the majority of Israelis are Ashkenazi so they lived a bad time in Europe, they know what it means to be picked and tortured. And then I’m looking and it’s like, for god’s sake, I mean you’re not doing as bad, but come on! It’s almost as bad! I mean you’re driving them to kill themselves.

“Yasir” is forty-five, works at a family-owned restaurant, and is married with four children.<sup>20</sup> He was born in Palestine but then fled to Kuwait, where he lived until he moved to the United States at age nineteen. Like Ahmed, he finds it hard to accept how the Jews had an even worse experience in Europe, and now they are doing to the Palestinians what was done to them. He expressed a desire that I heard from most of the

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<sup>19</sup> Ahmed, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, June 11, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Yasir, interview by author, Morrisville, NC, December 7, 2006.

interviewees—he thinks “...it could easily be peaceful if they just give us a land and get out of our...not give us all our land...okay, until the ’67 [land divisions] and stay out of that area—nothing would happen.”

“Naimah” is presently in college after spending most of her youth in Kuwait.<sup>21</sup> She confessed that her views are not yet clearly defined, as she is only nineteen and does not yet know who she is. When asked about her ethnic identity she said, “...well, I mean, when I think about who I am, I don’t even have an answer. I don’t even know am I Palestinian, am I American? I’m like, in between. I don’t have a place. I can’t really find a place.” One thing she is clear about is that she does not like organized religion, because she sees how people (she gives the example of Zionists) use it to justify their mistreatment of others. The main differences between Israelis and Palestinians for her are related to religion and history:

I guess the major difference is the whole religious aspect. They believe in their right to the land, God gave them that land. But the Arabs, the Palestinians, they feel that they were there and just got kicked out. It just wasn’t fair.

“Raya” is twenty and an undergraduate.<sup>22</sup> She is Muslim and wears a Hijab. Like Naimah, she feels that religion is all too often used to legitimize rights to land at other peoples’ expense.

Asim is a forty-three year old father of four and an entrepreneur. He was born in Kuwait to Palestinian parents who were exiled by the occupation, and he has now lived in the United States for twenty-seven years. Asim, like Hassan and also Yasir, consistently drew connections between Islam and his actions and viewpoints. His religion serves as a bridge between himself and his life in the United States and his ties to Palestine because,

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<sup>21</sup> Naimah, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, March 18, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Raya, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, March 3, 2007.

“It’s truly a land of peace. It’s a holy area.” “Burhan” is forty-seven, married with six children, and owns a local Middle Eastern restaurant chain.<sup>23</sup> He grew up in Kuwait and Lebanon and moved here twenty-nine years ago. He too claimed that Islam is the basis for how he views the conflict—“...If people understood that the more people are educated in their faith, the more peaceful they will become, it would change a whole lot.” Burhan, Asim, and several other self-identified Muslims mentioned that as a part of their religion, they do not believe in country borders or ownership of land. They think that these are modern notions created by man as a way to control and dominate others, and for them this applies directly to the Israeli occupation of the land. All of these divisions between the colonizer and the colonized create further suffering and fuel the continuing conflict (Memmi 1965).

Just like with Israeli Americans, collective memories and common stories are used by members of both Palestinian generations to explain their views on the historical foundations of the conflict. The same story of the creation of Israel in 1948 takes on two very different meanings, depending on which side of the conflict one falls. It is either a story of final redemption or the beginning of oppression and exile. And like their second generation Israeli American counterparts, second generation Palestinians recall having been raised by their families to be aware of and emotionally connected to people’s suffering in the homeland. Here again we see that via parent-child socialization processes, memories of the conflict can shape how individuals see themselves, despite their not having experienced it directly.

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<sup>23</sup> Burhan, interview by author, Chapel Hill, NC, April 27, 2007.

For both ethnic groups involved in the conflict, collective memories—here in the form of historical narratives—help maintain their group bonds across physical space, and continuity through identity. As MacIntyre (1984) acknowledges, historical identity and social identity go hand in hand, and belonging entails aligning oneself with the group's past, if only by rejecting it (Hobsbawm 1972, Olick & Robbins 1998). Accounts and stories are useful tools for gaining insight into the human experience, and for arriving at collective understandings of culture and ethnic groups (Orbuch 1997, 474).

## ***2.2 Stories about Homeland Conflict***

Extensive research on transnational ties (Basch et al. 1994, Portes et al. 1999, Vertovec 2000) has demonstrated that migrant families orient particular, meaningful aspects of their lives around their country of origin (Haller & Landolt 2005, 1183, Patterson 2006, Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004, Zimmermann et al 2007). When asked in the interview about homeland issues that are important to them as a Palestinian American or Jewish Israeli American living in the United States today, every person with whom I spoke, except for one individual, said that their main concern was the conflict between Israel and either the Palestinians specifically or the surrounding Arab nations more broadly. The common sentiment among both groups is that the conflict's history is so long, it pervades everyone's lives anywhere they live, and continuously shapes their identities. In this way, they come to view homeland issues as transnational platforms of concern. Through caring about and supporting the end of the conflict there, they are encouraged to continue identifying with and acting on behalf of the country of origin (Haller & Landolt 2005, 1183, Patterson 2006).



As I demonstrate through my findings, this process is different for each person and fluctuates across time and space—it is not a linear progression. A person can be strongly attached to both home and host country simultaneously and in varying ways (Zimmermann et al 2007). I pay significant attention in the following analyses to multiplicity in these transnational connections, emphasizing the interactions between the diasporic individual and differential power relations linked to the state and civil society. Both first and second generation Jewish Israelis and Palestinians relied upon a combination of testimonials (stories that directly involve them or people close to them) and more generalized stories/collective memories to articulate for both themselves and the audience what role homeland conflict plays in their social world. The main themes brought up in discussions of homeland experiences with conflict were: wartime occurrences and episodes of violence, encounters with members of the other group, military service for Israelis, and loss of home and forced expulsion for Palestinians.

Before I discuss respondents' experiences with conflict, it is first important and relevant to mention an interesting viewpoint often expressed by my Jewish Israeli subjects. In contrast to mainstream, often media-derived characterizations which portray Israel and the occupied territories as dangerous areas where one's life is threatened daily, those who have been there express the notion of "life goes on" (Ackerman 2001, Kamalipour 1997). Although every Jewish Israeli I interviewed acknowledged that the conflict over land is the most crucial issue, they also noted that people in Israel continue to lead normal lives, just as they do in the United States.

Tzipora, who moved to the United States from Israel nine years ago, used a testimonial to explain how being in the homeland makes all the difference for understanding this key distinction.

Well, it's interesting—I took my kids for the first time to Israel last year, and they were very afraid, especially my daughter. She said, my friends are going to Hawaii and you're taking me to the war, because we went in the middle of the war a little bit. And I was like, you will feel safe there. She has completely different expectation from what she got. She said that because of CNN because actually that's the way that they most get informed—TV...It's completely distorted and they will show the worst because that's what will bring the audience... So they got to a country where they saw something completely different. They saw young soldiers who hate going to war, who are good people, who are concerned if they need to aim at someone. She saw kids walking in the street by themselves in a different society. Here I don't let her go by herself to get an ice cream. There it was 10:30 at night and she went with a friend to get an ice cream, because the streets were full of kids, and so it was different. They had different expectations. They didn't know what Israel is because they got it from the TV.

Moshe, a stay-at-home father who grew up in Israel, brought up this idea again and again throughout his interview, and personalized it by giving multiple testimonials.

Some people are like, I can't live over there, you never know what's going to happen. People live over there. They go out. I go to Israel, I go dancing. During the war—I went last summer, I went Israeli folk dancing every night in Tel Aviv. I live! So there is war in the north, I know don't go to the north... So it's scary to live there, but you know, it's part of life. One thing about that, if you're going to be dead, you're going to be dead no matter where you are. It's a part of life.

“Zev,” who lived in Israel briefly, said about his teenage years there, “And then sometimes the Israeli army would say, hey, there's a guy who managed to get into central Israel, and so we wouldn't go out that weekend.”<sup>24</sup> He later added, “I feel worse living in Paris than in Israel. In Israel I know that I'm being protected by someone...”<sup>25</sup> Leah,

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<sup>24</sup> Zev, interview by author, Durham, NC, May 2, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Post-World War II, France's unitary ethnic system caused Jewish affiliation with Zionism to be culturally taboo, and this hostility towards Zionists has persisted over time (Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004).

another second generation Israeli American, made a similar statement about daily life and conflict there:

For example, the Arab-Israeli conflict, I guess that could be a barrier to going to visit, but we're going anyways and my parents have gone when things were more active than they are now, and it's kind of like, your life must go on.

She later noted that these opinions of hers reflect those of her parents, who grew up there and raised her, which again supports Halbwachs' (1992) claim that family is the crucial link for learning how to belong to a group through collective memories. Sasha, who lived in Israel during her teenage years as well, told me how she does not recall talking about the conflict at all while she lived there because "...we were just clueless high school kids just trying to be normal and trying to get on with life." "Dalia," a nineteen year old college student whose mother is Israeli, clarified the difference between seeing the conflict from afar and living it on a daily basis, "but like my relatives, they're so used to everything there that it's like, normal. So it doesn't bother them. So like, I think we're bothered by everything more than they are."<sup>26</sup>

It seems that for second generation Israelis, either hearing about it from one's parents or being there and verifying that indeed, the conflict does not impact every aspect of daily life, helps them understand the complex and somewhat contradictory notion that although the conflict is the most important group issue, it does not stop people from going about their everyday lives. This common perspective was notably absent among the Palestinian American subjects.

As opposed to the Israeli experience of negotiating a normal life around the conflict, the Palestinians with whom I spoke all described quite a different reality for

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<sup>26</sup> Dalia, interview by author, Durham, NC, May 1, 2007.

people living in the homeland. Perhaps the best way to appreciate these totally divergent group-level experiences is to frame it in terms of power—the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizer exerts control over the colonized people’s personal freedoms and rights, and has the capacity to monopolize valued resources such as land, education, and economic opportunity (Memmi 1965). As I will show in the following section, which explores encounters with conflict and violence in the homeland, the Palestinian Americans I interviewed who have been there describe collective memories about daily life quite differently from their Jewish Israeli American counterparts. Power relations shape the connections that transnationalists have with both sending and receiving countries, and their divergent experiences with conflict have differential effects on Palestinian and Jewish Israeli American identity.

### **2.2.1 First Generation Palestinian Americans**

Hassan had his entire life trajectory altered by war. He was born in Gaza and at age five, while his family was temporarily in Kuwait, the '67 War occurred and his family was not allowed to return home. From that point on he lived as a refugee with very limited rights in Kuwait, and his only continuing association with Gaza—a place where his family had lived for seven-hundred years—was when the Israeli authorities would “grant us a visa, like a visitor” and allow them to come back for a couple of months every summer. Hassan recalled memories from these visits, from age six to seventeen, of humiliating strip searches he was forced to undergo each time he passed through the border crossings: “...I mean, they’re not harsh but it creates uh, a sour memory, especially when I was like ten and they ask you to strip and then they don’t do

anything! They tell you to put your clothes back on...that was psychological. I mean I think, uh (pauses), it's kinda trying to make people feel not very welcome." This memory of border patrol harassment turned out to be a very common theme.

When he reached adulthood, traveling to and within Palestine became even more difficult for Hassan. What used to be a forty-five minute trip from the Tel Aviv airport to his home now took seven hours, because he was no longer allowed to fly into Israel and was forced to go through Cairo. The Gaza of his childhood transformed from a beautiful place to an overpopulated territory after the Palestinians were displaced in 1948. "So all the sudden the population of Gaza quadrupled within a short period of time, from, you're talking about from 50,000 within fifteen years became almost a million and a half. Yeah, all refugee camps, living under poverty, have nothing." He described the refugee camps.

*Hassan:* I mean, Tijuana, Mexico looks like a beach resort compared to this. I am talking about there is no infrastructure. Sewers running in the streets, poverty... The alleys, people made, houses made out of mud and shingles. I mean, literally it's not a life.

*Interviewer:* And there are a lot of young people living there.

*Hassan:* Yeah, it's full of a lot of young people and uh, and the, the elderly who are pretty much kinda left, and now they're living in these refugee camps... They are trying to make a living, you know so they send their kids, they don't go make them finish school. They just send them out while they are kids, young, to go out and start working... The Arab populations, the work populations—it's like Mexicans here. They are, because people were going to Israel, and they were the cheap labor, you know for Israel. And uh, but, I mean all that now...it became like a major problem. And I, every time I go there now I see that sight, and the minute I step out of Gaza into Israel, it's like a completely different world (pause) even thought it's just...

*Interviewer:* You mean like the economic state of it?

*Hassan:* Yeah, I mean, even though they are just miles apart, you know, but it's like two different worlds.

Mansur recollected similar tales of how he "used to visit almost every year... It used to be easier...but they will identify you through their databases and they will figure

you are a Palestinian and you will get really harassed. Plus it became so difficult to move around anything in there.” He too gave plenty of testimonies about sitting at checkpoints for hours just to travel six miles during his visits there, and sees these hardships as a part of who he is. He wishes he could move back there “and benefit the society there, be part-time living there or somehow. Is it going to happen? It does not look good.” Mansur, like Gameel, Asim, and many others, laments the fact that Palestinians in the United States are unable to help homeland development (which is a significant potential form of aid) due to a “lack of power, lack of international recognition of their suffering, their support... Israel made a lot of mistakes too but never paid for any of their mistakes.”

Mansur, Hassan, and several others also mentioned their frustration with not being able to return and live in the homes they own, which were taken from them, and meanwhile any Jew in the world can move to Israel and be given instant citizenship and government aid. Mansur’s loss of his family farm has permanently affected him.

Oh yeah, I mean in my family I lose the farm. My father within weeks died. He could not handle what happened; he just could not do it. I mean a lot of people sympathized with me or sent me an email or card but they have their priorities and their own concerns... And I appreciate it but the reality is it’s not going to leave the same fingerprints on their lives the same way it is on me... For me it’s an existing issue. Every time I am going to go there I am going to see that farm sitting behind that fence and somebody else is in control of it. So even if I wanted to forget, I would not forget it. The events that is happening, what is going on, is a constant reminder.

Echoing the theme of difficulty moving within Palestine, Safia had her own stories. She defined homeland conflict in terms of these types of adversities, along with the general lack of human rights and resulting poverty.

I think the conflict is constant. I mean anything—it’s all conflict. As far as people living in the West Bank, it’s a conflict every day. Walking or driving or

taking a bus from your home to a school and going through several checkpoints and getting beat up or spat at—to me that’s a conflict, an ongoing conflict.

Safia used to go back to Israel every three years to renew her paperwork, in order to maintain her Israeli ID for, “patriotism reasons, so I can be counted. I didn’t want to give up that right, to be counted as a Jerusalem resident.” Once she even crossed the bridge from Jordan to Israel, spent the night, and returned to the United States the next morning. But about four years ago she began to think it had become too difficult and dangerous, as she experienced more and more harassment when crossing the border. Ultimately she lost her status as a resident there, but she has not yet given up hope: “I still have a copy of my paper, maybe one day I’ll sue and try to get it back.”

Like several others, Safia was traumatized by the experience of losing her family home, and tears were streaming down her cheeks, her voice breaking, as she told me the story of how she would occasionally return to visit it. A Jewish family had been given her mother’s home and they would let her and her parents in to see it. “And it’s tough, I mean the stuff that they buried in the backyard was dug up and on display everywhere. And my dad was trying to buy them back for her. I think the daughter said no because selling them back to my mom was acknowledging that this was her home...” Her personal account served several important functions, from giving her some degree of control and understanding of her situation, to allowing her to cope with an emotional and stressful situation, to hopefully providing some level of closure (Orbuch 1997). Despite any resolution achieved through the sharing of narratives, these stories are never forgotten and leave an indelible mark on people’s lives and identities.

One way that Palestinians described how living through the conflict shapes them is in terms of a burden they always carry. Like the rest of the first generation Palestinians, Safia explained how having family origins and enduring head-on conflict in Palestine has permanently affected her.

*Safia:* ...So I feel like it's a big, big burden. I go through depression phases when things with the conflict gets heated. So it's very hard. Psychologically, sometimes I wish could be something else. I want to be from another nationality. I don't want to be a Jew, I don't want to be Palestinian, I don't want to be Indonesian. I want to be somewhere that doesn't have conflict.

*Interviewer:* What is it about these types of conflict that make it important to you even though you no longer live there?

*Safia:* I mean, the fact that I was born and raised there and that my parents have been there for hundreds and hundreds of years, if not thousands of years. It never goes away. It's a part of me. As much as I'm an American citizen—I've lived here longer than I lived there. ...But you never lose that connection. It's a part of me. It's a part of my parents. You know, you feel sad about bad things happening in Darfur and other places, but it hurts a lot more when it happens back home where I came from, because I lived it. I walked those streets, I know that feeling. I've been stopped at those checkpoints. I've been treated that way. I've seen my brothers get beat up. I've experienced it, so it all is personal to me. And it will always be personal. Even if I never go back to live it will always be personal to me.

The conflict has also shaped the identity of Mansur and continues to haunt him. The pain it causes him even affects his health and productivity. I met with him at his office, and halfway through the interview he pointed out to me a postcard he has up on his wall.

See that picture of that old man? He's carrying it [Jerusalem] on his back. This guy is carrying Palestine on his back, it's a burden. That's really my burden. I love this picture. This guy represents me. I am carrying on my shoulders the huge burden of the Palestinian suffering, the pain of the diaspora being denied the right to be free, to go and visit my family when I want to, to go to the farm that I grew up as a little child around, and to enjoy what my father left me. This is why I'm not a normal person.



He went on to tell me that being a Palestinian motivates him to work harder than everyone else, in order to represent Palestinians in a positive light. He also worked longer hours to escape ruminating about the conflict. Had it not been for this burden constantly distracting and consuming him, he would “probably be sitting in the White House. I mean I would probably be a hundred times more productive and successful in my career and my life.” This is one example of how experiencing ethnic inequality and discrimination augments an individual’s sense of connection and loyalty to the group, despite his or her absence from the homeland.

Gameel, who now makes documentaries about the conflict, also informed me that losing the family home was an episode of conflict that continues to influence him today—hence the career change. “Well, I’ve lived through a war there—the ’67 War—and my family still lives there. And I know the emotional connection, you know, my family has to the land that they lost and to the home they lost in ’48, which is still there...” For him and the others who experienced this type of loss, the link to the land includes having family there, but is mainly focused on having land and homes that are still there, being occupied by others. “So growing up in this country, if somebody could come in and just push you out of your house and take it, we can’t even fathom that...and yet that sort of thing has happened and does happen around the world.” This common ancestral heritage joins them all together as a forcibly exiled population. Many of the respondents told me stories about parents or grandparents who still have, and often bring out, the deeds or keys to the house and land that they were compelled to leave.

All the Palestinians (and Jewish Israelis) I spoke with who had lived in the homeland spoke about how growing up in wartime is something that cannot help but

shape who you are forever. Gameel described what he went through in the '67 war and how it influenced him.

*Gameel:* Well the thing about conflict, the thing about war that I think most people don't understand, is that it's something that stays with you forever. The notion you go and bomb people for a couple of weeks and then okay, everything is better now, that kind of terrifying experience just doesn't go away. I was about four. I don't remember every detail but things like when a bomb goes off, it's something you feel through your body. And also seeing dead bodies, I mean they're things that you...and the people around you are all scared...I mean, you experience all of that. There are windows shattering, and so I remember a lot of those kinds of things.

*Interviewer:* And at that age it must be even more terrifying because you don't understand.

*Gameel:* Right, but the point being, I think, is that people who go through conflict, it can't help but shape who they are in some way. And for me I think it has caused me to always want to find a solution to conflict, a peaceful kind of way—a dialogue with people, or trying to see what their motivation is, about why it is that they're involved in this conflict. Because I think it's the only way you can bridge that gap. So for me that's how; it's created somebody who's looking to educate and bridge those gaps of knowledge, or lack of knowledge.

“Umar” is forty-eight, married with four children and works in real estate.<sup>27</sup> His story is similar to Hassan's in that he was born and raised in Gaza, and then moved temporarily to Kuwait when his father got a two-year teaching contract there. The Gaza Strip was occupied while they were away. They lost their home and were not allowed to return. He described as extremely unfair having a deed to a home and then having that home stolen, and went on to tell a particularly potent memory.

*Umar:* It affects me when I see my father. I'll tell you a sample example and I'll never ever in my life forget this sight. We went to visit in 1974 and I was fourteen, fifteen at the time, and I remember it just like I'm looking at you right now. And Mom and Dad, they took us from Gaza Strip, we went through the Israeli border... So they went to my dad's hometown at that time, where he was born, and he stood right there and cried his eyes out, because it's like here's where I was born and we never sold that land. It was taken away from us. That hurts and I'll never forget that sight in my life, as long as I'm alive, because I know I saw my mom and dad both crying, because it was still fresh at that time—

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<sup>27</sup> Umar, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, June 6, 2007.

we're talking years ago, what thirty-five years ago? And it was fresher then than it is right now. So it touched them and it touched me to watch them with tears coming down their eyes because they lost it.

*Interviewer:* So what kind of emotional reactions do you have to these kinds of events?

*Umar:* Sadness, just sad, it brings a lot of sadness to my heart to see my father suffer so many times, and my family. Maybe I haven't lost anything personally because I never owned a land in my name in Palestine. But mine, my father's... you know that's how people in this country—they hand down what they owned to their children and children and grandchildren. Well, nothing was handed down to me yet.

A common link among all of these first generation Palestinians is that they belong to a cohort that grew up in the 1960s, and all experienced the loss of their family home during the Six Day War. As Mannheim (1952) notes, shared social and political events mold generations through major shared experiences during formative years. These firsthand narratives or testimonials are very powerful in evoking an emotional response from the listener. Hearing these personalized, descriptive stories and the person's own emotional reactions influences the audience in a way that common tales simply cannot (Bonilla-Silva 2003). And these collectively-shared memories about direct experiences with conflict actively form identities.

Direct experience with homeland conflict makes a notable difference for how conflict affects the identities of first versus second generation Palestinian Americans. Echoing the central tenets of the transnationalism literature, Umar described to me how distance and length of time away from the homeland attenuates only certain people's connections to it. "So as the generations move on, the tie becomes weaker, and the effect on the human being becomes weaker...except the ones that live there. You can't change them, they live it every day. It doesn't get weaker, it actually gets worse."

Mansur explained to me the main differences between himself and his second generation children.

I am more emotionally attached. I lived in there until the age of eighteen. When that farm was taken away from us, I remember when I was five, six years old that was my dream time to go to the farm and help the family plant citrus trees, and then after hard work we'd have a little picnic lunch on the farm, and then sometimes we'd spend the night on the farm in the spring or the summer, when it's nice. So it's attachment. I'm attached to the land. I mean I know [the kids] sympathize, I know they know about, but it's just no comparison. Actually, one of my concerns is that if something happens to me I'm not sure if they're going to maintain relations with people over there. They really will not have what I have. It's different.

He tells his children that because they lost their real home in Palestine, their American residence is a house and not a home, but for them it is the only place they know. It is this key difference—between actually losing one's home and being raised by those who have—that I turn to next in my discussion of second generation Palestinian Americans.

In his discussion of how the Peace Process was an interruption in the long-standing conflict, Hassan provided evidence supporting the notion that identity fluctuates across the lifecourse. He told me about how it changed Palestinians' behaviors and attitudes. People rapidly became optimistic and the diaspora returned to the area, investing their money in building up places like his hometown of Gaza City.

You know and then they, both sides, because both sides were tired of living through this back and forth and uh, killing and fighting, and that's when Arafat tried to make peace with Israel. And everything is, okay, we'll concede for 80% and we'll have the West Bank and Gaza, but you know, we'll make peace. But people were looking forward to this, you know, a lot of people, including my wife's family, they went back to Gaza, you know, because of that peace deal... But unfortunately it did not last, you know, and then we all know about what happened—the Intifada and uprisings, and the whole cycle of violence started all over again.

### **2.2.2 Second Generation Palestinian Americans**

Segmented assimilation theory, along with social memory theory, looks first to the family as the social institution developing ethnic identities among American-born children. It is mainly through language retention and parental socialization for the former perspective and storytelling for the latter (Haller & Landolt 2005, Olick & Robbins 1998). There are many other factors involved in the diasporic identity formation of second generation individuals, such as religion, homeland information usage and sources, and community involvement. I will examine in detail how contextual factors other than parental influence shape the identities of the second generation when I turn to issues of media usage and host country experiences in chapters three and four. For this topic of how direct homeland experiences with conflict affect identity, it is primarily the parents and family who determine the trajectory of transnational ties for their children (Haller & Landolt 2005). This process of establishing their children's attachment to homeland conflict occurs either through traveling there (for those who are able to do so), or through sharing collective stories and memories about homeland conflict, like those previously discussed.

It seems that the first generation's retention and retelling of these collective memories about growing up in and leaving the homeland are an important factor connecting the second generation to the conflict. This is especially true for Palestinian Americans, many of whom have never been able to return to the homeland, because of visiting restrictions, because they fear the dangers and harassment associated with traveling to and through there, or because their displacement was such a traumatic ordeal they cannot face returning to the land. It is usually the first reason that keeps them from

visiting their families and showing their children their country of origin. And as I will continue to show, this crucial element of having no homeland to claim or return to is a key differentiator for how distant conflict affects the identities of Palestinian Americans versus Jewish Israeli Americans.

Age was a consequential mediating factor that emerged from my interviews with second generation Palestinian Americans. Four of the five men I interviewed, whose ages ranged from thirty-seven to forty-eight, had been able to visit Palestine when they were younger and the borders were more accessible. The four women with whom I spoke, whose ages ranged from nineteen to twenty-two, had never been allowed to visit because entering Palestine became much more difficult during their early childhood. There is an alternate possibility that gender may also have played a role here; however, all of the women I interviewed mentioned that their parents wished to take them but simply were not able to because of access and safety issues. While half of the second generation Palestinian subjects have never been to Palestine, they all indicated that they see it is as their homeland. Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority of second generation Israelis have been to Israel several times throughout their youth—an issue I will turn to in my discussion of that population.

Ahmed, the thirty-seven year old restaurant owner who was raised as a refugee in Jordan, identified Palestine as his homeland because his family was there for over eight-hundred years. He would like to be able to visit. He has been to the area twice, the last time to give a presentation in Jerusalem (he has a PhD in nutrition from Jordan), and although he did not experience violence while there, he did have a conversation with an Israeli colleague which typified the conflict for him.

I had known him for years through his writings and he'd known me through my writings. And he goes like, where are you from? And I looked at him, and I didn't want to smart mouth him in a sense, but I wanted to declare myself, especially since I was inside what I considered Palestine. And I was like well I'm from a few miles down the road, south of here, and it's a village called Tapasia, but you call it now Yehud. And he goes like, you're from Yehud? And I was like, yes. He said, I didn't know there were any Arabs in Yehud. I said, well there wasn't but three women Jews in the village before 1948, and they were married too. And it was a little bad comment, well not bad comment but just an expression of how I felt, and he goes well yeah, but you're Jordanian born and raised. I said, no. He goes, yeah, you're parents immigrated to Jordan, so you're Jordanian. And I didn't even have a chance to answer—my professor's wife was with us, she's from Raleigh, and she's like, no Peter, you are Dutch because your parents are Dutch and they chose to immigrate to Canada, so you became Canadian. Now you chose to come here so now you're American. [Ahmed] will always be Palestinian because his parents were kicked out. They did not immigrate. I said, thank you Debbie, well said! And that's how I feel exactly.

During his only other visit to Palestine, Ahmed remembers being shocked by how small the land was, yet how much of a division existed between the affluent areas of Israel and the ghetto-like refugee camps just miles down the road, where his aunt lived. He told me how he was harassed at checkpoints both in Jerusalem and at the entrance to the refugee camp. He compared the beauty and peace of Jerusalem to the extreme poverty, crowding, and mayhem in the camps, where you see "Israeli patrol coming through town, and you see the people running around away from it, they might be shot or something."

Beyond these explicit encounters he had in the homeland, Ahmed's conceptions of homeland conflict are formulated around stories he was told as a child by his now deceased mother, and the life lessons that suffering taught her. Her stories were of the same kind collectively-shared by the first generation members I interviewed.

She basically left while they were being shot at, you know, the last minute, and she just grabbed her kids and ran away. She even forgot to put her slippers on. And the only thing she had was ten pieces of gold under her head cover, because

she was still not married five years and the culture was after five years she could remove them. So that's how they started their life later on, with these pieces of gold that she had left on her head. As a child growing up without a father, she would start crying and telling me all of these things—"I'm sorry, I should've gotten you a better life but we couldn't. Be tough, be tough, toughen up." And I did.

"Josef" is forty-eight, married with two children, and works as a psychiatrist.<sup>28</sup>

He and one other person in the Palestinian sample deviate from the rest in that they are Greek Orthodox/Christian and not Muslim. He visited Palestine four or five times before age eighteen and then it became too difficult for him to visit. His personalized stories of homeland conflict are centered on the same topics as the others—border patrol harassment and difficulty moving around the country. To him, these daily struggles are as important as the more overt, aggressive conflicts such as Israeli incursions and helicopter attacks.

There's a conflict at wanting to do your work and having to drive three hours when it used to take ten minutes. Those are what I would call the underlying tension conflicts that are there. You know the car bombings, all that kind of stuff is an overt, aggressive conflict, and the Israeli incursions into those areas with a lot of force and helicopter attacks are just an escalation of what I think is an underlying daily tension conflict.

He described the intimidation and questioning he underwent from Israeli police as demeaning and angering—a common characterization of these collective memories. And also, just like Ahmed, his parental stories of conflict had the same themes of forced expulsion and fear of being killed. He told me the following stories, first about his father's and then about his mother's forced retreat from Palestine.

*Josef:* One day he was going to get on his school bus to go to school. He missed the school bus, and some Jewish settlers blew up that school bus. His mom would not let him go back to school because of that... So he went to the American University in Beirut at sixteen, so he grew up in Bethlehem until he was sixteen.

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<sup>28</sup> Josef, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, March 18, 2007.



My mom grew up in Haifa until she was ten, and then when she was ten British soldiers came to their house and told them they had to move because they lived on Mt. Carmel, which overlooked the town of Haifa. So they were forced to move to the German Colony, down in Haifa proper, from Mt. Carmel because there was a concern among the Jewish settlers that Palestinians on Mt. Carmel would create sniper...

*Interviewer:* Because they had a lookout up there?

*Josef:* Yeah. And then when they were down there the '48 war broke out and they were basically run out of their home under gun point. So they had to leave.

*Interviewer:* So they fled to Beirut?

*Josef:* Uh huh, Beirut. And that's where my mom grew up from the time she was ten until she came to the country to be with my dad.

As a child, Josef, "was kind of antsy about being identified as being an Arab, much less Palestinian," but upon entering college and learning more of the history, "there was a sense of kind of pride in being Palestinian, and I still have that sense of pride of being Palestinian." This proved to be a popular theme amongst my subjects, and it lends additional credibility to the theorized notion that ethnic identity is not constant across the lifecourse. Also, like Ahmed, he feels connected to Palestine and the conflict there because "it's where I came from...I can't really just freely go back there if I want to." In regards to how the conflict shapes his identity versus his parents', Josef claimed that they are more connected to it because they lived through it.

*Josef:* I mean naturally my dad will pull out deeds to land he has in Jerusalem. He still has the deeds. We visited my mom's house in Haifa and the person who was renting from them was given the house when they left. And so we were able to talk to him about it, what his memory was of that house. The deed is still in my grandmother's name. So they experienced the loss of what they had.

*Interviewer:* How do you think that impacts the way they react to it now?

*Josef:* I mean it's just the sense again of things were taken away from them. And you know, I think there's still somewhere deep down a hope or a wish that they could get it back, not at someone else's expense but because it's theirs.

For Josef, and the other second generation Palestinians, this is a key distinction between him and his parents. The United States is the only home he knows, and this wish to

return does not exist for him in the same way or to the same extent. As part of this desire to return, the first generation also maintains more of their traditional cultural practices, such as language, dress, and lifestyle customs. These types of discrepancies in assimilation will be explored in Chapter Four, when experiences with the host country are discussed.

Asim, the forty-three year old entrepreneur, linked his Palestinian identity to his childhood experiences as a refugee in Kuwait. This was another unique characteristic of some Palestinian members of both generations—they or their families did not migrate to the United States directly after leaving Palestine, but instead fled to nearby Arab countries and lived a difficult life as refugees. In most cases, the children of these Palestinian refugees in the Middle East were only allowed to remain in the country past age eighteen if they secured a job, which was very difficult to do, and so most of them had no option but to leave their families and emigrate. Asim sees Palestine as his homeland and related being there and seeing what his family had lost to feeling citizenless and attached to the conflict there.

I've been there before and I was introduced to everything that is ours that we can't get to now. So therefore it feels like that's where I would be if it wasn't for Kuwait as an intermediate place, where you were nobody and you had nothing. So you always question—Dad, why can't we own a house, why can't we do this and that? Why couldn't I stay after high school and go to college? He's like, son, you can't, you have to be deported because you are not a citizen and you can't stay, that's just the law in this land. I was like, where else can we go and hopefully make a future? And everybody was at that time suggesting the United States, because you had some kind of freedom and human rights. So you could come and become a citizen, because as a Palestinian it was very important that you please, somebody give me a passport!

Asim visited Palestine a few times, but like the others has not been back in several years because of traveling obstacles. Like Josef, Asim perceives a divide in how

experiences with conflict there affect him versus his parents. They are very nostalgic for a remembered past that he lacks and, “when it’s occupation and you leave, it all becomes emotional ties...I gave them a \$300,000 home here, cars, everything. They still remember the damn little home in Palestine!” Concerning the experience of being forced out of your home at gunpoint, he said, “if you haven’t been in that, you will not feel the same way. You can’t even understand; come on, let’s be realistic!” It ties you to the conflict and the homeland forever.

Yasir, the forty-five year old worker in a family-owned restaurant, was born in Palestine but fled to Kuwait with his family when he was two years old. He views Palestine as his homeland because, “We had a land, we had a house, we had trees, and we have history there, so I would love to go back.” Due to traveling limitations, he has only been able to return once, at age seventeen. Like Asim, he sees living there as “very important in our religion” and he dreams “of my kids learning Arabic and living in a Muslim society” with its traditional cultural norms. Also like Asim, he experienced the life of a refugee in Kuwait, and says that during his seventeen years there “we were treated worse maybe than the Israelis treat the Palestinians there.” In accordance with my previous findings, Yasir described how his parents are more overcome by the conflict because they endured it, and because the United States is more his home than theirs.

And my parents going through that, I have a lot of sympathy. I love America; for me America’s my number one so far. I lived the most here, since nineteen, so I don’t know anything else. But I still have a lot of sympathy for back home. When I see my parents cry, when I see my grandparents, they remember and they show me pictures of my land—we still have land and we cannot sell it or get anything out of it.

While Ahmed, Josef, Asim, and Yasir had some actual experiences in the homeland on which they base their belief that their rights have been stolen from them, other members of the second generation I spoke with had only the words and stories of their parents to connect them to homeland conflict. Like Josef, the college-age women in the sample all described how as they are growing into adulthood and learning about the conflict in a diverse college setting, they are becoming more tied to it and to their Palestinian identity. Theoretically, this timeliness makes sense, as adolescence and early adulthood are prime stages for the transmission of political memories (Olick & Robbins 1998). It has been demonstrated that young men and women in modern societies seek to construct integrative narratives of the self in order to create a sense of purpose and solidarity in their lives (McAdams et al 1996, Schuman & Scott 1989). With newly acquired knowledge, alongside their parents' highly influential shared collective memories, these young members of the second generation are learning how to see themselves in light of their families' tribulations in a conflict-ridden society.

Naimah, who is currently in college, does not view Palestine as her homeland because she has spent all her life living in the United States and in Kuwait. Also, her father, like Asim and Yasir, was ejected from Palestine as a youth and grew up nationless and powerless in Kuwait. He identifies as Palestinian, "but he considers himself American because that's the only citizenship he has." This is one clear example of how power differentials—at both the individual and the state level—matter for how transnationals connect to both the home and host country, and also for how power inequalities shape self-identification (Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004). Unlike the extremely emotional and personalized testimonials of the other Palestinian Americans,

Naimah described her connections in more detached terms. She mentioned how she has heard that her grandfather was falsely accused and jailed at some point by the Israelis, leaving her grandmother to care for all the children on her own. When asked if there are any Palestinian issues that are personally important to her, she said, “Well, I’ve always been kind of apathetic to politics, but when it comes to human rights issues it kind of hits me strong when I hear about how the Palestinians are treated and what happened to them.” In her stories, Naimah disassociated herself from homeland and familial hardships, as opposed to the others’ stories, where intimate details and emotional connections to the conflict were expressed. Her accounts help demonstrate how those who have never been inside the conflict cannot fully relate to the psychological and tumultuous impact it has on the self.

“Adara” is also a college student and lives at home.<sup>29</sup> She spent five years of her youth living in Kuwait. Like Naimah, Adara’s stories about homeland conflict were less descriptive and emotionally-laden than those told by Palestinian Americans who have directly suffered through the conflict there.

I guess I can relate to everything that’s going on there just because, like I said, family is over there and then people who have families over there... All my friends go back every summer, and they tell stories about people getting shot in the streets and how many funerals they go to, and there’s just funeral processions that go down the streets every day.

“Hana” is a college senior who did not embrace her Palestinian heritage in the past. But like Josef and many others, she saw her identity shift as she began to learn about and identify with this side of her family more. This happened after she entered the

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<sup>29</sup> Adara, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, March 24, 2007.

university setting and an adult stage in her life.<sup>30</sup> As she put it, “I think as I’ve grown up and I’ve become more educated and more informed, the fact that I’m a Palestinian American, and not just an American, has become more important to me.” She connected her feelings about homeland conflict to the experiences her father had there, and noted that, “he gets very angry, and it’s frustration too.” She said that because he directly experienced the conflict, he reacts more and sees more divisions between Jews and Arabs than she does.

For me, it hits me but it’s not as much of a physical reaction. It’s more I am trying to digest everything. For him, because he has so many memories and connections to that area that when he sees a picture of a tank rolling over something, or the wall being built, there’s like a fire inside of him that just sparks. And I mean he gets angry sometimes. It’s much more of a real response from him and much more anger, whereas I try to look at it with an open mind and just digest it before really reacting.

Raya, the Muslim student who wears a Hijab, is very outspoken about her Palestinian identity and about the conflict. For her, “the biggest thing is just communication with people who are Israeli or sympathize with Israel...I think it’s just building a bridge between two groups that are pretty much the same.” Her stories were also less specific and internalized than those given by people who have been to Palestine. For example, when asked if there are homeland issues that are important to her other than the conflict, she responded, “I think the quality of life in Palestine. Just from hearing about the kind of poverty that’s there, and the children that are orphaned—that’s really eye-opening because I don’t think I realized how many orphans there were over there.” Raya made a very important point about how being Palestinian means that one’s life will always be affected by the conflict.

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<sup>30</sup> Hana, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, March 23, 2007.

...I think to a certain extent, for a lot of us Palestinian kids, we're born with...you know how when you're a kid you're really innocent and you can live in a sugar-spun world for a little while? But for us, we're born without that. We're born and we see the raw reality of things, and some families more than others... So I was like, okay, well this is how life really is. Not everything is beautiful. Because even when you're explaining to people I'm Palestinian it's different, it's a loaded statement. You can't just say I'm Palestinian and not follow it up with something, because it's going to come with a question. And even when you're a kid, all the other kids whose parents were immigrants, they can turn to a map and be like, this is where I'm from, this is where I'm from... And I'm like, well where I'm from is supposed to be there, and it could be this outline right here but I can't tell you because it just says the word Israel on it. So it's kind of frustrating for us when we're growing up, and it makes us tend to really separate ourselves too, which is I think is kind of part of what our problem is—is that we just kind of say, we have the burden of the world on our shoulders and that's it, and we're different than everyone else, woe to me.

As has been demonstrated, the second generation differ from their parents in that they lack ties to the “old world” in the form of memories of conflict, and are thus less likely to see the foreign country as a point of reference in evaluating their social world (Zhou 1997). Raya's statement works well to point out that although second generation Palestinian Americans are not as emotionally attached to the conflict—because their stories are not personalized in the way they are for their parents—their lives are also deeply transformed by the violence back home.

As I turn to discussing generational differences in how Jewish Israeli Americans relate to and are shaped by experiences with homeland conflict, it is additionally important to acknowledge divergences by ethnic group. Throughout our discussion, Raya articulated how she sees many more similarities between Palestinians and Israelis than differences, and how, “separation is what makes the conflict...We look similar, we eat a lot of the same foods...” She also acknowledged that there are two main distinctions between Palestinian Americans and Jewish Israeli Americans that matter—

the central and overriding impact of the conflict on their homeland-based identities, and the lack of power and national status which keeps Palestinians tied to a land they still cannot claim. Shai, an Israeli activist whom I will speak more about later, illuminated the distinction between how the conflict influences one side versus the other with his notion of a “transport apartheid.”

Yeah, I think there is very significant asymmetry in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The most glaring difference is freedom of movement. Israelis are free to move around in their country. ...whereas West Bank and Gaza Palestinians are not able to move. They are trapped in their own communities. ...It's been so that people from the north don't marry people from the south anymore, despite it being less than an hour and a half straight drive away, because now it takes twelve hours to get from one place to another because of huge amounts of check points and barriers and roads you can't go on. The Israeli settlers in the West Bank have highways which Palestinians can't go on. The roads are completely separated, very much a transport apartheid.

### **2.2.3 First Generation Jewish Israeli Americans**

While Palestinian Americans' stories of encounters with homeland conflict focus mainly on the day-to-day difficulties of basic travel, Jewish Israeli Americans spoke of isolated, violent incidents, such as a bus bombing, or their experiences while doing mandatory military service as a young adult. Both groups used memories and stories as central evidence to explain how historical circumstances have harmed their people and made their own lives difficult. They use their stories about conflict to reinforce, for both the audience and themselves, their beliefs about what is right and wrong. As others have noted, accounts can serve a communicative and persuasive purpose as much as they reflect insights and explanations (Orbuch 1997). We can observe the multiple functions of stories, particularly in my later discussion of suicide bombing. Both Palestinian and



Jewish Israeli Americans show the expected trend of the first generation feeling more emotionally connected to the conflict, as it is a constitutive part of their own past. It is the perspectives on and types of conflict mentioned, and the degree of direct involvement that sets these two ethnic groups apart.

Liat, the graduate student who is pregnant and moved back to the United States less than a year ago, differentiated herself from second generation Israeli Americans. “I had a bomb go off near my home. I heard it, I heard the sirens, I called my grandma, I told her everyone’s alright...you can’t experience that vicariously...So your opinions and your ideas are going to be influenced by that.” Liat believes that those who have not lived in Israel, “whether they have Israeli parents or not, are more cognitive in their understanding of what’s going on.” This is because they lack the emotional, personal associations that she gained from experiencing it firsthand, and also because her immediate family is still there. She described how seeing her husband leave for the military reserves made the conflict very real and significant for her.

Liat told a detailed story about Arab or Palestinian gangs who came into Jewish areas and harassed people while they were having bonfires on the beach to celebrate a holiday. Liat herself was not directly involved and did not personally know anyone who was, but she feels that these violent groups, “make it unsafe for Jews and Israelis to travel within the country, and that’s not fair. They beat up Jews.” She sees their everyday actions and organizations as more threatening than the occasional terrorist acts because “it was organized; because they have like scarves and they have like symbols and it was organized...there’s funding going into this.” She did not draw upon any biographical stories of clashes with the Other when I asked if she had any experiences in Israel that

continue to influence her connections to the conflict today. When questioned about any hostile encounters she had while serving in the military, she said, “I didn’t have anything directly with the conflict. I was like an HR person, so I didn’t deal with that head-on.”

Rachel, who is working on a PhD and will be collecting data in Israel with her family next year, believes that she has developed strong defenses against reacting to violence there because she had to learn this survival tool early on, “when I was a child, having to just not think about it all the time.” Her stories of conflict were also distant ones; for example, she spoke about “what happened in Ramallah, with the lynch thing. That had a huge effect on me.” This incident took place about ten years earlier and involved Jewish soldiers getting lost and winding up in Ramallah, where they were attacked and killed. There is a famous image from this event, of a Palestinian showing the murdered men’s blood upon his hands.

Rachel mentioned how when she was young, “there were a lot of bus bombings, sometimes on buses we were always on, and some people that I knew were around or sometimes hurt.” Events like these made her scared to be in Israel. When asked about her military service, she told me, “I was actually in intelligence and it wasn’t the main thing we were worried about, you know, countries, it was not influential.”

Maytal, who is a post-doctoral student and a mother of four children, never realized that she was living a very stressful life in survival mode in Israel until she emigrated and experienced life in the United States. This has made it difficult for her to imagine returning to live there. Her firsthand narratives were centered on her life there just before she left, during the heightened conflict of the second Intifada.

When I sat in Jerusalem and did my PhD there, I could hear the sirens of each ambulance. Also 2002 was the worst year I think. So everyday you'd know where the bomb is. We really lived the stressed life, although living there it didn't seem like it, only when we came here. Before we came here I wanted to buy shoes for my daughter in the mall in Jerusalem. I remember rushing in, getting the shoes, running out. And I thought that's normal, I never had a problem with it. Only coming here and my daughter started going to the mall and we'd go for hours and never be scared. I thought, oh my god, we lived a very, very stressful life there, on a daily basis.

She also spoke to me about a nail bomb set off at a Hebrew University cafeteria in 2002—a building where her father worked, and this too made her afraid of life in Israel.<sup>31</sup>

Moshe described for me the direct violence he faced while serving in the Israeli military. “I was in Lebanon when in the army. I saw bombings and people die over there and one day I woke up and the room was still shaking, and you could still smell the smell of the weapons, and I was this close to being gone. And my friend who was with me got very crazy.” All four of these people mentioned how those who have not existed in a combative society cannot relate to it in the same way that they do. Maytal believes that they can choose to be less involved in the conflict, whereas she does not have that choice because, “you know, the conflict *is* me.” This sentiment was common among the first generation individuals I interviewed, and is a recurring theme of this dissertation.

Noam, the immunologist, explained how living through all the major wars of Israel's past, “plus the fact that I was in the military and all of that, I think that those things had an influence. Definitely they did in terms of the conflict.” He described, just like Ahmed did, how close together everything is in this small land. Being there and

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<sup>31</sup> I myself ate in this cafeteria many times while studying abroad in Jerusalem in 1998. I also knew a woman who was killed in that very explosion; she was there with me in 1998 and then returned to the same school years later for another academic program.

seeing the actual distances, “made it very visual,” and verified for him just why Israel needs to maintain its borders, for safety’s sake.

Tzipora, who spent her youth in Central and South America, as well as Israel, was very emotive when telling her personal stories about homeland conflict. She listed the cousins who were killed in a suicide bomb, and those killed during the Yom Kippur War, which she also lived through as a young girl. The conflict had profound repercussions for her, as her father worked for the Israeli government.

I was going to sleep dressed because I needed to run to the bomb shelters in the middle of the night. And my dad worked for the Israeli embassy...but still it wasn’t a political position. I couldn’t open a toy or a gift without taking it through x-rays because it could be a bomb. And I’m talking years ago, right? Forty years ago. Or I grew up knowing that I can’t pick up a pen from the floor because it could be a bomb. Up to this day, I don’t let my kids pick up everything from the floor because even though I don’t think I was traumatized then—it wasn’t scary, it was normal—but it has affected how I see it.

She is concerned about second generation Israeli Americans today because, “there is a young generation that we created, making them live very comfortable and not aware that they need to care—the need to be global citizens! And they have no need, they don’t see that.” In contrast, she described how being there, in the conflicted homeland, bonded her to worldwide conflict for life.

Tzipora also discussed a media-sensationalized and highly contentious issue—suicide bombing. Many of the Jewish Israeli Americans mentioned suicide bombing as a typical instance of conflict there, and all unequivocally expressed their condemnation of this form of assault. Several of the Palestinian American subjects also expressed their disapprobation of this kind of resistance, and labeled it as counteractive and pointless in the long run. They do, however, differ from the Jewish Israelis in that they are able to

see some of the underlying motivations and reasoning behind these desperate acts, whereas Jewish Israelis, like Tzipora, cannot and will not attempt to excuse or empathize with suicide bombers.

...When there is a suicide bomber, maybe I will judge as unacceptable, right? I think that there are many ways, financial ways, there are many ways of punishing a country but not killing people. And it will be different for them. They will say there is a reason for this person to kill themselves, to be a suicide bomber. I won't agree and that's why we differ, because I think we all have choices of doing bad things or good things, and we will decide. I think that there are many, even if you walk around the corner, who are underprivileged, but they won't decide to harm those who are not giving them a job and kill themselves. It's a choice. So whenever someone will justify violence, I will stop identifying with them.

Some of the Palestinian Americans in my sample expressed frustration with the bad reputation suicide bombers give the overwhelming majority of non-violent Palestinians. However, despite their denunciation of these acts of violence, they additionally acknowledged some reasons why they do it—namely a sense of futility and extreme despair at having lost everything, therefore having nothing left to lose by dying. Hassan articulated this perspective.

Technically, sociologists, technically they say when you put people in a situation like this, due to human nature it creates a complete outrageous behavior. I don't know, it's what we see when many of the Palestinian, when they go start becoming suicide bombers. It's the result of this inhumane treatment, so the people feel like they have nothing to lose. They are dead while they're living, you know, may as well be dead and kill as many people with them. It's desperation, exactly.

These divergent understandings of suicide bombings by ethnic group exemplify the importance of discussing identity in “collective” terms, as we are always influenced by the groups to which we belong, and thus our contrasting perspectives never exist entirely outside of the group's pull. Again, it is the primary agents of socialization, such as the family, through which we accrue these disparate mindsets. The mainstream

stereotype which links Palestinians to suicide bombing was vocalized by Moshe, who said, “Teaching kids to hate Jews, hate Israelis...they teach them at young ages how to go out and be a bomber. This is crazy! I mean, why? What good does it do?” Liat made similar generalized statements.

And today I feel like the Palestinian side is not making as much of an effort as it should, especially seeing that the generations that have grown up are still so anti-Semitic and are still educated by...so the subtraction—you have five Jews, you kill two, how many are left? That’s a subtraction lesson! And they have it in their education books.

These mass categorizations impact how Palestinians identify with their ethnicity, as it is known that ethnic and racial identities can be partially imposed upon the individual (Zimmermann et al 2007). In most cases, I found that Palestinian Americans are conscious of and concerned about this label, especially when disclosing their ethnicity to strangers.

In accordance with theoretical expectations, several first generation Jewish Israeli Americans recognized that their relationship with the conflict has fluctuated over time, based on their stage in life, and also on the current state of affairs in the homeland. Many people, including Gil, mentioned how during the rule of Yitzhak Rabin there was a different collective mindset. “In the mid 90s the Peace Process was going on, and I think that had a major influence. I think young people especially...were very hopeful towards the future.” Unfortunately, after the assassination of the Prime Minister, the Peace Process fell apart and the conflict worsened. Gil was fearful during this change.

Once terrorism started, it felt more like a real danger because I wasn’t exposed to war really before that, actively. But then once terrorism started, then you couldn’t really be detached from it anymore, just live your own life. I know it influenced how I feel...I still believe in peace, I maybe just didn’t think it was as simple as before.

I discovered an interesting ethnic group distinction involving homeland-based experiences with the Other and the conflict. While Gil, Efrat, and several other Jewish Israelis mentioned to me that they had very little direct interaction and contact with Palestinians, as they lived in predominantly Jewish communities, the Palestinians I spoke with had constant and mostly negative encounters with Israelis. The Israelis they knew were border patrolmen who interrogated them, or soldiers who entered their villages and assumed total authority and control. According to the conflict theory, peaceful, everyday encounters with the Other facilitate coexistence and resolution of conflict, whereas limited and negative interactions exacerbate it (Memmi 1965, Simmel 1955). As I will discuss in Chapter Four, for many of the first generation members of both groups, it was not until they immigrated to the United States that they first experienced positive exchanges and relationships with members of the other ethnic group.

There were a few exceptions to this pattern. One is Rachel, who asserted it is important to acknowledge that the conflict is predominantly at the group level, and not at the personal level. "I mean, I worked with them in the Israeli television in Arabic, so there were a lot of Palestinians working there, and there were very good relations, I think. On the day-to-day basis everything felt friendly and natural...So yeah, I think it's not the one-on-one." Ofer grew up less than half a mile from the Lebanese border. His immediate encounters with Arabs throughout his youth greatly influenced his understanding of the conflict, again supporting conflict theory claims about the positive functions of increased interaction (Memmi 1965, Simmel 1955).

I've been in Lebanon during the war before, so I saw Lebanon and I saw Lebanese. I have Palestinian friends that I worked with before, Arab Israelis. I

left during the first Intifada and I have many Palestinian friends. I used to speak some Arabic but I lost it. But these people that live maybe ten miles from where I grew up, they didn't want to have anything to do with this conflict. They just want to have their own lives. They want to earn a decent living. They have houses, they have families, and they want it to be quiet.

Ofer continues to be influenced by these initial exchanges; this is demonstrated by his ongoing participation in an inter-ethnic Middle Eastern peace organization called "Chefs for Peace."<sup>32</sup>

#### **2.2.4 Second Generation Jewish Israeli Americans**

Leah, the medical school student, believes that there are several types of group-level conflicts occurring simultaneously in Israel—from the Arab-Israeli to the Sephardi-Ashkenzi, and most important to her, the orthodox-secular divide. She believes that, "a lot of other conflicts in Israeli society are overlooked because of that one [Arab-Israeli], because when you're at war, you can't really focus on the economic and social issues in your country." She remembers traveling to Israel several times in her youth with her parents. Leah's following insights support the theorized immense influence parents have on children's understandings of conflict.

Probably my reactions to things are reflecting how my parents react to them, just because I grew up with them. So I think their perspective, since we go to Israel so much and there's always conflict, was you just, [you] can't let it affect your plans. I mean obviously you're not going to travel in a war-torn area, but there were lots of times that we went that there was active conflict going on.

When asked if there were any experiences she had there that stand out as significant for how she relates to the conflict, she said there were none.

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<sup>32</sup> Chefs for Peace is a Triangle organization comprised of restaurateur chefs and club owners from around the Mediterranean. They organize dinners together that benefit charities working for peace. They also strive to promote peace by demonstrating that Israelis, Palestinians, Lebanese, Jordanians, and Moroccans can successfully coexist and work together.



Like Leah, Dalia, who is currently an undergraduate in college, also traveled to Israel frequently with her parents throughout her youth, and she too did not share any personal stories of conflict experienced there. She compared herself to her mother, describing her as “a lot more suspicious and wary” due to her past in Israel, having lived through the '67 War. Dalia illustrated this point with an example. “One time there was like a backpack sitting somewhere and somebody had left for like just a few minutes...and she was like, who left that there and why is it there? And I was like, Mom, it’s just a book bag, and she was like, yeah, but you never know what could be in it.” Her mother is also much more inflexible and intense in her feelings about how the conflict should be resolved—“she’s like just get out, leave us alone.” Dalia maintains that experiencing direct conflict causes a person to feel much more influenced by it overall, and also acknowledged that her mother’s viewpoints have shaped her own.

Zev, who has lived in Spain, France, Israel, and now the United States for college, also agrees that living in the homeland makes all the difference in how you view the conflict and your own identity. “And it’s the sort of thing that you just sort of grow to—once you live in Israel you feel like this is your country and that’s it. Because before I went to Israel I wasn’t necessarily Israeli. I mean I was Israeli by the fact that my mom was Israeli, but it’s different.” He explained why he does not see the dispute with the Palestinians as a conflict, although he does see the recent war with Lebanon as one.

I think that the fact that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been happening for such a long time, it’s no longer a conflict for me anymore. I think the Lebanese with the Hezbollah was more of a conflict...and Palestine it’s not really a war it’s just war on terror, which is completely different. Especially because it’s just a different style of fighting—it’s more preventative then it is trying to attack someone, which is what we did before the Hezbollah because we were forced to. But against the Palestinian terrorists, the suicide bombers, I mean we’re pretty

much trying to prevent them from coming into the central territory rather than trying to attack them when they do something, although we do that as well in order to prevent... I mean it's really just messed up...

Zev's father served in the military for his entire career, including during the '67 War. He assesses the conflict from a military perspective, focusing on what he thinks are the best actions for the army to take. This predisposition to see Israel through a military lens has clearly been absorbed by Zev, as everything he discussed in relation to the conflict was linked to Israeli Defense Force (IDF) decisions. He voluntarily served in the army in 2006. "Well, I mean when I support the conflict, like in the war in Lebanon, I feel like I have to do something to support it really. I can't just sit around and just look at it happening, and that's why I went to Israel this past summer." All of his Israeli friends were enlisted at the time, as every Israeli citizen must serve in the army for at least two years after high school, and he felt he had to share this experience with them. Zev did not recall ever having immediate experiences with violent conflict there, even during his military service.

Zev, like Tzipora and many other Jewish Israelis I interviewed, cannot relate at all to the actions of suicide bombers, and thinks it is because of them that the conflict with the Palestinians is never-ending.

How can we end it? The wall is the only way to prevent more suicide bombings. They are just going to have a wall and you're going to have suicide bombers on the other side just packing up. Just a lot more suicide bombers who want to get in, but there's the wall that's blocking it. But that's not going to change anything, the hatred is still there. You take away the wall and there's still going to be suicide bombers going in with bigger numbers. It's actually maybe a better thing that we're shooting them now because then there aren't that many. If we take away the wall then they're just all going to go right in.

As opposed to many of the Palestinian Americans, who disapprove of this tactic but nevertheless see the humanity and suffering behind it, Zev clearly views suicide bombers in a more abstract, detached way and his focus is on how to stop them, whether with walls or guns.

David, the thirty-four year old dentist, also expressed his opinion that erecting a wall is a necessary tactic for keeping suicide bombers from infiltrating Israel. He admitted that the conflict foments his animosity towards the Palestinians, and he perceives of significant group-level divides.

I think Israelis are more of a negotiating group, and the Palestinians are more under the impression that they have to use forceful or tactical suicide, murder kind of things to get their point across. I mean, I'd rather see people sitting at a table for a year or two, working things out on paper, giving maybe land here and land there, instead of...they just feel they have to do everything with violence. It's just the wrong way they're going about it, totally.

David asserted that the majority of Palestinians “are for that type of insurgence,” and those who do not endorse it are not speaking out against it, as they should. Like other second generation Jewish Israeli Americans I interviewed, David went to Israel with his family many times in his youth, and he also did not recount any stories of experiencing direct conflict.

As I mentioned before, Sasha, who works in the high tech industry, did not recall enduring or even thinking about immediate conflict while she lived in Israel as a teenager. In contrast to those Jewish Israelis I mentioned, who transcended the threat of violence in Israel and maintained a normal life there, Sasha finds it, “kind of frightening how living there you get very used to it, like bus bombs going off and stuff like that.” Her stories of conflict were impersonal, and she indicated her disparagement of “the

Palestinian side, because you hear about a lot more terrorism rather than military warfare, I guess. You know, attacking civilians doesn't seem cool to me." Similar to Dalia's discussion of her mother, Sasha said that, "because she's a first generation Israeli, she definitely has a lot stronger feelings about things than I do...She's very pro-Israel and...most definitely biased against Palestinians and Arabs in general."

Shai is distinct among the other second generation Jewish Israelis because he spends every summer visiting his parents in Israel proper and also promotes conflict resolution from within the West Bank. He sees himself as "having moved from a non-Zionist to an 'anti-Zionist.' I see myself, my identity, as opposed to the fundamental basis of the Israeli state." His connection to the conflict was largely shaped by his father. "My dad was an activist and I remember going to demonstrations when I was seven years old, shouting 'two states for two peoples!'"

Shai's descriptions about his experiences with conflict in Israel and the occupied territories were very direct and poignant. He referred to a time when he was participating in a demonstration in the West Bank, and instead of using the regular stun guns and tear gas, the Israeli army "opened fire with rubber-coated lead bullets within ten seconds of us arriving at the army line. An acquaintance of mine was shot with a rubber bullet in the head from a distance of 10 meters [about 33 feet] away and had to have part of his brain removed." He discussed many other engaging and illuminating memories, mostly about his experiences over the past couple of years, during our conversation.

I was in Haifa for part of the time and I was in the West Bank for a lot of the time as well. So I was going from having missiles raining down on my hometown, to West Bank demonstrations which were very, very pro-Hezbollah, and to anti-war demonstrations in Tel Aviv which tried to balance the two. And so I also had

cousins up in the north very much near the border; two of my cousins were in the army station near the border. So yeah, I was very much involved in that conflict.

...The West Bank actually was extremely pro-Hezbollah. You had Hezbollah fighting songs in every shop corner, there were Hezbollah flags everywhere, pictures of Hassan Nasrallah everywhere. And I participated in demonstrations which were um...strongly against the Israeli reaction and in many cases pretty pro-Hezbollah. I was extremely uncomfortable in these demonstrations. It was difficult being in Ramallah with Palestinians waving Hezbollah flags, coming from Haifa.

By the time we got to Israel and I had met my cousins and they invited me to go up north, and the next day was the first serious missile attack on Haifa and there were eight people killed in a railway station which is not particularly far from my house.

Another unique quality of Shai is that he has experienced immediate conflict within both ethnic group contexts—he has been a victim on both sides. He has many friends and cousins currently serving in the Israeli military, and many other friends living in the occupied territories. He has had close contact and relationships with members of both camps involved in the conflict, and thus he can more clearly see the complexities and gray areas involved. Shai is very much influenced by the conflict. He has chosen to dedicate much of his life to this cause, and so his connections to it are atypical; however, his insights are helpful for gaining a deeper appreciation of this complicated situation.

When Shai first began his volunteerism in the occupied territories, he realized how unaware he was of what real life on the inside was like.

I came for the first ten days into a village which just had...all their water sources were cut off; they were cut off from agricultural land. I was one of the first Israelis to be there since the beginning of Intifada and that was extremely difficult. I ended up becoming good friends with a guy whose brother was a suicide bomber. And I had no idea about his history when he invited me to his house, had dinner, there was a picture of his brother and we got into a conversation and it turned out that his brother was killed on his way to blow himself up in Haifa. ...The army caught him and he was killed on the way. And my first reaction was stunned silence but then I [realized] this person is someone

I've just become friends with over the last week, and what his brother did or didn't do is not linked to whether he has the right to live an adequate life, whether he has a right to be able to feed his children. And so my awareness very much changed. That was one of the defining moments but there have been many others since.

Shai transitioned from feeling totally disconnected from and revolted by suicide bombings to aligning himself more with those like Josef, who see the sense of futility behind these terrorist acts. In this one example we can witness two important themes. The first is that collective meanings and memories are indeed drastically selective and subjective (Yerushalmi 1982). Second, we can see how interfacing with the Other involved in a conflict reduces the sense of separation and opposition (Memmi 1965, Simmel 1955).

Like Raya and Gameel, Shai believes that bridging the gap between Palestinians and Israelis is the only way to end the conflict. He thus condemned the building of walls between Israel and Palestine. One powerful story he recalled was about when he was volunteering in Nablus during a military invasion, and the Palestinian children were yelling at him and his companion and chasing them. They stopped and explained to them why they were there. The next day, ten times more children flocked to them and "we were the most popular kids in town." This instance showed Shai how easily perceptions can be altered and stereotypes overcome through contact, especially with the youth.

### ***2.3 Conclusions***

As we have seen through the words of respondents, for Palestinian Americans, past experiences with homeland conflict were more constant and involved more of the day-to-day hassles and dangers of trying to function and maintain normality in a

society pervaded by conflict. In comparison, for the Jewish Israelis there were more sporadic peaks of violence during heightened clashes with the Palestinians, and their stories included less direct involvement in actual conflict. These patterns provide additional support for the claim that while conflict was always a part of daily homeland life for Palestinians, it was only one critical area of concern for the Jewish Israeli Americans who lived in Israel.

The first generations' sharing of stories about personally-experienced suffering had a discernible impact on their children. This was particularly visible in second generation Palestinians' emotional depictions of shared family memories. There were notably less personalized stories about homeland conflict told by the second generation Jewish Israelis that I interviewed.

### **3. Differences in Homeland Conflict Information Sources by Generation and Ethnic Group**

In Chapter Two I discussed perceptions of conflict from a more historical perspective, looking at how narratives and collective memories about homeland conflict experienced in the past continue to shape the identities of immigrants and their children. The conclusion, relying upon key insights from the fields of social memory theory and narratives/storytelling methods, was that these recalled experiences do have a continuous and significant impact on identity. They primarily affect the first generation, but also influence the second generation through the intergenerational sharing of memories and stories. In this chapter, I continue my exploration of how distant conflict shapes identity. Sources of information about the ongoing homeland conflict naturally follows my previous discussion of historical conflict as an imperative area to examine. This is the main theme of this chapter, which compares access to and use of information on the current conflict, and the resulting effect it has on the identities of first and second generation Jewish Israeli and Palestinian Americans.

Extensive research has demonstrated that migrant families focus part of their new lives on the country of origin—they maintain social ties across borders, travel back and forth, and discuss nationally-related politics (Haller & Landolt 2005, 1183, Zhou 1997). The main sources used by respondents to get up-to-date information were, as I anticipated, transnational social networks and media coverage. Personal connections to people still living in the homeland are primary or informal agents of socialization, which in this case influence identities related to perceptions of conflict (Phelan, Link, Stueve &



Moore 1995). They are obviously potentially valuable informants on the conflict, as they are often directly involved and have access to local, more detailed information on it.

Homeland conflict is one topic that serves to reinforce the linkages between the subjects and their friends and family back home (Haller & Landolt 2005). Mass media and formal ethnic group organizations are secondary socializing agents, and they can help influence and inform the diaspora about the conflict on a more regular and consistent basis (Hagen and Wasko 2000, Livingstone 1998).

As I have previously discussed, the forces of globalization and modernization have abridged time and space expansion, via global travel, cyber-networks, and international media coverage. The resulting pan-ethnic movements and transnational identities work to maintain Jewish Israeli and Palestinian diasporic connections to homeland conflict. They also assist me in critically responding to Tilly's (2002) claim that identity is primarily shaped by direct conflict, as I demonstrate that distant conflict matters as well. Again, I found that transnational personal networks and accessible international media coverage are the main mechanisms bridging the distance between immigrants in the United States and the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

As for generational differences in information usage, I originally expected that first generation members of both populations would have more dense and extensive social networks in Israel/Palestine, as they established ties to family and friends while living there. Of course, the strength and longevity of these connections depends on individual characteristics, such as length of time lived in the homeland and efforts to maintain relationships post-migration. For the second generation, I speculated that they would have less access to personal sources of information in the homeland, as they

spent limited to no time there and most likely retain relations with friends and family there through their parents. In lieu of having direct contacts, I assumed that the second generation would rely more so on their parents and mainstream media sources for information. I also anticipated that they would, as a whole, be informed about conflict less often and less intensively than their parents.

In the literature on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is often discussed how the media heavily emphasize and amplify the violent conflict there, and it is known that media representations do have an impact on the attitudes of those with no contrasting experiences (Ackerman 2001, Gandy Jr. 2001, Gilens 1999, Kamalipour 1997, Weaver 1996). The media have played an important role in creating an international image of Israel and Palestine as a place where one's life is in constant jeopardy (Binder 1993, Jacobs 1996). Based on my previous assumptions, I expected that the conflict would be the overriding central issue and concern of the second generation, who have been influenced by this media coverage. As for the first generation, with their direct homeland experiences, I hypothesized that they would regard a multitude of events back home as important (such as political divisions, economic concerns, and environmental issues) besides the significant Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to a greater extent than their children. I did find consistent support for my expectations, as I will demonstrate with quotes from my interviews; however, the processes involved proved to be much more complex and varied than I had originally anticipated.

First, in accordance with Chapter Two, although I did discover through my interviews that media portrayals had a greater impact on the second generation than the first, it was the memories, accounts, and narratives of their parents that mainly shaped

how they are affected by homeland conflict. The way that the first generation discussed and explained the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during their children's upbringing proved to be the basis for how the second generation understood and interpreted the current conflict as adults.

Second, my assumption about differences in information source usage and the resulting emphasis placed on the conflict was not confirmed in the ways that I expected—by generation—but rather varied by ethnic group. Again, in accordance with segmented assimilation theory, the socialization of children by their parents was the most significant influence on the identities of the second generation, more so than violent depictions in the media. The narratives and memories shared within the family were the main mechanism shaping conceptualizations of conflict. As I will show, Jewish Israeli Americans of both generations regularly discussed how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was just one important factor in the homeland. As for Palestinian Americans of both generations, parents' personal stories about homeland conflict mattered most for their children's understandings; however, for this group, conflict was an all-consuming concern.

Reflecting the subjects' words and the conclusions of the second chapter, Palestinians' homeland lives were always permeated by conflict, as it encroached upon their day-to-day reality—from delays and harassment in traveling to their lack of rights and autonomy. It continued to affect Palestinians after they emigrated, as they faced difficulties in re-entering the homeland. This ethnic group-level difference demonstrates the multiplicity involved in transnationalism and identity, which vary due to factors such as the characteristics of the migrant population and the impact of the state and politics.

As I discuss throughout the dissertation, the interactions between migrants and both the host and home country influence the diverse impact that conflict has on identity.

For my Palestinian subjects, homeland conflict may not be as consistently violent as the media portray it, but the centrality of the conflict and its domination over all other areas of social concern distinguishes their conceptions of conflict from those of the Jewish Israeli Americans. In this chapter, I use interview data to demonstrate these pertinent differences by ethnic group, and also to detail some of the generational discrepancies in how homeland conflict information is accessed and imbibed.

### ***3.1 First Generation Palestinian Americans***

An important observed pattern among the Palestinian subjects was the intense impact hearing about current homeland conflict had on them. Emotionally-evocative issues are known to have the greatest influence on identity, and this was clearly the case for the first generation Palestinian Americans. For example, when asked about how learning about an episode of conflict affects him, Mansur had the following to say.

It varies. Sometimes I live with pain and I know it affects my health, and so I internalize it. So that occasionally happens. Sometimes I'm not even willing to read anything about it. I don't want to hear the news. I don't want to read the news... So sometimes I try to sort of shrink and put myself in this little circle. I don't want to know...there's nothing I can do about it...and then sometimes...and it is like a struggle; it's an internal struggle. And then in a few days I sort of wake up and say I wanted to know. And then I start learning, and it sort of cycles.

The idea of Palestine as a burden was mentioned before by Mansur, in the previous chapter. Here he talks about it again, in terms of being informed about the ongoing conflict.

And I know it's a burden. It creates actually a conflict between you and the country you love...So either you jump in it and you become close to the Palestinians...or you build a boundary so you don't want to know, you don't want to be involved.

Safia also discussed this habit of wanting and needing to know, followed by being unable to handle knowing about the constant, never-ending hardships experienced by people in a land where she was raised. "I have Al Jazeera on and off. I get it then I get so depressed that I can't even function. So we cancel it, then we get it again, and then for a few months I get so depressed, and then I cancel it. It's on and off."

Another statement I frequently heard from the first generation was that over time, as things have not improved in Palestine but have even worsened, they have lost hope and have accordingly become less involved in or aware of the conflict. This pattern supports the notion that identity is dynamic across the lifecourse, depending on personal and public circumstances. Mansur said, "...I do believe that this feeling started about seven, eight years ago...I think with the second Bush administration I really started to believe that there is no political solution to this problem. And I just reached a point where I just lost hope in a way."

Another theme supporting the claim that identity changes over the lifecourse was discussed back in Chapter Two. Several participants acknowledged that their identification with and understandings of the conflict became more focused and developed as they aged and became more invested in and educated about the issue. As for how accessing information plays a part in this, Umar claimed, "As we grow older, we get more educated and we get more in contact, and we get more realization of the facts and the truths, or close enough anyways."

Active participation in pan-ethnic organizations supporting the Palestinian cause was common among first generation Palestinians. It was also mentioned as a popular alternative to social networks and media for gathering information on homeland conflict. The level of activity in these associations proved to vary across the lifecourse, depending on factors such as the intensity of the conflict and available free time. Gameel mentioned his membership in a few popular organizations, including the Arab American Institute—which keeps him informed about Palestine-related discussions and actions by the American government—and the more active Arab American Anti-Discrimination committee. According to the conflict theory, organizational strength is augmented by the presence of conflict, and in turn, the strength of the organization is linked to the success of a group in mobilizing on behalf of its constituents. Extreme and important differences exist in the relative power of Palestinian American and Jewish Israeli American organizations, due to vast disparities in support by the American government and in lobbying strength. This in turn has a strong influence on identity, and also affects the rights and livelihood of individuals living in both the homeland and the diaspora. I will discuss these major discrepancies by ethnic group in Chapter Four.

Safia and Hassan, as well as several other subjects, have been involved in organizations working towards resolving the conflict through inter-ethnic collaboration; for example, Tikkun and Jews for Peace. Safia has even started her own group, which includes herself and two other mothers who practice Judaism and Christianity respectively, and together they publicly speak about the conflict and work towards peace.

As to what makes knowing about the conflict so difficult for Palestinian Americans to bare, it is mainly tied to having intimate connections to family and friends

in Palestine—people who they know are suffering but they are unable to help. Some people, like Hassan, even retain land there which they try to visit often and consider a second home. Unfortunately, the Gaza closure happening at the time of our interview had been keeping Hassan from his annual visit for some time. Mansur has brothers and sisters in Palestine, as well as their children and his uncles and aunts. He comes from a small village where everyone knows each other, so he keeps informed about and bound to the entire town.

I feel personally responsible for doing my best to help the Palestinians because it's my family, it's my people. Yes, I am an American citizen, but the American way is to help those who need... My brother is there and suddenly he's the school principal and he could not collect his salary, so he's hungry, his family is hungry. So this is a moral responsibility.

Mansur simultaneously identifies with his home and host countries, and feels attached to both. This supports Zimmermann et al's (2007) claim that attachments to host- versus home-land are not mutually exclusive, but can overlap and coexist. Mansur drew a distinction between himself and others, such as the second generation, who can just sit back and not want to know what is happening in Palestine. Meanwhile, he cannot ever escape needing to know about the conflict because of his roots and ties to the land. He believes that those less directly connected to the conflict can live in more peace and with more ease than he can even imagine.

The conflict consumes the daily life of Safia. "I mean, the truth is that it's always there. It never leaves. My ears are tuned to what's being said about the conflict; it never goes away." Safia frequently uses people living in Palestine to get information on the state of the conflict; she is informed by her family connections there on a daily basis, mostly about personal encounters with conflict.

My sister is married to a Palestinian whose family is there and he goes frequently, and they are on the phone all the time because his family's there. So then she'll say, they took the land that's on this mountain today, or his sister cannot live in Jerusalem. I mean she just tells me some stories that sound bizarre. She does not have Jerusalem ID, so she cannot ride in a car with [her husband]. She has to walk her daughter to school but if she ever gets caught in a car she gets fined a thousand dollars. So I hear those firsthand stories from relatives that are in contact.

Testimonials about immediate experiences with conflict and hardship work to evoke emotional reactions and a deeper sense of connection, not just for the general audience, but especially for those who are already invested in the cause.

Gameel, like Safia, believes that having roots in Palestine permanently binds you to the conflict and to being informed about it. "I think that being a Palestinian or a Palestinian American...you can't help but have this...I mean this is part of who you become—is what's going on over there. So you are listening to the news, you are trying to work towards doing something that will get people to hear what's going on."

While members of the first generation rely more often on personal homeland sources of information than do their children, they also frequently use international media sources. The most prominent resource was mentioned by almost every first generation Palestinian American—Al Jazeera.<sup>1</sup> It is common for Palestinian Americans to get satellite television so that they can watch this main Arab news station based out of Qatar. Besides the coverage concentrating more on relevant issues to them and being given in their native language, first generation Palestinian Americans prefer Al Jazeera because

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<sup>1</sup> Officially, Al Jazeera is considered to be more objective than other Middle Eastern news sources, as it is an independent station that lacks constraints by local regimes; however, since it receives government loans, in reality this channel is partially influenced by the local agenda of Qatari leadership (Sakr 1999).



they believe that the American media are biased against their people and thus their coverage of the conflict is inaccurate.

Palestinian Americans also frequently asserted that American media are frivolous and not comprehensive, and “it just seems more like it’s for entertainment than it is for getting news across,” as Gameel put it. And Mansur said, “I don’t really believe the media is fair [here]. I don’t think the media is telling the truth; that’s why I try to get my sources from another source—Al Jazeera.” Safia has similar views and noted, “I feel like it’s my mission to educate people, because I believe it’s a very distorted picture that they get of who we are. They think of us as very, very violent, vicious people that just want to kill all Jews...” And Hassan said that all people hear in the news, which they derive their stereotypes from, is “Palestinian bombing, the suicide, mostly the killings of the Israeli children, you know... They just want to kill all Jews. And the Jews are protecting themselves... [The U.S. media], it’s unbalanced. You know, it’s not like they’re fair when it comes to the Palestinian issue.” Umar believes that the mass media are biased, inaccurate, and not to be trusted. “I think the media is a bunch of bologna, personally. Again, it’s who controls that media and what picture do they want you to know or see.”

Gameel discussed inaccurate representations by the media in greater detail:

The Palestinian story is not something that gets aired very often, and when it does it appears to be very skewed. The media, in my opinion, tends to be...when people make fanatical statements they report that a lot, but when people come and speak in measured tones you never hear it.

He went on to give examples of this claim—the unreported peace talks by the King of Jordan versus the well-publicized Iranian president’s rant against Jews—and stressed that in the face of this media discrimination against Arabs, it is important for Palestinians to

educate Americans. “A lot of other people sadly follow whatever the media tells them, so it becomes this everybody-in-that-group-is-this-way.”

Hassan was once asked to be a guest on a local television news program and speak about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He felt discriminated against as the reporter tilted the conversation toward mass generalizations of Palestinians as supporters of suicide bombing.

And he was so quick. I didn't like their questions. I mean, they asked me...I was there to talk about the conflict, but all of the sudden he's asking me, do you approve of suicide bombings? I mean, what am I, a suicide bomber? But I was on live television, so I tried to conduct myself, trying to answer questions that he's not asking. But then, after the show I really protested. I told him, you're stereotyping, and for a journalist like yourself...

Later, the same journalist apologized and gave him a more open platform to debate the issue with a prominent Jew in the community. He noted that while that Jewish man was in a large conference room, he was placed at an anchor desk, which he felt spoke volumes as to their respective status in American society.

It is widely believed that there is a bias toward representing the Arab world as violent in popular culture and mainstream media, and that media exaggerations influence the opinions of those with no direct or countering experience (Don-Yehiya 1998, Gilens 1999, Reich 1991, Said 1979, Shain 1996). Stories are social products, and their power and presumed validity is influenced by the media. What mainstream media show (or do not show) matters—in this case the message is one of all-encompassing violence which, in the opinions of Palestinian Americans I spoke with, portrays Arabs as the aggressors. This in turn strengthens their ethnic identities, as they feel obligated to make an effort to tell the public that they are not supporters of violence.

Segmented assimilation theory accounts for the effect that racial discrimination has on identity, noting how the associated negative status works to create both daily and lifelong experiences with exclusion (Haller & Landolt 2005, Zhou 1997). The recipients of media and public discrimination also feel personally attacked in their country and that they have to work hard to overcome stereotypes. This is an integral issue I will discuss further in Chapter Four, which deals with experiences in the host country.

Interestingly, several Palestinian Americans I spoke with mentioned that they seek out both American and even Israeli media sources, not to get their main information, but to see how other potentially biased sides frame the conflict. Umar told me about how he listens to AM radio station programs, such as Rush Limbaugh's.

They're always one-sided. I listen to them not because I disagree or agree; I listen just to hear what people say. I've called one time, I've called twice and three and four times. And they screened my phone call and when they hear what I want to say they'll put me on hold. One time they put me on hold for forty-five minutes and another time they put me on hold for an hour and a half. I forgot that I was on hold—I left the house! And so is it biased? You're doggone right it's biased!

When asked which sources he relies on to find out about homeland conflict, Gameel said he mostly uses a wide variety of media—*Ha-Aretz*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *The Jordan Times*, BBC, NPR, Al-Jazeera's website, CNN, and *The Financial Times*. The only major news medium he avoids is Fox, which he says "just makes me too upset." This Fox media caveat was quite a common one among the Palestinians with whom I spoke. Gameel is deeply informed about the conflict and, while he does hear stories from people in Palestine, he relies on a wide variety of media sources to keep him up to date.

As for generational differences in media usage, Safia believes that the second generation, "probably rely more on local sources here, like the news. And most likely

they may not speak Arabic, so Al Jazeera won't be that useful to them." She also thinks that hearing about homeland conflict matters to them but, "it's a lot more painful when you are first generation and you've lived there." Mansur's response is in alignment with Safia's. He claimed that while his main source is an Arab one, his children are Americanized and access mainstream American sources, like Google news, even though they speak Arabic and could rely on the same resources as him. Studies have demonstrated that first generation immigrants watch far more television in Arabic than do their children (Sakr 1999). Although his children focus on Palestinian news less than him, Mansur noticed that they, "pay more attention...reading things related to Palestine more than if there is something on Thailand." These findings support theoretical developments on immigrant adaptation by Zhou (1997, 64) and Portes and Rumbaut (2005), who claim that because they lack the same meaningful ties to the homeland as their parents, second generation immigrants are less likely to consider it as a point of reference, and are instead prone to assess themselves by American standards.

Also reinforcing these previous theoretical claims—as well as my main conclusion that the second generation are predominantly informed and influenced by the accounts of their parents—are the words of Umar, who discussed his sons' information usage and identification with the conflict in Palestine.

So they don't know any difference. And now as they get older, like my son is graduating from high school tomorrow, what's he got on his mind? Nothing. He has lost nothing; he never lost his home. He hears of my stories...but he feels the pain that the Palestinians feel when he watches TV, I reckon, just like you would feel if you watched anybody getting killed or shot.

### ***3.2 Second Generation Palestinian Americans***

The second generation experience life in America differently than their parents, as they struggle to blend in while still incorporating the ethnic perspectives they have been taught by both their parents and the media. As I have already mentioned, the conflict narratives of their parents have the most significant impact on the second generation; however, the media coverage of the conflict also has a perceptible effect on them.

Raya thinks that the conflict is, “very ingrained into my identity and that’s why I am so politically active to a certain extent.” She feels as if she “was growing up in the Middle East, just because I went to private school for eight years, and it was a private Islamic school that’s up the road.” Today, most of her family lives on her street and she has a network of “about two hundred people in Raleigh that are related to me.”

According to the segmented assimilation theory, conformity to traditional ethnic values and behavioral expectations while in the diaspora requires strong familial integration into an ethnic community that encourages these standards and cultural retention (Haller & Landolt 2005; Zhou 1997, 82). This helps us understand why Raya and several other second generation Palestinians are so closely tied to the homeland and the conflict there, especially when compared to the second generation Jewish Israelis, as we will see later on in the chapter.

Not surprisingly, as Raya was raised with both a strong Palestinian and Muslim identity, she is highly knowledgeable about the ongoing conflict in Palestine. Her family in the United States talk to people in Palestine and pass on the information—this is her primary source of information—but she also reads *The New York Times* and Yahoo news,

as well as the homeland-based Al Jazeera channel, and *The Jerusalem Post* to get another perspective.

Naimah is more informed now than she was in the past, which she attributed to entering college. “I just feel a little more than I did before, just because I was so detached before. But now I’m actually like learning more, talking to more people.” Similarly, Raya told me that entering a diverse public school for the first time in her life upon starting high school changed her understanding of the conflict. She began to make concerted efforts to learn “both sides of the issue.”

And I tell my parents all the time that I really didn’t believe that a two-state solution was possible until I entered my world civilizations class in sophomore year in high school. And I was that kid—I would cross out the word Israel and write in Palestine and that’s it. And I would get into debates where it was me versus everyone else in that room. But then I started really understanding and seeing, and I was like, you know, really there’s innocent people on both sides and you can’t really categorize innocent people. And I just think with Palestinians and Israeli people it just cuts out the work to break things down into good and evil, and black and white.

Raya has since worked hard to learn more about the conflict, mainly through discussing the issue with various people in the United States who have different opinions. She considers the media coverage to be poor because it glosses over the conflict—“it just doesn’t have all the history in it,” and thinks it can be confusing to outsiders. She also believes that the American media portray Israelis in a more positive light than the Palestinians, but deems this tendency to be partly the fault of the Palestinians themselves, who do not lobby for their rights as much as the Israelis.

I feel like the Palestinians have had to fight more to be like, this is what’s really happening. I think to a certain extent though that it’s the fault of the Palestinian Americans, because we’re the ones who can influence the media and we can write letters to magazines. You know, I subscribe to *The Jerusalem Post*...and they were in an outrage over Jimmy Carter’s book and they were like, you need to send

letters. As Palestinians we don't try to change the bias, so I mean, if you don't try to change it then you deserve, I think, every bit of what happens to you.

Asim also sees the American media as one-sided and pro-Israel, and believes this bias has worsened since the events on September 11, 2001. I will discuss the impact of 9/11 on Palestinian and Jewish Israeli Americans in the next chapter, when I turn to host country experiences.

Naimah agrees that the media in the United States support Israel and represent Arabs as being prone to violence. She thinks that, "maybe [Arabs] are portrayed that way in the current media because of the Israel backing by the United States." Like others in his group, Josef also sees the mass media as biased.

Basically, the way the media coverage here is, and the lack of really fully adequate coverage. The stereotypes that have been created about Palestinians in the media, and in the general American perception. When you say "Palestinian" nowadays, most people think terrorist rather than thinking about a group of people or a people without a country.

Yasir shares Raya, Josef, and Naimah's opinions on both the media's bias and on the greater success of the Jewish American community in being heard, although he tended to rely on stereotypes in his discussion of this difference. "The media is controlled by many powerful Jewish people. The Israeli lobby, the Jewish lobby in the Whitehouse is very powerful. Money in this country talks."

*Yasir:* Every time one Jewish person dies, it's on the news. Our kids, they die left and right, and you don't hear about it in the media. It's pro-Jewish, pro-Israeli media. They are very powerful.

*Interviewer:* The media or the Jewish people?

*Yasir:* They are influenced by the Jewish lobby. Right? You said you won't be offended, right? I'm just telling you the way it is.

*Interviewer:* No, not at all. I want to know what you think.

Reflecting the sentiments of the first generation, Yasir also commented on media biases and skewed reporting, which encourage the classification of Palestinians as terrorists. The media often reinforce ethnic stereotypes, such as linking Arabs with violence, and thus make them appear as absolute truths.

It makes it to somebody who's not with our side, they listen and say, these Palestinians are thugs, killers, and the poor Jewish people they defend themselves. And this is the way it is. The guys with the tanks and M-16s and the guy with the handmade gun are equal? This guy's shooting with a little gun, and this guy hit him with the M-16s? Who's coming to whose house? Who is being mistreated? Who is suffering day and night? Some parts of Israel, most of Israel, they live like this—a very peaceful life, they don't know anything. But all Palestinians under occupation live horribly.

The central conclusion of my interviews—that conflict has a pervasive influence on Palestinian identity while it is but one important factor among many for Israelis—has been repeatedly confirmed in this dissertation. It seems that these divergent experiences with homeland conflict lead to differences in how salient conflict is for diasporic identity, not just for the first generation who endured conflict, but also for their children who are socialized through being told their stories about it.

Raya is a member of several Muslim, Arab, and even Jewish organizations on her campus. Asim, Burhan, and Yasir all prefer to avoid memberships in any organizations. Their only group-level connection to other Palestinians is through their religion, as they try to go to the mosque to pray at least once out of the five prayers a day. Yasir uses a wide range of media, including CNN, Arabic stations on television (Al Jazeera), and other sites on the internet. He likes to watch “CNN and Fox. I like to see what these right wings say, what hatred comes out of their mouths.” When asked if he ever uses personal connections in Palestine as sources of information, for example his mother or other first



generation Palestinian Americans, he said, “No, how are they going to know? If something happens, it’s in the news.” Asim and Ahmed’s main source of information is the BBC because, as Asim put it, “I find it the most medium. They’re not all Arabs, so they’re not Al Jazeera, and they’re not pro-American like Fox or CNN.” Secondly, he relies on emails from his cousins in Palestine to get more details on the day-to-day conflicts. Burhan, who is of the same age cohort as Asim and Yasir, made analogous comments when asked which sources he most often used.

Primarily Al Jazeera is the main channel that I watch. I always flip immediately, when I hear a report, I immediately flip over to CNN or Fox. I want to see from what angle they are reporting any story. When it comes to the Palestinian issue, it’s not reported unless it is a suicide attack or there’s a major military operation that’s going on. Day-to-day suffering of the people themselves are only reported by the Al Jazeera and documentary movies.

He went on to note that although he often uses media sources, he is a “believer in talking to other people—not officials—people,” to get the real story. Josef also made comparisons between American and European media coverage, acknowledging the tendency of American media to emphasize the violence for the sake of a more sensational story (Lee 2002).

And when you read the American newspapers they were talking about terrorists and riots and etcetera, and when you got *The Economist*, which is a British-based news magazine, it was peaceful demonstrations with firing upon in response to firing on return. So it was very, very different wording and that’s very frustrating when I see that distinction going on.

Adara not only believes that American media sources are biased, but, like Gameel, sees them as frivolous, almost a joke. “I’ll see CNN and they devoted more time to Anna Nicole Smith’s death than anything else, and meanwhile everything else that’s going on in the world just doesn’t get any attention.” She uses many sources of

information, including Al Jazeera, the BBC, and personal contacts her family has in Palestine. Hana also uses a variety of sources, including her parents, the BBC, CNN, and online posts and blogs, and thinks that she gets totally different stories from each. She too believes that American media are biased; this is why she varies her media usage. “So often the American stations have a very generic, one-sided more towards what the Israelis are doing right compared to what the Palestinians have done wrong, whereas BBC and stations like that are at least more balanced, somewhat.” Interestingly, Hana thinks that perhaps the bias against her people in the media actually fosters her and her father’s devotion to the cause. When asked how the conflict would influence her if the media favored Palestinians instead of Israelis, as she believes they do, she said the following:

Maybe, honestly, it might make me more regularly informed. It might make me more apathetic because like being home with my father when he sees the news, there’s so much more passion and emotion. Whereas if it’s all just positive for the Palestinian, then you’re still supportive but it doesn’t spark something inside of you as much.

Raya mentioned how she hardly ever talks to her relatives in Palestine for the following reasons:

I feel bad because I feel like there’s this abyss between me and my relatives that live over there or that are first generation from there, because I will talk to them and it’s like crickets. I’ll talk to my grandma—I haven’t seen her since I was nine... She doesn’t like coming to America. Different things, like, I feel like to a certain extent they separate themselves from us—the second generation—because there’s something about us that’s different.

She does not like to watch Al Jazeera and she sometimes avoids hearing about Palestinian conflicts because knowing hurts her. Adara similarly asserted, “I tend to avoid the news because it’s just so biased, but it really breaks my heart.” Later on in the interview she said, “You realize that this has been going on for so long and you just grow callus to it. I

don't want to say you don't care, you just kind of grow apathetic to it—where you know what's going on but you're like, well, I can't do anything about it so why even bother thinking about it?" Hana, who, like the other two women, is in college, feels much the same way. "You know, when I see it on the news I think about it. I try to keep up with everything, but it's definitely not something that's always on my mind." Ahmed told a similar tale when asked about his current source usage.

So I do follow [the news] but it's not as intense and devoted as I used to be, because I just got to a point where it just started to consume me for no evident reason, for no change. I'm just adding stress and anxiety to myself—why? You know, I'm not even involved in the conflict. It's just that, you know, it's not going to make a difference, unless something really severe takes place, that I would generate a response to the news.

We heard similar statements from the first generation; however, the key difference here is that while the younger respondents can avoid the pain associated with knowing, the first generation simply cannot turn a blind eye to it. They differ because they lived through it and feel obligated to know what is happening to their homes and families in Palestine.

Josef predominantly uses British media sources to find out what is going on in the Middle East, while his father talks to people living in Palestine to gather information, and then passes it on to Josef. Asim, like most of the others, has family in Palestine, but he is mainly in contact with them only during the holidays, while his mother talks to them much more frequently. Also, like Raya, he believes the second generation is less influenced by and informed about the conflict, and that he is, "less likely to be emotionally deprived or distraught than they are." As compared to the second generation, the first generation are much more likely to orient their lives around and be emotionally impacted by homeland events (Haller & Landolt 2005, Levitt & Waters

2002, Portes & Rumbaut 2005, Zhou 1997). Naimah's words provide an illustration of this sentiment—"I don't think about [the conflict] a lot, but when I see something on TV, like it hits me strong—anger, sympathy..."

Yasir's mother is seventy-eight years old and has four siblings in Palestine with whom she is in frequent communication, but he talks to people there only on special occasions—for example, a birth or death in the family. Since Yasir was born in Palestine and lived there for a couple of years, I asked him whether he considers himself to be first or second generation. His response articulates precisely what I see as the single most important factor separating the first and second generation in identity effects resulting from ethnic conflict—"Second [generation], because I don't know about it. I just go by what people say about it, what's going on, seeing that injustice people suffer." Adara told me that her parents use their siblings living in Palestine to get information, while she relies mostly on the BBC. Here she compares her own feelings about the conflict to the first generation.

I think the first generation people, just because they could actually experience it, whereas we hear about it secondhand, so it's probably a little bit stronger for them than it would be for someone like me. I think if I were actually over there and experienced everything that happens, it would hit a lot closer to me than it does right now.

Josef provided a complementary perspective.

[The first generation is] going to be able to talk more directly to people at home, and they also have more of a frame of reference because that's where they grew up, and so they lived the experience firsthand.

Again, it seems that having directly experienced the conflict makes all the difference in how one's identity is shaped by it, even after emigrating from the homeland.

I have sought to demonstrate, through the words of my subjects, the discrepancy by generational status in accessing and being influenced by current information about ongoing conflict in the homeland. A final distinction between first and second generation Palestinian Americans, regarding their knowledge of conflict, stems from my asking every participant to measure (on a scale I gave them) how informed they think they are. Of my five first generation subjects, everyone told me that they gather information on conflict in Palestine daily and they consider themselves to be at the highest level offered—"totally informed." The one exception was Umar, who says that although he keeps up with the conflict no one can be truly informed, because they are not there in the midst of it and thus cannot get an accurate picture of what is going on. Of the nine second generation individuals, not one referred to himself or herself as "totally informed," although they were still very much aware, as evidenced by their answers, all ranging between "somewhat informed" and "mostly informed."

### ***3.3 First Generation Jewish Israeli Americans***

To recap, I originally hypothesized that first generation immigrants would consider the conflict to be one of many important homeland concerns, since they lived there and experienced the multitude of daily realities, of which conflict was just one. I then posited that the second generation, whose conceptions of conflict are derived from a combination of media and personal sources, would overwhelmingly focus on the conflict as the central homeland issue. This hypothesis was based on their lack of direct experience with homeland conflict and because of the way the ethnic violence is highly-emphasized in the news. In reality, I found that these assumptions were not always true.

In my discussion of Palestinian Americans, I demonstrated that the conflict in Palestine was indeed the predominant concern for both generations, as it pervades their everyday lives, and because parents have connected their children to the conflict through their personal homeland stories (Halbwachs 1992, Haller & Landolt 2005, Orbuch 1997). As for Israeli Americans, I found more support for my original expectations. Those of the first generation did frequently mention that it is crucial for them to be informed about several arenas of Israeli life, not just the conflict. As I will show, they felt this way to a much greater extent than those of the second generation, who relied more often on media depictions of violence in Israel when discussing homeland matters.

First generation Jewish Israeli Americans made several statements which support my hypothesis about the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for their ethnic identity. Although this conflict takes precedence, Noam recognizes it as one of many, akin to the thoughts of Leah discussed in the previous chapter (and as mentioned in interviews with several other Jewish Israelis of the first generation, including Moshe, Ofer, Gil, Maytal, Liat, and Tziporah). “The internal conflicts are between orthodox and non-orthodox Jews, between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews. There are lots of conflicts in Israel, but I see them as secondary to conflict between Israel and the Arabs.” When asked if homeland conflict is something she thinks about a lot, Liat noted, “It is, but I mean, there’s also pressing issues in terms of the economy and stuff, which I didn’t mention, but that’s also a huge thing.” Gil talks to his family on the phone: “usually when we talk, we don’t talk about the situation and so on, unless we have nothing else to talk about.” Moshe added, “Sometimes people are scared to go to Israel because they

say, oh, there are bombs over there, and things like that. But you know, it depends where you go.”

When asked at the end of our interview if he would like to add anything, Noam repeated his opinion that the incessant coverage and discussion of the conflict overrides other highly important aspects of Israeli life.

And so if there’s anything that you can somehow add to [your dissertation], so that to better highlight the positive aspects, not only the military aspects—the power, one of the strongest military powers in the world. I mean, that we are, but there are other things to talk about. And the willingness of Israel to compromise, the voice in the street that you hear, which is we want peace. We are willing to pay for that. Not whatever, but within reason. And the idea of a Palestinian state is in general accepted. And that’s not entirely clear in the world—what really the attitude of the average Israeli is.

Several Jewish Israeli subjects mentioned how the media exaggerate the conflict while ignoring peace-making efforts. The majority of the people I spoke with proclaimed their support for a two-state solution.

Several respondents made statements supporting my expectation that members of the first generation would maintain and use their close homeland connections to get information, and they would do so more frequently than the second generation. Ofer told me about his Lebanese friend, who he was greatly worried about during the war with Lebanon, as well as his parents, who live on a kibbutz less than half a mile from the border. “...We maybe didn’t see too much in the beginning of the Lebanon war, but later on you heard more stories from mostly inside Israel, and even by talk... And my parents’ house is one of the very last houses. I mean, I’m on the phone every day.” And noting his preference for direct information over media depictions, he said, “You hear something here, but it’s not necessarily correct.” Maytal, as well as reading Israeli papers online and

streaming Israeli radio stations, also hears from people there—“from my parents—from my mom—and from our friends.” Moshe gets his information on the conflict in Israel from a wide spectrum of resources, ranging from the “internet, friends both here and there, newspaper, telephones—most of my family are there—*News and Observer*.” Like Moshe, Noam relies on a wide range of local and national American media and reads a monthly diasporic report.

One of the most interesting insights I gathered from the interviews is that both groups believe that overall, mainstream media favor the opposing group. Both groups agree that major American networks such as CNN or Fox lean more towards the Israeli side, while the BBC and other European sources support the Palestinian cause. What is not surprising, but nevertheless fascinating to witness, is how both groups see the media source that is more aligned with their group as the objective report, while the other authorities are perceived of as biased and unfair. I repeatedly heard Palestinians express their belief that the mass media portray them as the villain and the aggressor. Here, we hear parallel perspectives, first in two quotes from Gil about the war in Lebanon in 2006, then from Noam, then Liat, and lastly from Tziporah.

I feel like there was a very black and white view of things sometimes. In the same way that there has to be good and evil for some people, then there has to be an assailant and a victim, and Israel was the assailant and the bad guys, and...Lebanon were the victims. I think reality is much more complicated than that.

...The media treatment in the war against Lebanon was very much, my feeling, against Israel. It depends on who too...Like there were...the BBC was very anti-Israel, which means the coverage focuses more on...I think coverage should cover everything... It was often presented like Israel the aggressor goes and attacks Lebanon.



*Noam:* I don't agree with the media in general—the way that they're reporting about things that are happening in Israel. I think most of the media is pro-Arab and pro-Palestinian, or at least they put more weight on things that happen to the Palestinians, rather than what happens to Israelis and why. They tend to take things out of context. It was very clear during the second Israeli and Lebanon war. Only Fox news had a more balanced view. In comparison, it's more pro-Israel, so maybe there was that objective even. But in general, CNN and a lot of things, you can see how they...it's more, how should I say? It's more...it's more attractive for them to have things that show the poor Palestinians, how their homes were destroyed or you know, how they suffered, rather than showing what happened on the Israeli side during the bombing, even though hundreds of homes, thousands of them were bombed and killed. But the major emphasis of the media was on the Arab side.

*Interviewer:* Why do you think that is?

*Noam:* I think it sells better. It's more sensational; it's more appealing to feelings of people. You know, the underdog of the story.

And I think that the media was biased towards the Palestinians, and I think the media is anti-Semitic to a certain respect, and the UN is as well... And also I think that the media in the United states is very opinionated and the reporters express their opinion, and a lot of times the cool thing it to be with the underdog, and the underdog is the Palestinians.

So the media will show what the Arab world, maybe, wants to show...It will take what some Arab leaders want to show...I don't like what the media's doing. I think the media is hurting. I think the media can play a key role in helping the process, but of course, that's not the way to make money, like a soap opera.

The group members also tended to agree that the media are unreliable and cannot be trusted. As Moshe put it, "I think the media only chooses what will be good for the media, even if it's not true all the time." Liat thinks that, "there's so much censoring going on in the U.S. that it like amazes me...I don't like to watch the news in general." She relies on Israeli media and her family and friends there to keep up on homeland issues. Ofer added, "...Mostly what you see on TV and hear on the radio, which is most of the time not a reality. It's what they want to show you, like what they show you in Iraq." In his discussion of how the war with Lebanon affected him, Gil said:

I felt that it was very problematic in terms of knowing what's going on, because I feel like I can't really trust anyone. I don't trust the media. I don't trust Israeli media. I don't trust the international media. I definitely don't trust the Hezbollah media. So there was no...it's just like triangulating things from various places and you don't really know what's going on, and that bothered me a bit.

As a result, Gil avoids news media and relies on his family members—all of whom are still in Israel—as well as his friends here to get information about the ongoing conflict.

Tziporah also uses her extensive social network, spanning the United States, Israel, and Argentina, to gather information on conflict in Israel, as well as mostly Israeli and Jewish local sources. When asked about her personal connections in the U.S. and Israel, Tziporah told me, “I have family in Israel. Most of my friends and everyone is connected to the issue. It's very difficult for me to be friends with somebody who doesn't care.” The conflict is an important aspect of her daily life and social relationships, as it often is for members of the first generation, who continue to shape their lives around homeland events despite their out-migration.

When asked if he ever uses Israeli residents as sources of information, Noam's response again supports my notion that the conflict is not central in the lives of the Jewish Israeli diaspora to the same degree that it is for Palestinian Americans.

Not really. I find that people in Israel don't really care to talk too much about the situation. Even during the war in Lebanon our friends here, the neighbors, were there in Haifa. They have a house there. And I talked to them and they said we are visiting friends and so on. Nobody talks about the air raids. It's there of course, and you live through it, but it's not a topic that's discussed every day. There are other things which interest Israelis just as much. I mean, it's not that security is not important, of course it is, but they don't think about it all the time. They live normal lives. So it's not a discussion topic every time they meet.

The extreme contrast between Jewish Israelis' and Palestinians' homeland experiences was succinctly expressed in this quote by his words, “They live normal lives.”

Noam brought up an interesting point that was mentioned by several Jewish Israelis. He noted that because he is watching the situation from the outside, he probably has a clearer understanding of the conflict than those directly involved. “But if you are living abroad, listening to different news and sort of see perhaps the larger picture, though maybe not necessarily the right picture, but a different picture, I think that can all be help to give some feedback, criticism, and comments about the situation.” Rachel made a similar comment regarding getting an outside perspective. She attributed her realizations over time to gaining access to varying media sources and perspectives.

*Rachel:* Um, I think yes, living here did change it a little bit. I can see it more from the outside, more—not objectively, but more like people here see it...I can see a lot of things that are wrong in Israel in the way we do treat the others, the Arabs...

*Interviewer:* What do you think helps you see things from a better perspective—was it just being away from it, or was it having different media sources, or talking to people?

*Rachel:* Media sources, yes. That’s important because so much that you get is from the media, and in Israel I think it’s repeating the same thing again and again. It really makes you more and more emotional and less and less rational about everything...And it’s also just the experience of living in a different place and seeing Israel not as the center of the world, but maybe more in proportion.

Maytal also thinks that distancing herself from the conflict changed her opinions about it; however, her shift was quite the opposite of that experienced by Rachel.

I used to be a left wing in Israel and kind of be against the war in Lebanon and be against the Palestinian occupation, and living here kind of made me look at it from a distance...I have a tendency to kind of forgive Israel for doing things because I see it from a distance and I know it’s not just Israel, it’s the Palestinians, which you don’t even hear about in the news when you’re there...All these countries hate Israel, so I have a tendency to kind of say, you know, you have a right to do things to survive.

Recognizing his differing relation to the conflict over time, Gil described how his perspectives changed once he emigrated from Israel. “And I was very critical towards

Israel, Israeli culture, even though that's the only culture I lived in at that point. And once I came here I started to see more positive things as well. So I'm still critical, but now I can see the good things about it. So that has changed."

The most prominent organizational membership mentioned by Jewish Israeli American subjects was belonging to a synagogue. It helps them to connect to other Jews and Israelis as they face a much more religiously and ethnically diverse society in the United States. Segmented assimilation theory notes that religion, in a similar fashion to race and ethnicity, has a substantial impact on identity construction and the development of meanings and morals (Haller & Landolt 2005, Levitt 2003). Haller and Landolt (2005, 1188) argue that religious belonging can also facilitate the focusing of religious practices on transnational concerns. Efrat believes that joining a religious community has helped her recapture her Israeli heritage, which she once purposefully shed.

I would say that over the past two years I have had this amazing experience in going back to synagogue...Once I decided to stay in America, I think I kind of distanced myself from Israel, and I distanced myself from Israelis, and I kind of turned my back on a lot of my heritage...And I think that's begun to change. I feel more like I want to reclaim some of my identity and my heritage.

Also supporting Haller and Landolt's (2005) claims linking religious affiliation to transnational concerns, Noam, like several others, is a member of both a temple and also Jewish organizations that give large sums of money to Israel. Tzipora is not only a member of several of these types of these associations, but she also works for one. She told me about one particular organization that is dedicated solely to, "Israel advocacy for the media and explaining, behind the scenes, what's happening." In comparison, not one of my Palestinian subjects was a member of any organization that serves a similar function for their homeland inhabitants.

These comments underline the strength and success of the Jewish lobby, which takes a very public stand on the conflict and supports Israel, as compared to the weaker transnational movements created by Palestinian Americans. I attribute these power differentials to a combination of factors, including: Palestinian Americans' severely restricted homeland access and rights, which make remittances and movement back and forth difficult; the stronger and more supportive relationship Israel has with the United States as compared to the Palestinians'; the long-standing presence and fortitude of Jewish groups within the American government; and anxiety many Palestinians experience about making their ethnic identity public (especially since 9/11) and as a result possibly facing discrimination or being labeled as a terrorist. I will further discuss all of these explanatory factors when I turn to host country experiences in Chapter Four.

Noting the differences in both the impact of homeland conflict and in using various sources to keep informed about it, Noam made the following comparisons between his three sons and himself:

I think that the older ones have strong feelings towards Israel. They are not the types who really don't care, but I don't think that they read much about it. If they know something about it, it's never going out of their way to find interesting resources for the information. They probably hear what they hear on CNN, I would say, the sort of typical coverage. They are not going to any blogs. They are not going out of their way to get diverse opinions or analyze and research the situation.

Tziporah drew similar conclusions when comparing first and second generation Jewish Israeli Americans. "The problem is if you care as much. And I'm not sure, I don't think that you care as much, especially if you live in a country where you're comfortable and free, and you forget about how connected your reality is to what's happening around the world." Gil is more influenced by the conflict than those who did not grow up in or have

family in Israel, “because I have people who are important to me over there. And I am directly influenced.” Maytal also expressed how it is more personal for her than for second generation Israeli Americans. “...I don’t think they have the worry I have. I have an instant worry—oh, my sister’s taking that bus, oh, where’s my brother today?”

Moshe and Ofer drew contrasts between first and second generation Jewish Israelis that lend support to the claims of Portes and Rumbaut (2005) and Zhou (1997). These authors argue that the identities of the second generation are heavily shaped by their American upbringing, as compared to their parents with their homeland orientation. Moshe said, “...I think the way of thinking is different, because they never lived there and they don’t know how it is living there and what’s happening, and it’s different. I will tell you, I am Israeli and they are American. It’s always a big difference.” And Ofer added, “When you’re born there you are much more tied to the land, to the place. I know for my kids, I mean, as much as I try to explain to them, still they feel like for themselves they are American. And I try to speak Hebrew to them most of the time, and they don’t answer much in Hebrew.”

### ***3.4 Second Generation Jewish Israelis***

As I mentioned before, my hypothesis about the centrality of homeland conflict in diasporic identity did hold true to a certain extent with the Jewish Israeli Americans in my sample. The first generation explained that although the conflict is the main homeland issue for them, it is not the only one that matters, nor is it an all-consuming part of daily life in Israel. As for members of the second generation, they acknowledged this viewpoint, but it was clear that the media emphasis on the violence in Israel also

influences their perspectives on the homeland. Those with limited access to firsthand knowledge tend to form their opinions based on those with more contact, such as the first generation and also news sources (Gilens 1999, Guttman and Foa 1951). Dalia typifies this pattern.

It's really scary for me, like having relatives that live there and like have almost been directly affected. As far as like specific issues, like I said, I'm not on top of things, just like security in general. I mean, it's pretty safe. I never feel uncomfortable when I am there, but at the same time things have kind of hit close to home. Like when my cousin wanted to go to this disco and her mom wouldn't let her, and like that night there was a suicide bombing. You know, like that's scary, even though I've never felt uncomfortable when I was there.

Although David does not know any Palestinians personally, he believes that in relation to suicide bombing, "the majority of them are for that type of insurgence." This generalization is one that writers on Palestine, as well as people I spoke with, believe is created and upheld by the media and their skewed accentuation of such activities (Don-Yehiya 1998, Reich 1991, Said 1979, Shain 1996). Leah mentioned several times in her interview how her parents taught her the importance of not allowing the conflict to intimidate her while there or stop her from going about her regular routine, as it is not an all-consuming part of life. "Well, I just hear lots of people say like, oh, it's not a safe time to go right now or whatever, but most of my family lives in Tel Aviv and it's not like that." Zev felt very safe living in Israel and believes that people simply have to adjust their daily lifestyle to the current state of the conflict, rather than allowing it to monopolize their everyday lives.

Sasha, as I mentioned before, finds it scary how people in Israel grow accustomed to having bombs frequently explode. Her main concerns about the conflict are influenced by the fact that her mother and sister are still in Israel, but she does not believe the

conflict affects how she thinks of herself in any way. This provides further support for the segmented assimilation claim that, unlike their first generation parents, those who have not lived in the homeland do not tend to frame their lives and identity around it. Sasha invoked the typical, media-derived stereotype of life in Israel when she told me about people's reactions to finding out she had lived there. "...They're like...were there always bombs exploding over there? Or the really uninformed people—oh wow, did you ride a camel to school?"

When an outside threat of violence is perceived, the common reaction is to bolster any related identities and increase one's protection of and advocacy for the group. As for perspectives on the media and their representations of the conflict, I again witnessed some tendencies for members of the group to see their own people as being treated unfairly, while the Other is perceived as receiving preferential treatment. Dalia illustrated this outlook.

I think also like, there's a lot of negative media coverage of Israel here in the U.S. and that's something that bothers me too, because I think a lot of things aren't fairly reported...Like headlines, like, oh, ten killed in Israeli air raid, and they talk about the Palestinian babies that died or whatever, but there's no mention of the fact that ten Israeli children were killed the day before. No mention at all, or like, they'll gloss over it. Or like, let's say for example with suicide bombers, making them out to be more martyrs and talk about their family and how their family has been affected by this, and why they think he did it. Like, oh, we had no food. I don't know, like but they don't focus on the people who were killed, especially if there's any children killed, they usually just gloss over that, I feel.

Leah thinks the press tends to sympathize with the Palestinian cause, and acknowledged the argument that the media, with its mainstream portrayals, do affect the way Americans (including her) view the conflict in Israel (Gandy Jr. 2001, Weaver 1996).

*Leah:* I think that American media tends to, they tend to focus a lot from the perspective of Israel being...I mean it's not 100% this way, but I feel like if



there's going to be a touching story about the family that suffered because of the conflict, it's usually going to be like a Palestinian family. And it's not 100% but it's say, the majority of the time. So when it's framed that way, then if it's a conflict, then the people who are creating the trouble for the family is going to be the other side, which is the Israeli side. I mean there's still a lot of focus on the suicide bombers and stuff like that, but I don't think that there are the stories about like some Israeli who was maimed because of a suicide bomber, or the family of the guy who died because of a suicide bomber. I definitely think that the American media does shape the way that Americans in general, and probably myself, think about the Arab-Israeli conflict there and...

*Interviewer:* How does it shape it for you?

*Leah:* Well it makes you empathize with the family whose apartment is getting shelled because of a conflict that they're just stuck in the middle. And I'm not saying you shouldn't empathize with them, but why should you just empathize with them? Why shouldn't you empathize with everyone whose life is ruined because of it?

*Interviewer:* Does that bring up any personal feelings, any reactions that you can identify, emotions?

*Leah:* I mean, I think that I'm not like a raving...a person who's just going to be like...I mean like I'm not just on one side. I feel like I try to be pretty balanced about it. But I just wonder sometimes whether the balance is...like I'm not creating that for myself, but rather the media is kind of doing it for me in some way and shaping my opinions, which obviously it's going to do, but whether it does it even more than I know it does it.

*Interviewer:* So then you would say that the mass media coverage shapes the way that you understand the conflict?

*Leah:* Yeah, I mean I can think of plenty of things that aren't touched upon in the media that could be that would change the way that people view Arab-Israeli conflict there. So I think that it does.

Zev believes that the media were biased against the Israelis during the 2006 war in Lebanon.

I felt like there was more coverage of the Lebanese side than there was on the Israeli side. The whole world—CNN, BBC, all that. That's why it was sort of biased against Israel, because you would see all these like Lebanese people crying, but they don't talk about the million people who were displaced from the north to the central. We even housed a whole family. And they don't describe the pain. There was very few pictures of like katyusha rockets—well, they would show katyusha rockets falling on buildings—but they don't show people, blood, and like Israeli stories that much. There were obviously more Lebanese casualties because we're talking about different technology, but even despite the fact that they had more casualties I think they should show...

Despite observing this pattern, I did notice a generational difference in the tendency to view one's own group as being treated unfairly. Compared to the first generation, who invariably claimed that the media favor the other side of the conflict, several second generation Jewish Israeli Americans recognized that although the media are indeed biased towards violence overall, they do not consistently favor one group over the other.

David told me, "I mean, a lot of times they're [the media] biased one way or the other. So I take it with a grain of salt." Shai and Sasha, who also share this viewpoint, expressed a more neutral outlook towards the conflict and attributed blame to both sides for its perpetuation. Sasha said, "I would say probably they show Israel in a better light than Palestinians more of the time, but lately though probably less and less the more I watch. Maybe that's just because both sides are starting to fight dirty. I don't know."

Shai added:

The mass media here in general has been extremely pro-Israeli. There is very little coverage of non-violence in the West Bank, for example...The coverage tends to focus on violent reaction from the Palestinian side. And I've seen it over and over again, that there are significant amounts of non-violence, and yet the media focuses on the violence...It makes for better pictures in many ways.

Zev, Sasha, Dalia, and David also mentioned that the main difference between them and their parents is that the first generation tend to be more pro-Israeli and less likely to empathize with the Palestinian side.

When it comes to generational differences in media usage, it is apparent that the first generation does indeed consume media more often and more broadly than the second generation. It is also clear that first generation Jewish Israelis maintain and access social

networks in Israel for information on the conflict more often, as they lived in the homeland and thus have more contacts there. Dalia does not go out of her way to get information on the conflict in Israel. She only reads about it if it is in the headlines of *The New York Times*. She mainly relies on her mother—who is well-informed and talks to family there weekly—to update her.

...It has a lot to do with the connection that my mom has. Like, she's usually the one who will tell me about it. If I'm not home she'll be like, oh, did you read and I'll go read. Like, she'll send me an email about the letter that she sent to *New York Times* about the unfair coverage, and then I want to get involved because she's involved. I mean, yeah, I guess I have relatives there but she's the one that I see, she's the one that's most affected by it.

Like Dalia, Sasha seeks out information on Israel infrequently, as part of her weekly process of scanning the news headlines. She thinks that the media tend to, “always show you just the bad stuff—the fighting, the bombings, and who killed how many people here, and oh, this many children died over there.” Zev rarely searches for information on the conflict. “I mean, in a way the Palestinian-Israeli for me has just like—it's not a pertinent issue any more because it's just happened for so long that I don't see it as a new thing that I have to tune to the TV to hear everything that's happening, because it's just the same old story over and over again.” David, who is a dentist, mainly gets his general and Israel-related news from the television in his waiting room, which shows CNN or MSNBC all day long. Otherwise he hears things from his father—first generation subject, Noam—who he says mostly uses the internet and friends in Israel to gather conflict information. This tendency to use one's more informed parents as an authority about homeland conflict was very common. Zev's father is his main informant, as he was heavily involved in the IDF during his career and so, “he hears

it straight from the military, so that's pretty much the best." Leah too said that she gets her facts:

Either from reading something on some internet newspaper or something, or talking to my parents. Although my parents will tell me some like esoteric, weird things because like my uncle sends them newspaper clippings. So they'll tell me about like actual political scandals going on and stuff that wouldn't really hear in the newspapers here because they don't really care about whether, you know, the president in Israel is corrupt or something.

The most commonly used media sources for this group were mainstream and mainly American: CNN, ABC, NBC on line and on television, and also popular U.S. newspapers. Second generation respondents did not report using Israeli media sources often, especially as compared to their parents' usage. Shai was an exception, as he reads a vast array of media sources from all sides of the conflict. He also thinks that the media do not provide a very accurate picture of what is going on in the Middle East. "I don't believe that there is a source out there which is unbiased, but one can rely on cross-correlating and using my own previously acquired knowledge too to judge and to criticize different sources. So it's a slowly accumulating, critical process, I think." And of course, personal ties to Israel and Palestine were common sources of information for this internationally-networked individual. "And if I happen to know who were on the ground there, I'll email them or phone them and see if I can get firsthand reports of what's actually happening."

For the most part, the second generation members with whom I spoke were not heavily involved in any organizations linked to being Jewish or Israeli. Their most common association was the same as their parents'—the synagogue—and even then only a few times a year on high holidays. The notable anomaly here was again Shai, who has

dedicated much of his time to resolving the conflict. He is an active member of at least three national and international organizations promoting peace in Israel/Palestine, and he is involved with all of them on a daily basis.

Shai told me how he has, “a lot of other things to do but I’m very much involved, and I see myself as very much obsessed with the conflict, and I find it very difficult to extricate myself on a day-to-day basis from what’s going on over there.” Clearly, the conflict has an immense impact on Shai and how he views himself and the world around him. The other second generation Jewish Israeli Americans, for the most part, made statements about their media usage which support the idea that the conflict has less of an overall impact on them. Again, this is because, as compared to their parents, they have not had direct experiences with conflict and do not maintain intensely emotional ties to people living in the homeland.

When she hears about conflict in Israel, Leah said, “I mean, I guess it makes me upset a little bit but...I don’t know, for good or bad I’m kind of busy with other things, so it doesn’t really affect my life too much...your life must go on, so it’s not necessarily affected by what’s going on in the news.” When asked about how the conflict affects her, Dalia said:

If I hear about it, it affects me, but the problem is that I’m kind of in my own little bubble. I don’t know, it doesn’t affect me any more than anything that happens here affects me... It’s just something that happens in your life, or like, it’s something that you read about and you’re like, that sucks, I wish there was something I could do, but at this point in my life there’s nothing I can do. And then I just kind of move on, I guess.

I asked about her emotional reactions to the conflict, and she continued. “It’s more like sometimes I see my mom really upset because she has all the connections, and then that

upsets me. But I directly don't really get very upset." Sasha speculated that, "someone who grew up there might be more interested in what's going on, maybe use the internet or talk to family back home." She only corresponds with her immediate family in Israel about once a month. When asked about the differential impact of hearing about the conflict, David says his father (Noam) is much more vocal about the conflict, and that, "obviously it hits home more to him because he was born there."

Using self-reported scales as a way to compare the first and second generation in news access and awareness (as I did with the Palestinian Americans), it is again telling to contrast the interview responses of the two Jewish Israeli American groups. Of the eight first generation respondents: three said that they are informed about homeland conflict on a daily basis, four said it was more like once or twice a week, and one person said they are informed about every two weeks. In comparison, only Shai gets news on the conflict every day, two second generation subjects said they are informed about once a week, and three said about once a month or so. When asked to locate themselves on a scale of how informed they typically are, one first generation individual said "totally informed," four said "mostly informed," and three said "somewhat informed." As for the second generation, three said "mostly informed," one said "somewhat informed," and two said "somewhat uninformed." There was a slight tendency for the first generation to get more news more often; however, as I previously discussed, the greater and more interesting discrepancy arose when comparing Palestinian Americans and Jewish Israeli Americans.

### ***3.5 Conclusions***

In this chapter, I have focused on the sources that diasporic Jewish Israelis and Palestinians use to gather information about the ongoing conflict in the homeland. I conclude that while members of all generational and ethnic groups have a keen interest in staying informed about the homeland, there are ethnic group and generational differences in how they access and are influenced by information about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The first major distinction is that while first generation members of both groups rely on a combination of personal networks and homeland-based and international media sources, the second generation predominantly use their parents and mainly American news sources to get informed. And secondly, as I anticipated, the first generation more frequently access and are more emotionally impacted by reports on the conflict than are their children.

As for contrasts by ethnic group, Palestinian Americans as a whole are to some degree more aware of and burdened by the conflict, as it is a never-ending issue of concern for their people living in Palestine. This is in contrast to the more intermittent experiences with hardship and violence that most Israelis reported. As I mentioned before, all but one first generation Palestinian American mentioned that they are “informed daily” and are “totally informed,” while only three first generation Jewish Israelis get news on a daily basis, and just one felt “totally informed.” And the range of how informed they think they are was much higher overall for both generations in the Palestinian American population.

In addition to noting this slight but important differentiation by ethnic group, it is also imperative to acknowledge the strong tendency for all individuals involved in this conflict to be invested in and emotionally affected by the continued strife and suffering in their shared homeland.



## **4. Differences in Host Country Experiences by Generation and Ethnic Group**

In Chapter Three, I used the words of my subjects to describe the different ways that information about homeland conflict is obtained and what effect hearing about it has on their diasporic identity as either a Jewish Israeli American or a Palestinian American. I concluded that the first generation is more informed overall than their children, and that Palestinian Americans access greater numbers of informants more frequently and are more deeply affected after hearing about conflict than are their Jewish Israeli American counterparts. As to why this pattern exists, my explanation comes back to the unparalleled experiences Palestinians have with daily conflict (such as difficulty in movement and limited human rights, as well as the consequential extreme poverty and suffering) as compared to Jewish Israelis. These unequal experiences transcend the actual conflict site and continue to shape the lives and identities of those living in the diaspora.

This last statement brings me to the central theme of this chapter—how the experiences of Palestinians and Jewish Israelis living in the United States differ in relation to ongoing homeland conflict. First, when analyzing the identity processes of any given diasporic community at the micro-level, it is imperative to investigate the macro-level conditions, such as historical precedents, as relations between the host and home country matter (Rumbaut 2002). Worldwide reactions—including that of the United States—to both Jews' and Palestinians' past experiences with discrimination and persecution have differed greatly (Ellis 2002, Khalidi 1997). The Jewish claim for a right to land after facing monumental victimization was successful in the form of the Zionist movement, while Palestinian petitions for a nation of their own have largely been

ignored in the past (although the public discussion has shifted more towards recognizing their rights in recent years) (Patterson 2006, Khalidi 1997, Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004).

This chapter examines participants' experiences in America—their associations with and within the host country—in areas such as perceived reception or rejection. I explore differences by both ethnic group and generational status in encountering ethnic discrimination in the U.S., and also perspectives on the United States' historical and current role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is a degree of imposition as well as self-identification involved in minority group identities, as they are shaped by how the dominant culture characterizes the group and by their given status in society (Zimmerman et al 2007). As I will demonstrate, all of these host country experiences and viewpoints significantly determine the trajectory of my respondents' diasporic identities, and also their ongoing relationship with homeland conflict.

Based on the literature, I hypothesized that my Palestinian subjects would relay more individual-level incidents of discrimination and express more institutional-level dissatisfaction with America's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Ackerman 2001, Barghouti 1988, Khalidi 1997, Shain 1996). My expectations were founded on claims that the United States has been a highly active supporter of the Zionist movement and Israel's military incursions into the occupied territories (Patterson 2006, Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004). Israel reportedly receives the largest amount of economic and military aid from the United States worldwide (\$3 billion annually) despite the fact that it ranks twenty-sixth in richest nations, out of around two hundred (Patterson 2006). The United States, with its pluralistic structure, has permitted its Jewish populations to respond to Zionism's pull both preceding and following the creation of the State of Israel, and the

continued strength and influence of their ethnic organizations echoes this historical antecedent (Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004, 1192).

Jewish and Israeli Americans have also been much more successful in generating lobbying strength and governmental support than have any Arab or Palestinian private nonprofits or advocacy groups. Two examples of these powerful Jewish American groups are the President's Conference, where presidents of large Jewish organizations collaborate and work with the executive branch of the United States' government, and AIPAC, which works with Congress to alert elected representatives to Israel's needs. AIPAC also use their donated funds to support congressional candidates who advocate Israel's cause and defeat those who do not. (Patterson 2006, 1899)

I additionally anticipated Palestinians citing more interpersonal confrontations because of the oftentimes violent portrayal of Arabs by both the Press and in mainstream multimedia (Don-Yehiya 1998, Reich 1991, Said 1979, Shain 1996). As I mentioned, Jews and Israelis in America have experienced great success in lobbying on behalf of their homeland, and their ethnic identity has been largely supported since the inception of Israel in 1948; however, they have also been the recipients of ethnic discrimination dating back to pre-industrialized America (Brodkin 1994). In general, Palestinians and Arabs have faced stigmatization and stereotyping in the United States, which they view as the perpetuation of prejudice they faced back in the homeland (Barghouti 1988, Khalidi 1997, Shain 1996). As I will demonstrate, both of these groups' experiences with discrimination have strengthened their identification with their ancestral group and thus also with the ongoing homeland conflict. These factors work to fortify their ethnic

identity. But as I will also show in this chapter, power differentials—in both the sending and receiving countries—do also count when it comes to ethnic identity.

Differences in group efficacy matter for economic prosperity, as well as for basic survival. It is often claimed that without the United States' support of Israel in the forms of financial, military, and intelligence assistance, it would have ceased as a nation long ago (Patterson 2006, Said 1979, Shain 1996). And linking this claim to my previous discussion, it is also argued that without the Jewish diaspora's successful mobilization efforts and organizational wealth, American aid would not have been made so readily available to Israel (Patterson 2006). Some of the Israeli American subjects, including Gil and Zev, mentioned that although they are grateful for U.S. aid to Israel, they also believe that because of it the relationship between the two nations involves a perceptible (and somewhat begrudged) degree of power inequality and control—the United States assumes that their assistance entitles them to having a say in Israeli military action. As I will demonstrate, this fiscal and military support of Israel causes considerably more discomfort for Palestinian American subjects, who resent having to pay tax dollars funding the occupation and oppression of their people in Palestine.

Relying again upon the main canons of the segmented assimilation theory, I demonstrate through my interviews how structural conditions—such as America's unparallel treatment and support of each group—unequally impacts respondents' relationships with both the host country and homeland conflict. I use this theoretical perspective in analyzing identity formation and maintenance because it captures the multiplicity involved in these social processes, and again it underscores familial ties as

the social institution with the most significant influence on immigrant's children's ethnic identities.

#### ***4.1 First Generation Jewish Israeli Americans***

Noam, who is now sixty-four, moved to the United States at the age of twenty-five and has lived in many parts of the country. When asked if he would ever consider moving back to Israel, he said it was “not very likely. We are so settled here and we have our three boys here.” He later noted that in my study it would be interesting to compare the more recent immigrants and their homeland attachments and plans to return to his own feelings as someone who has lived in the U.S. for almost forty years. Ofer, who has lived in America for twenty years, also alludes to this idea of looking for longitudinal changes in identity. When I asked him if he sees Israel as his homeland, he paused and replied, “Yes, but if you asked me this question fifteen years ago I would say much more so. Now it's like this is my home. Israel is my homeland...” And in regards to his long-term views on the conflict, “Israel didn't change. I felt more Israeli then, and now this is my home. That's really the only difference. I've lived in Raleigh almost eleven years, so this is definitely my home, but my view about the conflict, that's definitely not going to change.” As I will demonstrate, more recent émigrés do express more of an immediate and concrete desire to return to the homeland, as their family ties and homeland memories remain quite strong. They also visit more often and maintain more comprehensive and concentrated networks there.

Although Noam does feel that America is his home, he later discusses how growing up in Israel has forever altered his viewpoints.

Well you know, when you are born in Israel and raised in Israel for twenty-five years, your loyalty and your feelings towards the country, especially since I served in the military and went into reserves, I feel very strongly connected to the country. So even though I lived in Europe and am living in the United States for many years, I still feel deep inside as an Israeli, and I see everything from an Israeli perspective. But I can also see it from an American perspective, a Western perspective.

This statement reflects both a central notion of segmented assimilation theory and the complexity involved in transnational identities—one can simultaneously feel attached to both home and host country (Haller & Landolt 2005, Zimmermann et al 2007).

According to Noam, maintaining this Israeli outlook on life differentiates him from his sons, who were raised in America and thus see things from a disparate cultural standpoint.

Moshe feels similarly to Noam, but his identification with Israel is more exclusive. When asked what he identifies as, he said, “I am Israeli. I’m American, but no, I’m Israeli. I was born Israeli and I will die Israeli. No matter how many years I live in America, I will always be Israeli. It’s in my blood.” In comparison, he explains how his children view the conflict and themselves differently than he does, as they have never lived in Israel. And while he will always be Israeli, they are definitely American.

Noam mentioned how he always feels a desire to be back in Israel for at least extended periods of time. Several other first generation respondents mentioned how the pull to return to the homeland never abates, and this sets them apart from their children, for whom America is the only home they know or need. Rachel says, “Well, we do feel so much like part of Israel. I think that will probably never change...It’s still very basic to both of us [her and her husband], this feeling that we’re Israeli and we need to be in Israel. So everything that happens really affects us.” When Efrat decided to stay in

America she felt “initially a little twinge of guilt about staying in the United States because...I felt very proud as an Israeli and didn’t want to be known as a ‘yoredet,’ you know,...it’s a derogatory term for someone who abandons the country and leaves.” Moshe told me that, “My dream is to live part of the year in America and part of the year in Israel. Only if my kids decide to do aliyah [move to Israel and become Israeli citizens] it would be wonderful!”

As Maytal, who moved here about five years ago, put it, “Sometimes I would hear Israelis that come here say we don’t even intend to go back, and that kind of highlights even more to me that I’m an Israeli...I feel like maybe Israel is not doing always the right thing but that’s my land. You know, I am going to go back there and change it if possible.” She believes that she does not belong amongst any groups in America and always feels like an Israeli outsider, which increases her wish to return. When it comes to her children though, she said, “...they’re Americans. They don’t want to hear about us going back.” Maytal and Liat, despite expressing their desires to return to Israel, also describe how living in America has been a reprieve for them from their stressful homeland lives. As Liat, who moved back to America just a year ago, said, “But now that I am here I also was like relieved that I don’t have to deal with the tension, because if I was in Israel I would not feel safe.”

Noam, Tziporah, and several others are all currently active members of Jewish American organizations supporting Israel, and their discussions and high levels of involvement exemplify how the Jewish American diaspora maintains extensive and powerful connections between Israel and America (Patterson 2006, Waldinger &

Fitzgerald 2004). As Noam puts it, “We the diaspora need Israel, as Jews, and Israeli Jews need American Jewry’s support.” Liat adds:

I think the United States is supportive of Israel... Part of that is the relationship that American Jewry has with I guess American politicians. So there is an influence of the rich Jews to a certain extent on policy... It makes me feel secure as an Israeli to know that the Jews are watching out for us...at least in America.

Tzipora, Moshe, Ofer, and Efrat mentioned to me how they were not very religious in Israel and did not feel that they had to be, because their Jewish identity was reinforced by their community and schooling, while in the diverse setting of the United States there is a greater need to seek out support for this identity. Another related factor is the religious-secular divide in Israel. Ofer, like most Israelis, was raised celebrating the Jewish holidays and studying the torah in school, but he was not raised to have a religious identity like he now encourages for his own children. Ofer’s wife—who is also his business partner and was present during our interview—described this dichotomy.

There are just many people in Israel who are offended by the sort of stated theocracy, and so they become anti-organized religion. And that is completely political and has nothing to do with religion. And so while his parents are anti-religion and are really headstrong opposed to some of the practices, they raise other aspects of it.

Tziporah described her Jewish lifestyle here. “I am affiliated with the conservative synagogue but I am more a cultural Jew in many ways. It’s a very strong identity as an Israeli. Only when I am in the diaspora, living outside of Israel, is when I need to try harder to do it for my kids, for their identity.” As I mentioned before, Efrat discussed how with age she feels “more like I want to reclaim some of my identity and my heritage.” As for joining her local synagogue, she added, “I just felt like I wanted to be more part of the community and this was a way to do that.” Liat, like many others,



believed that although being connected to Jewish Americans helps, "...even living in this area where there aren't a lot of Jews, having Israel makes me feel more secure in my identity."

Moshe added, "In Israel you don't go to Hebrew school, Sunday school. It's not part of your life like in America." He also told me how, "I have non-Jewish friends, but my closest friends are almost all Jewish." This was a recurrent comment, as Israelis' concept of kinship in the diaspora necessarily expanded to include Jewish Americans as well as Israeli Americans. This is because these relatively small American subgroups are linked here by their shared religion, collective memories, and cultural practices (Mannheim 1952). Haller and Landolt (2005) describe transnational social fields as creating novel opportunities for social engagement and group construction; belonging can be redefined once it transcends a single location.

Several respondents acknowledged that America has usually been supportive of Israel in the past and present, although some people noted a recent tendency to empathize with the "underdog" (as they put it in Chapter Two) and favor Palestinian rights. First Moshe, then Liat, and finally Noam all express this perspective on America's support of Israel.

I am really happy that America tried to help Israel, because America is a big country and Israel is small. And I guess that the American government sees that Israel is overall a good thing to happen, so they try to help us. Like, what happened three months ago, when Israel attacked the Lebanese, before the war. So the government of America was actually behind Israel. It was good in a way. So overall I am happy that America tries to help Israel in any way they can.

Well, I appreciate the American involvement. I appreciate the money that America's sending over and the international support. I am proud to be American, I am proud to be Israeli and part of that is the connection allows me to be proud of both. Because if they were in conflict I wouldn't be able to be both.

So the support that America is giving and the appreciation that Israel has for America influences my identity.

I think that the relationships have been very close relationships between the two countries. And that makes me feel good to live in a country where the host government or the local government is by and large pro-Israel...I think that for a Jew outside of Israel this is probably the best place to live.

Tziporah agreed that America and Israel are the only safe places for Jews in today's world, especially when compared with her own experiences in Argentina.

...People won't walk through a Jewish building [in Argentina] because it's a target. And I won't let my kids go with a big Magen David [Jewish star] on the street. You can do it here. I know that here I go to the grocery store and they tell me do you want it wrapped for Christmas or Hanukah?...It's not anywhere around the world like that, unless you're in Israel.

While she acknowledged America's aid to Israel and thinks it is "the only country taking a brave step and speaking up to hey, there's something happening and we need to stop," she thinks that there is also a tendency to empathize with suicide bombers, and this greatly bothers her. "And I am also concerned as a mother because I don't like the values that the world is teaching my kids. Somehow if you do something bad we will listen to you, so if you kill yourself we will feel sorry for you and we will listen to you. And that's scary." Liat thinks that the media make Palestinians out to be the victim, and "that's also maybe part of the reason that the really liberal Jews are like more pro-Palestinian than pro-Israel, because the Palestinians are the underdog, you know, we need to care for the poor people."

Gil believes that, "Israel with American support and Israel without are two very different things. I don't know if Israel would even exist without American support." He thinks that if he were to live elsewhere, say in Europe, he "might have encountered considerably more situations where it would feel uncomfortable to say I'm from Israel."

While for the most part the Jewish Israeli subjects reported positive reception and treatment in the United States, and believe it helps and supports their homeland, there were respondents who experienced anti-Semitism. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Maytal has heard discriminatory jokes and comments made about Jews. She has had coworkers joke with her when she made mistakes in the lab she works in about how, “it’s because you’re Jewish—nothing ever works for you.” Or they would use terms like “oh, you were Jewing us.” Efrat lived in a very Jewish neighborhood of Pittsburgh for a few years of her youth, and yet still, because of her Israeli/immigrant status, “it always made me acutely conscious of being in the minority...I was different from most of my classmates.” As an adult she had only a few brushes with discrimination, such as being called names like “filthy Jew.”

When discussing encounters in the United States with the Other involved in the conflict—Palestinians—there were mixed feelings about how this influences their Jewish Israeli identities and perspectives on the conflict. For Liat, the key global-level division is between Jews and Muslims, and she sees little room for overlap between these opposing groups.

My first divide is Muslim, if you’re Muslim or not, and if you’re Muslim then I’m like fearful and more cautious. If you’re not Muslim then I look to see are you of Arab relations—so Arab, Palestinian, even Turkish, because they fall under the Muslim. And I’m threatened and cautious of those groups. I don’t know if I could be friends with people of those backgrounds just because of the different basic world views that we have. I’ve worked with people like Christian Palestinians and stuff like that, but no friendship formed, probably because we’re both so different on basic levels.

Some people, like Tziporah, demonstrated support for a main argument of the conflict theory by asserting that the conflict “polarizes a society in many different groups.” In her

opinion, the following story shows how the antagonism transcends the conflict site, especially for those who experienced it firsthand and carried it with them after emigrating. She once made a friend from Lebanon in the United States and started teaching her Hebrew. They also exchanged ethnic food recipes.

One day she told her parents that she became good friends with an Israeli, and they told her to stop it right now or we're bringing you back home, this person is dangerous. And she told her friends from her community, and they said, we don't want you to see her because we are going to do something really bad to her if we see you with her. That was the point where she said I can't see you anymore. And again, we're here in a different place. There is a lot of judgment. There is a lot of prejudice. It's polarized.

Maytal described a more common trend of avoiding interactions with Palestinians and Arabs in the United States, as part of a wish to avoid having negative encounters about homeland conflict. When asked about her perception of Palestinians, she had the following to say.

I don't think we have any that we know. If we go to a Mediterranean place we usually try not to talk in Hebrew and not show too much that we are Israelis, because I think still even here the fear of what if they know or what would they think about us...They hate us, of course, so I think that also kind of sheds light on oh, we're still Israelis even if we don't want to be related.

Gil, when asked about his impressions of ethnic group differences, said, "Um, I don't really see or interact with Palestinian Americans. I don't know anyone." These statements align with those already discussed in Chapter Two, concerning encounters with the Other in the homeland. The Israeli subjects have had very limited and sporadic interactions with Palestinians throughout their lives.

In direct contrast to Maytal, Rachel believes she and Palestinians "...probably have a lot in common. We just go to a Mediterranean store and meet some Palestinians, sometimes it feels like, oh, they're from home." She was shocked to learn that many

Americans categorize her as Mediterranean, thus lumping her into the same group as Palestinians. In reference to a comment made at a UNC seminar, which she found to be racist, Rachel continues, “And so it took me a few days to realize that part of why I was offended was also because he put me in the same group as Arabs, which I wasn’t used to thinking of myself in that way.”

As for their overall feelings about the conflict and its resolution, most of the Jewish Israelis I spoke with empathized with the Palestinians and want to see peace and national rights for both, while also expressing frustration with what they perceive of as a terrorist-driven method used by them. As Maytal says, “So I do see the Palestinians as people and their suffering hurts me, but I just can’t figure out why they keep fighting the way they do.”

Several subjects described their interactions with non-Israeli Jewish Americans in discussing United States’ experiences with other ethnic groups involved in the conflict. Noam spoke of the relationship between Jews in the United States (he actually included himself in this category because of his length of time here) and Israel, and acknowledged that many Israeli and Jewish Americans are conflicted about criticizing Israel while not living there. He concluded that nowadays the main feeling is “yes, you can. It’s our right to express our views, our concerns, our criticisms about the administration, about certain issues, and so on. We have the voice. We are Jews. We support Israel, especially being a part of the Jewish Federation where a lot of things are done for Israel.”

Moshe thinks non-Israeli and Israeli American Jews see the conflict differently, for the same reason that the first and second generation differ.

I mean, I am sure they can look in a paper but it's always going to be different because I think Israelis see it differently and understand it differently...because, you know, we grew up over there, we know everything over there. It's like, it's different for us than for them... I know more what's happening over there. It's different for them to judge and for me to judge.

He linked this generational difference to characterizations of Israel discussed in the first chapter, about how people on the outside label Israel as a dangerous place that is unsafe to travel within, while he knows, "if you need to die, it's going to happen anywhere."

Tziporah was even less open to the idea that Jews in America have a right to an opinion on Israel's actions, especially military.

I'm also very angry, upset with the world, with people, with reactions, a lot with people in the United States who don't realize that they are judging Israel, especially Jews who are judging Israel. And they don't realize that they have the freedom to judge Israel from here because Israel is there, so they can be safe here... So I am very concerned when people judge Israel without really understanding or living there, or being there day-to-day and seeing how difficult it is.

This again is a key difference between generations: being in the homeland and experiencing the conflict directly shows one how complicated and convoluted the situation and its resolution are. This is opposed to the more simplistic picture in the mass media, which frequently influences the identities of the second generation.

Liat is also often frustrated with Jewish Americans' responses to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and thinks that being outside the situation gives you a skewed perspective.

Very rarely have I met a Jewish American, even ones that have been there for like a year abroad type thing, very rarely have I met a Jewish American who really cared to listen to Israelis, or at least to my husband and myself, about what is actually going on there. And a lot of times when they do listen they process it through this very like righteous, humanistic, environmentalist type of, I don't know, lens... And you're Jews, you should be pro-Israel because that's your country!

Noam, again in contrast to Tziporah, and to Moshe and Liat, also thinks that being outside allows him and other Jews in the United States to be more objective about the conflict, which makes them good candidates to give feedback. He noted, “there are so many people now traveling to Israel, so many of the American Jews have family in Israel,” so they are better able to preserve diasporic ties. This common pattern can be contrasted with the difficulty or even ability to travel to the homeland for most of the Palestinian American subjects.

#### ***4.2 Second Generation Jewish Israeli Americans***

When asked which homeland issues are important to him, David, the son of Noam, first said peace with the Palestinians and second the relations between Israel and the United States. “Well, hopefully they’re good, and hopefully that bond stays strong and that trust is still there and the politicians here still view Israel as an ally, that kind of thing. And back Israel in what they do—so those are things that are important.” Leah’s congruent comments recognize important historical precedents, and also the crucial role the influential Jewish American community has played in preserving and sustaining Israeli-American relations.

*Interviewer:* Do you feel that the United States has been supportive of Palestinians and/or Israelis?

*Leah:* I think probably more supportive of Israelis, just because there’s more...like Jewish lobby is bigger and has more money and stuff like that. And there’s also more...I mean even beyond that it’s the idea...like especially nowadays with like, America’s against terrorism but Israel is a democracy and historically...I guess now things are changing a little bit, but was the only democracy in the Middle East. So America’s always been with Israel and on Israel’s side, and now that the Palestinian government is controlled by Hamas it’s...so I don’t think America is really going to be supporting them.

Leah later mentioned that she wonders how much of America's unrelenting support of Israel is tied to the Christianity—a topic mentioned only by her amongst the Jewish subjects, but one discussed frequently by my Palestinian respondents, as I will soon show.

Like the whole Christians who are pro-Israel, there's always this undertone that they're pro-Israel because of Christianity. When Jesus comes back, the Jews have to be there—this whole thing like we're being used or something. I'm sorry, I can't think that [President] Bush is good for Israel because of his religious perspective if he's just using us. That doesn't feel right.

Zev is pleased that there are strong bonds between the Israeli army and the United States' military.

There's sort of a link here between the Israeli and American army. In a way, if you're like, we're the ones protecting the western world, if you're like we're the first offense, they're like we have to help Israel because they're the ones who know, first of all, most about the War on Terror. We know how to fight it, we have the strategic planning and everything, and you know, that's why we're the ones helping Americans in Iraq. And so they just feel really like this is our nation. Also, Christians believe Jews are like...and for them it's important that Israel's having Jerusalem.

I know American soldiers who are deployed to help in Israel, and it's just great. They send us obviously tons of like military weapons and we bought planes from them a couple of years ago. I think the United States, for me, is the number one ally.

Zev also thinks that without American support, Israel would be obliterated.

Like as far as [if] the United States supporting Palestine, I think Israel would have to eventually retreat. I don't think Israel would exist really. We would be fighting a lost cause, I think. Let's face it—they are a lot more than us. If they got the technology that we get then we would be off the map.

Shai most definitely agrees, and draws connections between the Israeli and Jewish lobby in the United States and its' financial and military support of Israel.

The Israeli economy and thus Israel, they couldn't exist without U.S. support, and thus the taxes that I pay and have to pay do go in part to fund the occupation.



That's something I feel very conflicted about. I very much support the idea of stopping all U.S. tax fund aid to Israel because I believe that without the economy prop up, Israel would be forced into having a just solution to the occupation. So historically, and this has changed over time, the varying degree of U.S. support for Israel...there has been a very strong impact of U.S., especially U.S. Jewish support, which has impacted U.S. government support.

As we will see repeatedly in my upcoming analysis of first generation Palestinian Americans, being forced to pay money that funds the Israeli occupation of their homes causes great suffering and internal conflict.

Dalia, like many of her peers, goes to the synagogue on high holidays and feels a connection to the Jewish American community, but refers to herself as “Jewish culturally, but not really religiously.” Almost all of the second generation Jewish Israeli subjects, including Dalia, Zev, and David, only go to synagogue a few times a year, on the most important holidays. In the past Dalia was more active in the Jewish community, participating in Jewish youth organizations. No one in this particular respondent group is a member of a secular adult organization supporting Israel or dealing with the conflict, with the exception of Shai, who is affiliated with several international groups working to ameliorate the situation (such as the International Solidarity Movement and the Palestine Solidarity Movement—PSM). In comparison to the second generation, many first generation subjects are active members of these ethnic organizations. Religious affiliation, like ethnicity, helps reinforce global aspects of their Jewish/Israeli identity.

As I stated in the introduction, my goal was to look for prevalent trends in my sample while also acknowledging anomalous outcomes. Bonilla-Silva (2003, 14) suggests that overcoming potential interviewer misinterpretation involves presenting “non-conforming cases” whenever possible. But of course, in the end the data must be

both analyzed and interpreted, so that conclusions drawn best characterize the targeted sample (Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004). Sasha was probably the least connected person when it came to being Jewish and Israeli, despite the fact that she lived in Israel for several years and her mother and sister are still there. Her ethnic and religious background are simply not important aspects of her own identity. Her current social networks reflect this pattern. “I really don’t know too many people who are Jewish, Palestinian, or even Israeli, anybody who has a connection to Israel really.” The only reason she feels more attached to this particular conflict than any others in the world is because her family is there and she is worried about their safety. As to why she does not reflect the same level of connection to the conflict, she told me she has always been a more independent person, and feels distant from her mother and seldom contacts her.

Shai represents the opposite end of the spectrum when compared to Sasha. Much of his daily life in the United States revolves around the conflict. He has many connections with groups in the United States and across the globe, and sees himself as someone bridging the gap between the opposed groups.

*Shai:* I’ve met a lot of American Jews and American Palestinians I’ve been able to have very constructive dialogue with and get significantly into both the way I think and they way they think about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Having experienced both sides to some extent and the U.S. again I see myself as some sort of a bridge in many cases. So I have had relationships with both Jews and Palestinians here that I consider close friends and who I also consider in many ways victims of the occupation, because many of them are obsessively involved with it and are unable to proceed with other parts of their lives because of the continuation of the conflict and how strongly they feel connected to it.

*Interviewer:* You don’t see yourself as part of that at all?

*Shai:* I do. I think I would much rather this wasn’t going on so I could get on with other things.

Dalia, a current undergraduate college student, made an interesting observation about changes over time in her Jewish Israeli identity. She described growing up in a little town with a small Jewish population, which encouraged her to make being Jewish her “thing.”

Like I was always like the Jewish girl and I liked teaching people about being Jewish, and then if there was ever any debate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict I was always there. And I had like my little myths and facts book and I was like debating it. And I was very much more informed then than I am now.

She attributed this shift to entering a diverse college environment with a more significant Jewish population.

I don't know, it's almost like now that it doesn't really make me different. Like, I don't see a Jewish person and get really happy because I never see Jewish people... And here, I don't know, maybe it's because there are so many different people, so many different ethnicities and races and just everything, that it's just not as big of a thing for me anymore.

Whereas before she had always engaged in Palestinian-Israeli conflict debates, she now does not feel that the conflict influences her identity in any way, other than it upsets her to see her mother worried about it. This again points to two patterns: first, the second generations' ethnic identities are largely influenced by their parents; and second, the first generation tend to have more long-term and long-lasting effects from experiencing the conflict firsthand, and their American-born children simply do not experience the same enduring ties to the homeland.

As for perceptions of the Other involved in the conflict, Dalia drew a distinction between group cleavages in the homeland and conflict site and inter-ethnic relations in the United States.

*Interviewer:* Does the conflict make any of the boundaries/divides between different groups stronger for you?

*Dalia:* In Israel I think definitely it does. Like people will look at somebody and be like, oh, he's Palestinian, like, stay away, he's scary. Or you know, like I wanted to go to Egypt and see the pyramids after Birthright [a program that subsidizes Jewish youths first organized trip to Israel], and my mom was like, no, it's dangerous, they hate Jewish people... So I think the conflict, definitely it's defined there. Here not so much. I don't know outside of [names her university] but like, here nobody really cares what you are, you know, they just accept you for who you are. There's even a group called [names the campus group], which is mainly based around just the idea that everybody should unite, but it's focused I think on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Leah feels similar to Dalia and believes that over time, the conflict in Israel has “probably deepened divides more.”

I think outside of Israel...I mean, I've got friends who are Muslim, or I've worked with people who are Lebanese or from the Middle East in other places. I mean, I don't really talk with them about political issues but I think there is generally a softer attitude towards things when you're not living there. So we're able to work together and it's not a tense situation or anything—outside. But I think it's obviously tenser in Israel.

For the most part, the second generation feel the same as their parents: they empathize with the Palestinian cause and want to see peace for both populations. As Zev puts it, “I don't feel anger as much because I understand their point of view as well. I mean we're obviously impeding a lot of things for them as well. Just standard of living is just horrible for them.”

Second generation Jewish Israeli Americans see themselves as different from their non-Israeli Jewish American peers, despite the fact that both groups were born and raised in America. This is due to their upbringing and having oftentimes spent great lengths of time in Israel. Zev, much like Tziporah and Liat, says, “I think an Israeli Jew is completely different from an American Jew. There's a lot more strong emotions about Israel—they support Israel a lot more. American Jews are more anti-Israel, that's what I find.”

Dalia (and also Zev) sees the main differences as being that she speaks Hebrew fluently while her Jewish peers do not, and when she was growing up, her mother naturally celebrated the Jewish holidays Israeli style, which differs from the American versions in food, customs, and song styles and sounds. More like Noam, Dalia does not see much difference between herself and Jewish Americans when it comes to the conflict. This is because many of her non-Israeli Jewish friends still have family in Israel and visit often.

I think you create your own connection, and like I already have a connection, but it's maybe not as strong as other people's connections who build their own connection because of their Jewish identity. I was like born Israeli American, like I have a connection no matter what, and I can choose to let go of it if I want. But other people who are Jewish form their own connections through their Jewish identity, and that in fact might be stronger.

Zev believes the opposite is true. "So, I mean, Jewish people living in the United States don't necessarily have to [be informed about the conflict]. They don't know as much, they're not as informed. They don't need to know as much, it's not their country."

Shai made a more complicated assessment of how Jews' (and also second generation Jewish Israelis who have not spent consequential amounts of time in Israel) relationship with Israel and the conflict differs from Israelis'. He believes it is a multi-faceted process influenced by having lived through the conflict.

*Shai:* To massively generalize, American-born Jews are far more extreme in their support of Israel than Israeli-born Jews. And the explanation to me is simply that they haven't lived there. And same with Palestinians who haven't lived in the West Bank—they tend to hold far more extreme views than people who have had the experience of both living in Israel or the West Bank and living outside and removing oneself from that pressure cooker of the Middle East.

*Interviewer:* So why do you think that difference exists? What is it about living there that changes it?

*Shai:* You're actually aware of the direct situation and how it impacts your life and the lives of people close to you in a very direct way, whereas here they're

removed from it. On the other hand...that's a very negative image of it... On the other hand being outside allows you to depressurize and to expand your sources of information and expand your sources of knowledge, to debate, to talk about this with other people who are not under that pressure. So that's a much more positive point of view.

When asked about his experiences with discrimination in the United States, Shai mentioned that he most often encounters hostility from American Jews who shout at him during Palestinian Solidarity Movement rallies.

First of all they were shouting, "anti-Semite," and when I showed them an Israeli passport or say I'm Jewish they huddle around together for a minute and then start shouting, "self-hating Jew." To me that's very much discrimination of automatic reaction. If he is a Jew he is a self-hating Jew, otherwise he's an anti-Semite because he supports Palestinians. And that to me is stereotypical discrimination.

#### ***4.3 First Generation Palestinian Americans***

When it comes to explaining why the Palestinian subjects experience discomfort about living in America, using the words of the other side—Jewish Israeli Americans—builds the strongest case. I initially asked every person about whether or not they feel the United States supports their homeland and their side in the conflict. All of my Israeli respondents acknowledged, at least to some extent, America's historical and current support of their country and military organizations. In the following question, I asked the subject if they thought their relationship with the United States and the conflict would be different if the opposite was true—for Israelis this meant the United States being explicitly pro-Palestinian. Every Jewish Israeli subject told me they would have a very hard time living here, and several indicated they would return to Israel if this were the case. Many also predicted that if there was less backing by the United States

government, it would encourage them to be more active, with the intention of gaining national support, and that it would strengthen their Israeli identity.

If America was not an Israeli ally, Liat would not be able to feel proud of her dual identity as both an Israeli and an American. She later said, “So if America was pro-Palestinian I think that I would come here, use the funding, and leave as fast as I can. And I would make more of a point to fight in Israel for like things that I think are important.” If this were the case, Dalia would “probably get in a lot more fights with people.” Going against the mainstream—as she felt she did back in her hometown where she was one of few Jews—would once again reinforce her ethnic identity and facilitate her associations with the conflict. Leah predicted a similar outcome—“I might be more politically active to try to change the way the U.S. government was focusing on the problem there.”

Now that we have seen how difficult it is for Israeli Americans to imagine living in the United States if it funded Palestinian military and economic activities instead of Israel, we can better appreciate the deep-seated anguish felt by the Palestinian Americans for whom it is a reality. The following quotes were taken from my interview with Mansur, the fifty-five year old man who has worked here for the past thirty years. I believe that his feelings about being both Palestinian and American typify the distress felt by first generation Palestinians.

Mansur believes that, “The United States is partners in the occupation of Palestine,” and this alliance is the result of guilt felt by America post-World War II for not sending out troops to stop Hitler earlier. Mansur pointed out how recently it seems as if anti-Semitism and criticism of Israel have become synonymous, and that people here

are very careful not to “antagonize the larger Jewish community.” He gave the Jewish American organizations’ reaction to Jimmy Carter’s recent book (*Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 2006) and his use of the term “apartheid” as an example. For Mansur, America’s unrelenting assistance to Israel is almost anti-American.

Israel was created in 1948. The issue is simple—it was created at the expense of another people, and that’s the Palestinians. That is a conflict for me. It is contradictory to the American principles, which is the right of people to be free of foreign domination and occupation, the right of people for self-determination, freedom, own property, own land, or whatever they do. Well, all of these things were taken away from the Palestinians, I mean from land theft by Israel. My family lost a beautiful farm. It was taken away from us a few years ago. I consider this unbelievable. How could a human being do this to another human being? We can explain and say, well, the Palestinians are doing that and doing that, but that doesn’t happen in the United States. I couldn’t pass by your house and say, that’s a beautiful house, and the next day I bring my boys and four, five people armed with M-16s and machine guns and say, we’re going to take it and they take it, it was done... I mean that’s the Old West. That only would happen and it would be allowed to happen because we are the Palestinians. We are really the underdogs. We have no defenders, we have no power. We have nothing. And then they have guns and they have the United States’ support, and they have the Europeans’ support and the United States’ military aid, economic aid, political aid, and you name it! So that’s a conflict too.

He went on to explain why all of these macro-level factors matter to him personally in his own daily life.

Another big conflict to me, and that is sort of the constant conflict, and I am sure that may be the case for many Palestinians in this country, which is conflict between us as Palestinian Americans who live in this country, who contribute. I know I contribute to this country, over thirty years of my youth entail the productive work at the top level of this society. And then I turn my back and I see the F-16 airplanes and our brown tanks killing civilians who are my family or my cousins. I have a conflict, here in this country I give everything to, and then this is the same country that is contributing to the suffering of my parents and my family, my brothers, my sisters. It is a conflict where I pay a lot of taxes and then I see these taxes, my own money, being used to subsidize a brutal regime against my family. When I looked at the farm we lost, it was protected by soldiers who were carrying American-made weapons, fenced by fences made in the United States, and cleared by Caterpillars made in the United States... So this is a constant internal conflict.



Safia believes that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is so deeply entrenched and complicated, only a third party (for example, the U.S.) has the capacity to end the conflict. And like her peers, she disapproves of the way the United States has mediated the peace process thus far.

I mean, we think the key is in America's hands. And nobody is going to give up anything willingly... And we are in a situation where you've got two children entangled and some big, fair-minded brother or mother has to come and separate them and say, this is what has to happen. And that's not a role that the United States government is playing fairly and correctly. To me it's just very unfair.

Like Mansur, Safia is discomforted by living in a nation that helps others harm her family and homeland.

I'd be so much happier living in this country knowing that my government—because this is where I will probably die, this is where I pay my taxes—was more fair-minded and more even-handed, and did not perpetuate the suffering of my people. I'd be much happier if people over here would be a little more aware of what's going on and not say, oh, if you would just stop killing Jews, as if the whole thing is just because we're killing Jews, there's no other issue involved. It's hard to constantly be on the defense. It's hard being a Palestinian living in this country. It's very hard.

Umar believes that the United States' media endorse Israel, as does the U.S. government. He gave examples to back up his claims.

I think they're not supportive of Palestinians for sure, because if they are, then they wouldn't have watched them for fifty, sixty years suffer. And are they supportive of the Israelis? I'm pretty sure they are, because that's who they give their weapons and...you know, if you support somebody with weapons against somebody else, you know that's a clear statement that I support him, not you.

When we spoke about America's support for Israel, Umar told me that he has no idea exactly why it is this way, other than it is somehow related to "personal interest of the big powers." He went on to delineate the difference between wanting America's support and wanting them to bring an end to the warfare.

I'm not saying okay America, you're siding with Israel, you're bad. Or, no America, you're siding with Palestinians, you're bad. No, no, no. Don't side with nobody! Stand in the middle! Get in the middle whether they like it or not... Get in the middle, just like you get in the middle of a lot of places out there, and stop the fighting and resolve it. You're a big power!

Gameel has a similar attitude toward America's role in the conflict, and thinks that America's relentless support of Israel only fuels and helps sustain the conflict. "I mean, I think it's disgraceful actually that our government here is not doing a better job of trying to resolve the conflict in a fair way. So it makes it hard to feel good about all the taxes one pays and everything else when they feel that." Like Umar, Gameel does not wish that the United States was pro-Palestinian instead of pro-Israel. "The thing about it is it's not about pro-this or pro-that really as much as it is about pro-making it work."

Safia thinks that in the long run, the United States' unwavering espousal of Israel will only lead to further destruction.

I don't think the United States is helping Israel by perpetuating this. They may be confiscating more land but they're certainly not helping future peace. I mean, things change in hundreds of years. If things are not good for the Palestinians, also to some degree then at some point it's going to be like this mole that keeps festering and festering. And at some point the dynamics of the world powers will change and things will not be good for the Jews in that part of the world. It's much better for them to be part of that world as opposed to saying, we're Europeans, or we're this, and we're not like those people around us... Eventually they will be ejected at some point when the superpower is no longer there. Jews are safest in the United States, I believe, because they are part of the United States' fabric. They are not a separate entity and they're part of America.

Safia also maintains that although many people try to be supportive of both groups and want an end to the conflict, the fair-minded voices are silenced. Anyone who criticizes Israel publicly is attacked by Israeli American advocacy and evangelical groups. "So the policy of the government is typically, basically, don't piss off AIPAC and don't piss off the Jerry Falwells or Pat Robertsons."

In Chapter Two we learned that Palestinian Americans make comparisons between what Jews experienced during the Holocaust and their subsequent treatment of Palestinians. Hassan and a few others also drew a parallel between the treatment of Palestinians in the homeland and African Americans in America's past, pointing to inconsistent implementations of American principles of equality.

Yeah, the non-Jew, and it's like they are second class. I mean, their needs is not like your needs, you know, blah, blah, blah, so therefore no worries, don't worry... So when you strip that human element from people then you are not going to sympathize with them... The human mind is very easy to be programmed to be honest with you... They can program it to believe that those people are worthless... They gonna look at you almost like, from here in this country, what happened to the Blacks back then. People were thinking the same thing... And unfortunately that's what happened in Israel against the Palestinians. People start thinking of the Palestinians as sub-humans... That's exactly how whites used to think of the blacks—as sub-humans. So therefore, you enslave them, you kill them, you rape them, you know, and blah, blah, blah. Big deal. They're not human.

Although Palestinian Americans reported feeling angry about America's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they also have a very strong connection to and appreciation for this country. This was especially true for first generation Palestinians, who have never had a passport or a home to lay recognized claims to, neither in Palestine nor the Arab countries to which they fled after their eviction. For them, the United States fulfilled their long-standing dreams of owning a house that no one could take away, being considered equal to all others, and having citizenship rights. As Hassan put it:

One thing about the Palestinian is, 'til I became a U.S. citizen, most Palestinians are stateless... It's not fun, you know, because when you are stateless, everywhere you go you are considered foreign. In Kuwait, even though it was an Arab country, we were foreign. They won't even grant you a permanent residence in Kuwait... So your movement is very limited... You know, when I became a U.S. citizen, that was the first time I ever felt like I belonged to a place.

What made the situation even harder for Hassan was knowing that while he can never return to Israel as a citizen, “an American Jew, if they decide to go to Israel they are granted, and even though they’ve never seen that place before, given citizenship immediately.”

Second generation Jewish Israeli American, Dalia, does not believe that America is anti-Palestinian, but after 9/11 “the country was kind of anti-Arab, a lot of people were.” This idea was expressed frequently by interview subjects, and my study would be incomplete were I not to discuss the impact of 9/11 on Palestinians’ experiences in America.

In our discussion about facing prejudice in the United States, Umar mentioned changes in his immigrant identity and interactions over time. “When I first came to this country I felt like a foreigner because I was new, period, regardless of where I’m from. But after living here for all these years I feel more support than I’ve ever felt in my life actually recently.” When I probed him for specific examples, he spoke about the very positive community reactions he got after the collapse of the World Trade Center.

When the September 11<sup>th</sup> took place, I was running a business here in Raleigh. I swear, I have never seen more support from local people. I couldn’t believe it. People that I hadn’t heard from in months were calling me to check to see if everything’s okay. And that was great, absolutely magnificent.

Hassan also reported many affirming encounters with respect to his Palestinian identity in the United States. He is a member of interfaith dialogue groups locally, as well as having his own diverse social networks. Within both he was able to talk constructively about the events of September 11th.

*Hassan:* Like for instance, we go get together, like I have some Jewish friends at work and some other Christians. We sit and we talk, and we say okay, we want to hash out issues and talk about problems and see...and we created a dialogue among us.

*Interviewer:* Do you find that tends to be the topic of conversation, or is it just one of the many things you talk about?

*Hassan:* Especially after 9/11. You see a lot of interest when it comes to the Middle East.

*Interviewer:* Is there any conflict involved usually, or everyone's pretty respectful?

*Hassan:* No, no, no. Yeah, respectful, you know, people like to know more. They ask questions of us, you know... what's going on. They start questioning, why is this happening? What do you guys stand for?

Although Hassan is able to discuss Palestinian issues within his social circles, he told me that most of the local clubs, such as the Carolina Palestinian Club, have lost membership. When I asked him why, he said that since 9/11 people have "shied out.... A lot of them are afraid, some of them believe in that conspiracy theory that they are going to fabricate what they say."

Mansur's post-9/11 encounters were very different from Umar and Hassan's. His exposure to discrimination in the United States has affected his identity as a Palestinian American, just as America's involvement in the conflict has also perturbed and influenced him.

Our family owns restaurants, and then after September 11<sup>th</sup> suddenly there were huge rumors that we were celebrating the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks! And you know what? We saw a very successful business within two days nobody comes in. Zip. Business dropped 90%. And you don't think this leaves a permanent impact on me? It does. And then we got a lot of threatening phone calls in a few days after September 11<sup>th</sup>. And why? Because we are Arab American, or Palestinian American, or Muslim American. I don't know why, but it happened, and that left a permanent impact on me...

Gameel has worked with a Jewish American, helping small groups of Palestinians, Jews, and Israelis to discuss homeland concerns, and as was mentioned

before, he makes documentaries about the conflict. Despite his willingness to speak out publicly against the occupation, he sees a lot of discrimination in the United States, especially since the outbreak of the war in Iraq.

It's hard not to feel discriminated against, especially in this current environment, with the war in Iraq and Arabs and Muslims, and this whole thing where people are nervous and I have an Arab name... I notice that when people see my name they are taken aback a little bit... And then yet there are people who are very open-minded, so I think there's both.

Safia noted that her positive experiences here with Jews (as opposed to the consistently negative ones back in Palestine during her youth) have helped alleviate her fear of and negativity towards Israelis and Jews and instead see the similarities between them.

For me, when I see the Star of David, because it's on a lot of things that usually are oppressive for me, whether it's a checkpoint with the flag, or the soldier that's doing something to you, it has such a negative impact on me when I see it. It's a negative thing. Yet when I did work with Jews for Just Peace in Chapel Hill and I'm with them in the same demonstrations, I see these wonderful ladies that I completely agree with on everything else and I love them to death, and they're wearing the Star of David. And all of the sudden it means something different to me. It's kind of a shame that this thing that represents a religion of justice and compassion, which is what it means to Jews, to a lot of people in the world that are impacted by that conflict it's an image of what was oppression for them.

Despite the shift in her viewpoint concerning Jews, Safia still sees one major difference between the two groups and believes it helps perpetuate the conflict. When I asked her what she thinks is the best solution, she said:

The best solution would be one state for everybody where everybody is equal. Everybody living there is an equal citizen, like in America, which will probably never happen because even kind, compassionate Jews, as much as they believe in the American way of democracy, they feel like when it comes to Israel it's a different story. It has to be just this little Jewish majority state. It has to be a Jewish place because that's the only way it can be safe, it's Jewish. So ideally it would be one state—that's what the ethical, moral thing is. But at least two

states that one has a chance of being a real state, not just little ghettos of Swiss cheese of pieces of land.

As far as generational differences in reacting to the conflict are concerned, for Umar it goes back to the split between those who personally suffered and those who have lived only in the United States. He noted how distance from and depersonalization of the conflict tempers one's response to it.

At one time, when I was growing up, the best solution was fight, fight, fight until you get your home back... Put any wild animal in a cage and see the response. He fights and fights, even though he knows he's in a cage. But then listen to the ones that are in the United States responding to what's taking place these days and you're going to see a lot less want to do, because they realize the reality... The difference is one sympathizes with you and one feels the pain more.

Mansur thinks that another reason why the second generation relates to the conflict differently is their upbringing in a more stable and predictable society. He spoke about his hardships in traveling back to and within Palestine, and he then added, "I personally did not mind, but the kids, like every time I'd take them they were searched. They get used to the freedom and the luxury of the United States and it is sort of difficult. So now we go every three years, four years. It's really not as frequent as it used to be before."

Gameel has a more optimistic outlook on the future of the conflict, due to the characteristics of the second generation who have grown up in democratic America. They have not experienced the same depressing statelessness of their parents and thus feel more equipped to actualize change in the Israeli-occupied territories.

I think that in the second generation there's more hope for them to make a change because they're not afraid like their parents might have been, because they've grown up as Americans and they know that they have rights, up until now maybe—that they are capable of making change, of using their politicians to

effect that change and to talk about the situation. So I think that yes, they're much more empowered and are continuing to become more empowered.

#### ***4.4 Second Generation Palestinian Americans***

Like Hassan, Burhan knows what it is like to be stateless. Because of his experiences as a refugee in Kuwait, where he was looked down on and given no rights, he has come to despise the idea of national borders. Asim told a very similar story. He also came to the United States from Kuwait with refugee status. After all of his struggles, he has concluded that instead of claiming a national identity, it is easier to "be a Muslim and not really mess with this thing, because this is what politics does, it creates confusion and prejudices." When he was a young adult, Burhan secured a visa to attend college in the United States, at which time he came to Raleigh. He remembers walking the streets of downtown, noting the cultural norms of Americans.

I would look through the store fronts to see how people eat. Do they eat like me? I've always had an impression of Americans being completely different than us. And I've always been, since I was a little kid, the entire world is a playground for me... I never believed and recognized borders. I've always felt that they were made by men, manned by men to control man... So I was here and that experience...when I came here by the way, I couldn't go back to Kuwait anymore. That's that. Nobody will take me and the United States could actually pick me up and deport me and they don't know where to go with me. There's no other country would accept me.

Becoming an American citizen was a turning point for Burhan, as it marked the first time he could freely travel the globe. "When I first got my American passport you could've offered me a billion dollars or the passport and I would've taken the passport. I never felt free in my life until that day because I can put that passport in my pocket and travel and go anywhere. And I did!"



As well as serving as a board member of the American Anti-Arab Discrimination Committee and being affiliated with the American Arab Institute, Ahmed is currently president of a local Palestinian organization. As Hassan mentioned before, the activities of the group have declined over time and it has been almost inactive for the past three years. The group was originally created to help local Palestinians retain a sense of their community and culture, especially for their Americanized children who otherwise may not even learn to speak Arabic. This club, and more recently the Islamic Center of Raleigh and its associated school (to which several respondents, including Yasir, send their children), serve as social institutions that reinforce ethnic practices and identities, much as the synagogue and Jewish youth groups do for the Israeli American subjects and their children.

Most of the younger members of this respondent group are to some degree involved in on-campus groups pertaining to their ethnicity or the conflict, such as the Muslim Student Association and the Middle Eastern North African Student Association. Naimah takes Arabic classes to help her communicate within Arab nations and with her extended family (her parents continue to live in Kuwait). Hana noted that "...every [campus] event that I see about the conflict or that's Palestinian related, I try to attend." Adara spoke about the strong associations between the Jewish student group, Hillel, and the Arab or Muslim groups at her university, and how they create dialogues and events in support of a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Raya told me that she is so heavily involved in her college's Hillel, "I'm pretty much the honorary Jew."

Adara made an important distinction in reference to the preceding pattern. She differentiates between Jewish Americans who support Palestinian rights and

“...somebody who is a Zionist, for example, who’s just so strong in Israel’s right to exist that they just want to wipe out the Palestinians. There’s no way you can see eye-to-eye with somebody like that.” Naimah also has trouble understanding and dealing with people who think this way. “I meet some Jewish people and they totally support Zionism, and I think, how can you support it on a...you know, human rights level?”

When asked for an example of the latter kind of Jewish American, Adara provided the following case.

I have a Palestine necklace that’s in the shape of the country and it’s got the flag on it. I wear that a lot. And one guy saw it and he’s like, oh so you’re Israeli? I was like, no, I am actually Palestinian. He’s like, there’s no such thing as Palestine, and he tried to get into an argument with me. He was Israeli and this was at work actually. My manager was like, just let it go, don’t deal with it. People are just very adamant when they find out you’re Palestinian. They just want to prove you wrong and get you all riled up for no reason.

Hana has encountered similar types of prejudice.

For me it’s tough because it’s like, I am a Palestinian American, but then I feel like not as many people really...they may have heard of Palestine but they don’t recognize it...People don’t always recognize it as an actual country. They just think of the conflict and they don’t think of the positives of this group of people. And I just feel like there’s no recognition.

Adara is also distressed by the United States at the institutional level, and believes that the American foreign policy in general is misguided.

I think it needs to be looked at and revised. I think it’s very biased against the Palestinian people. The U. S. government supports the Israeli government. They give them money. A lot of the tax money goes to the Israeli government, to the IDF, which is the Israeli Defense Force. It goes straight to them, the weapons that they’re using to kill all these Palestinians and to destroy their homes is funded by the American government. So it’s definitely an issue for me.

The overall impression that the second generation has of U.S. involvement in the conflict is echoed in the sentiments of Adara, and also those previously expressed by the

first generation. Their main conviction is summed up well by Yasir: “It’s in the national interest of this country to support Israel... This is my land and I care about it a lot, and it hurts me that the government are one-sided.” As to why they think the U.S. provides support to Israel, these subjects mentioned a range of possibilities, from the influence of the Jewish lobby, to economic interests (such as access to oil) in the Middle East, to speculations about Christian fundamentalism and the prophesized Rapture.<sup>1</sup>

Much like the others, Asim and Josef feel conflicted about living in a land that does little to stop the affliction of their people. Asim avowed, “I feel like honestly, honestly, truly, the U.S. politics do have a lot to do with the conflict. The U.S. politics could have a very good role in ending this conflict.” Josef elaborated:

...There is a sense that if the U.S. really wanted things to be different there, then they could exert enough pressure that things could be different there. I mean, with the billions of dollars of aid that we send over there and the military support, you know if things really wanted to be different they could issue enough leverage to make it different. So there’s a sense that they don’t want things to be a whole lot different.

Josef believes that Americans are given a misleading image of Palestinians and Israelis. He maintains that knowing the actual history of the land is an important step in promoting a fair resolution. He referred to early Zionist activist groups, such as Irgun, and events like Deir Yassin,<sup>2</sup> to support his contention that Jews were the ones “who initially imported terrorism into the Middle East... And so there’s a history that a fair

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<sup>1</sup> The Rapture refers to the Christian belief that Jesus will one day return to the earth and save his followers from the oncoming apocalypse which will destroy mankind and the earth. For more information, please refer to Amy Johnson Frykholm’s 2004 book, *Rapture Culture, Left Behind in Evangelical America*.

<sup>2</sup> Irgun was a militant Zionist group operating in Palestine between 1931 and 1948. Their attacks were mainly aimed at the British authorities and Palestinian inhabitants, as they fought for every Jew’s right to live in the Holy Land. The Deir Yassin massacre was an event carried out by Irgun and also the Stern group on the village of Deir Yassin, which had declared its neutrality during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Between 107 and 120 Arab villagers, mostly women, children and the elderly, were killed. A Jewish settlement was built partially over the village afterwards. For more information, please refer to Noam Chomsky’s 1999 book, *Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel and the Palestinians*.

number of people have, most of the U.S. does not have, that recognizes that this is not a group of barbaric, hedonistic, terroristic Palestinians fighting these poor Israelis who are just trying to have a place to live.” Facing these stereotypes has shaped Josef over time, making him more “willing to speak out about things.” He has transformed from being “embarrassed to being proud, to being primarily just angry and feeling futile, to a sense that things could change and things can change.”

Ahmed made an important point about the shifting image of America in the Middle East and how this change bears upon him as a individual who feels connected to his ethnic identity as both a Palestinian and as an American.

I hate the connection that I have to America whenever I go overseas. And especially with the War in Iraq it makes it even worse. People overseas cannot understand why is America teddy-bearing Israel so bad, to the point that people have all kinds of theories about Israelis running the U.S... You know, when I first came here I used to go every year once or twice, and my nephews and nieces were like, oh Uncle, how is America? So beautiful, we want to go there. And in the past few years they look at me and say, we just cannot understand why you would live in such a hateful country.

Asim touched upon the important theme of belonging and notions of ethnicity and identity when I asked him how he identifies himself.

...I'm a U.S. citizen, yes. Because you know, as soon as you say U.S. citizen they say, yeah I know that, where are you really from? Usually it's more appropriate to say where you are originally from than to say U.S. citizen. That's the challenge we go through as foreign Americans, particularly as Palestinians.

His reflections speak to the meaningful differences between self-ascribed identities and those which are imposed by others, showing how both types matter for how we view ourselves and our social status.

Yasir, Asim, and Adara all mentioned their personal encounters with discrimination in America, but their feelings and experiences proved to be typical

amongst my Palestinian subjects. Yasir spoke about living as a Palestinian in a post-September 11<sup>th</sup> nation. “Our wives here, harassed in the shopping centers and malls...the wives more than us because they are marked [by wearing traditional Muslim veils]. You know, they get flipped the finger, and for us you get comments, ‘Why don’t you go back home?’” Asim added the following.

You know like when black people say you don’t know what it’s like to have gone through slavery or walk around as a black person? I remember that right after 9/11 I suddenly had a feeling that now I see what black people...like everywhere you are, you understand. Like at the airport, they’ll be in your luggage and everyone is looking at you differently. That feeling sucks. All the sudden everybody looks at you and you are afraid.

Adara has faced people who accept the media-driven stereotype which equates Palestinian with terrorist, and she has also encountered many Americans who recognize that these stereotypes cannot and should not be applied at the individual level.

*Adara:* Well, dealing with people State-side, a lot of people just have the mentality that all Palestinians are terrorists. So when I say I’m Palestinian to somebody, it kind of takes them by shock because they’re like, well you’re not a terrorist. So it’s just hard to identify with it because people always have this preset mentality of what they think you are, and then when they meet you and they see that you’re nothing like what they think, it’s just hard to deal with that.

*Interviewer:* So how do you think that affects your identity? Does it make you think of your Palestinian identity more?

*Adara:* Definitely. It makes me even prouder to be who I am and to just break all these stereotypes left and right. Because there were so many people after September 11<sup>th</sup> who came up to me and were like, we know that whoever’s responsible, we know that all Muslims or all Arabs are not like this. Because they knew who I was. So it makes me a stronger person and it makes me so much more proud of who I am and my heritage.

Hana recalled for me some similar experiences.

*Hana:* ...If I’m talking to somebody online, like on a message board, and I mention that I’m Palestinian American, then it’s like, oh my god, terrorist, terrorist, you know? It’s jokingly, but still, for me it’s like, you have no idea. You know, you’re completely clueless and you shouldn’t just assume these things or say it at all...

*Interviewer:* When people say stuff like that, how does it affect your connection to the conflict?

*Hana:* It sort of strengthens me with other Arabs and Palestinians, and maybe with more of the cliché American stereotype type people, I sort of isolate myself from them...but then I also want to educate them too. So I think it overall strengthens me because it makes me voice my opinions and my thoughts and my knowledge more than it used to.

Hana and Adara's sentiments bring us back to those discussed at the beginning of the Palestinian section of this chapter, when I quoted Israeli subjects about how they would feel if America was pro-Palestinian. Dalia and Leah both said they would feel more of an urge to act on behalf of Israel in this case, in order to help garner support for their people, and how facing discrimination would actually strengthen their ethnic identity as they worked to reject and disprove stereotypes and discrimination. In the prior words of both of these Palestinian American women, we see these anticipated reactions in action.

Ahmed had an unusual encounter with a Jewish American at an International Festival in Raleigh about five years ago.

I was sitting at the Palestinian booth and of course with my Palestinian outfit on. And a lady comes by and she was like, hi, how are you? And she was very anxious to talk to someone. And I was talking to her and she was like, you know what? She was like, I'm Jewish. I was like, it's alright, I'm Muslim, you're Jewish. And she's like, no, I want to tell you. I went to Israel/Palestine last year, and my husband and I were very pro-Israeli. We just hated anything called Palestinian. And I was like, okay, I might be the wrong person to tell that to, but okay [he laughs]. And then she was like, but we stayed there. One month later we moved from Tel Aviv to Ramallah and we became pro-Palestinian, anti-Israeli. And I was like, whoa, what happened? She was like, we witnessed, on the ground, what was happening, what was going on. She was like, we did not have to do more than reading the Ma'ariv and Yediot Ha'anot, and these things opened our minds... So here's a woman that of course has nothing to do with the conflict, I would say, and she still was very Zionist. And she went there and converted 180 degrees. That's how people educated people about the truth...and that's how the conflict does affect peoples' mentality.

This encounter taught Ahmed that not all Jewish Americans are adamant supporters of Israel, and it reinforces the idea I have argued throughout—that having direct experiences with and connections to the conflict has a definite impact on identity. He repeated this notion again moments later, in his discussion of the contested death of American activist, Rachel Corrie,<sup>3</sup> who was killed during a PSM demonstration in Palestine. “This incident did not even make it to the media; however, everybody that’s related to her converted in the sense of their direction. If they were pro they became anti-Israeli because of this sort of actions. And that’s how the conflict really affects the people and how they view it themselves.”

Burhan had an encounter similar to Ahmed.

I was talking to an Israeli journalist at one of the universities here. He came and introduced himself after I gave a lecture to a group of students. He is an Israeli, he grew up in a kibbutz. And his impression of Palestinians is that they need to be killed, eliminated, wiped out. Nobody should survive, or driven off the land. He went to Tel Aviv to the university to study journalism. And he said, I started reading from Edward Said. And he said, I was so angry at all the lies I was told about the Palestinians. He was so mad that recently he was involved in a play where he portrayed himself as a Palestinian, and the Palestinian portrayed himself as an Israeli soldier.

Hana also believes she has been very well-received as a Palestinian American. She thinks these positive interactions are linked to her generational status. Also, they differentiate her from her first generation parents, who personally experienced suffering at the hands of Jews.

...I haven’t met any Jewish people that when they find out I am Palestinians have any anger. And I think it’s because our generation has been raised to sort of look at everything in an open-minded way. Looking at it as if what’s happening right

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<sup>3</sup> Rachel Corrie was an American youth activist who was run over and killed in 2003 while trying to protect a Palestinian house from being demolished by an Israeli driving an American bulldozer. For more information, please refer Edward Said’s forward in the 2004 book, *Peace Under Fire: Israel/Palestine and the International Solidarity Movement*, by Josie Sandercock et al.

now, this was our fathers' generation that has so much anger and rage and fighting.

Like Hana, Raya sees some generational differences in her sense of belonging in America and in her Palestinian identity. When I asked her if she has ever considered moving to Palestine, she told me:

I think that I belong in America because, and I always debate with my parents about this, but I think that if I go over there, no matter what they're going to think that I'm not one of them. No one will ever accept me...because I'm American, because I am different. Even the way I speak. And I really think, I feel like I belong in America because this is my culture, to a certain extent, and I feel accepted here. What's unique about America is that...if you're born in America, you're American.

She sees things differently from her parents, and also from the first generation Palestinian Americans already quoted. These exiled sojourners will always see Palestine as their real home, where they truly belong.

Yasir, like the others, has not suffered much discrimination in the United States; however, he is concerned about America's continuing attitude towards Arabs and Muslims, especially considering its current relations with Iraq and other Middle Eastern Arab nations. His fears are somewhat reminiscent of the anxieties we heard from some Israeli American subjects in Chapter Two. They similarly expressed worry about the future possibility of another wave of anti-Semitism and the end of America's support.

You know, to tell you the truth, I am American now, but I'm not comfortable 100%. What happened in the past, with the Japanese in the concentration camps, at any minute another Bin Laden will arise from somewhere and do something stupid. And who pays for it? Everybody who looks like me, everybody who looks like my wife with the veil, my kids... Although we've been living here, paying taxes, been in this country, all of our kids, that's all they know this country, we have businesses... This is not going to help us by an ignorant... I mean we've had very little of it, but I'm afraid the next one is going to be a total mess... The first time, in 2001, we had very few comments, very few people bothered us, and a lot of people called and asked to help us—Americans. They



offered their sympathy, their help...neighbors, parents on the kids' soccer teams, business associates, stuff like that, and they were nice. I'm afraid half of these people will change their mind if anything happens again.

Burhan elaborated on this theme brought up repeatedly in the interviews, of how having direct involvement deepens the impact of conflict on one's identity. This argument was made mostly on the basis of how the conflict is more salient for the identities of the first generation—as they had immediate experiences with it—as opposed to their children raised in the United States. Like Tziporah and many others we have heard from, Burhan broadens this assertion and brings it to a global level, noting how in today's world we are simply not as isolated from one another as we want to believe we are. And like many other respondents, Burhan thinks that if people were more aware of and concerned about the suffering of others—as opposed to viewing them as foreign, distant Others—then the world's ethnic conflicts would be more easily resolved.

Israelis are not suffering like the Palestinians. The vast majority, maybe the ones that are close to the West Bank or some of the settlements, but proper Israel truly don't know what's going on in Gaza and the West Bank. They don't see the suffering. It is just like us here in the United States. Most Americans truly might sympathize with something, a cause or another, but because it's not directly impacting our lives and our security and our safety, we don't do anything. We sympathize. We sympathize with the Iraqis. We sympathized with the Rwandans when they got massacred—one million of them got killed—but that's all we do, because it doesn't impact me sitting here having a great cup of coffee talking to you. It doesn't impact me buying things and going on vacations. It doesn't take anything away from me. And that is so selfish. If that is the only way you can feel the pain of other people...the pain is going to come to us because it is going to spread.

In alignment with the conflict theory, Burhan believes that the solution to the conflict in Israel/Palestine is simply increased interaction and interdependence.

There are different groups right now because there's boundaries that have been put up to separate the people. And as you separate people from each other the become more...when you have very little contact with a group of people, you

don't trust them. Let me give you a scenario. Imagine there is a Palestinian state and there's Israel, open borders... What happens is commerce, money. Money solves and erases a lot of history. Common interests will make you friends. Why? Because that is the human nature of things.

#### ***4.5 Conclusions***

In this chapter, I noted that Jewish Israeli Americans are cognizant and appreciative of America's pro-Zionist stance and the power of the Jewish lobby in America. They also recognize that these two elements matter enormously for Israel's strength and survival. In comparing generations, first generation Jewish Israelis (as we have repeatedly seen in the previous chapters) experience a stronger connection to Israel despite having emigrated, because they lived through the conflict there. This is reflected in their articulated feelings, their social networks both in the U.S. and Israel, and their involvement in ethnic and religious organizations. In contrast, their children report that they are not very involved in these kinds of social organizations and feel less connected to Israel than their parents, as America, for them, is home.

Palestinian Americans face an unusual predicament as they confront their oppositional feelings towards their host country of America. On the one hand, they are incredibly grateful for finally belonging somewhere and being granted civil rights and citizenship—a cherished status they were previously denied by Israel and the surrounding Arab nations they were exiled to as refugees. Despite this gratitude towards America, they cannot escape the guilt that comes with knowing that their hard-earned new freedoms come with a price they must literally pay, in the form of taxes that go towards funding the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

## 5. Conclusion

In assessing the claims and contributions of this dissertation, it is useful to begin by restating the central aims of my analyses. First and foremost, I wanted to examine the relationship between ethnic identity and conflict, and more specifically, determine whether or not identity is affected by homeland conflict post-migration. This initial query stemmed from a response I had to Tilly's 2002 work in *Stories, Identities, and Political Change*, where he argued that identity is primarily influenced by conflict at the actual site, and away from the center of the conflict it tends to dissipate.

Having studied in Israel and having known several Jewish Israeli and Palestinian Americans throughout my life, I questioned whether or not this assertion was always accurate, as the ones I had encountered were constantly discussing and reflecting on the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was clear to me that this conflict continued to be an integral part of their lives in the United States, and it seemed to me that it played a significant role in how they saw themselves as Jewish Israelis or Palestinian Americans.

As well as wanting to determine whether or not my own observations would be substantiated through interviews, I was also curious to see if and in what ways the conflict influenced the lives and identities of the second generation—the American-born children of these Palestinians and Jewish Israelis who grew up in a conflict-ridden society.

Based on my own prior knowledge and pertinent literature in the fields of Israel/Palestine, ethnic conflict and identity, transnationalism, assimilation, and social

memory, I decided to formulate my research agenda and consequent analyses around three fundamental issues related to diasporic identity and homeland conflict: personal descriptions and understandings of conflict; access and usage of information about homeland conflict; and migration experiences and reception in the United States.

As for the first area—definitions of homeland conflict and subsequent effects on ethnic identity—I discovered support for the idea that conflict in the country of origin, both that which was personally experienced in the past and ongoing events, does have a discernible impact on the individual and her or his diasporic identity. In my examination of differences by generational status and ethnic group, I drew several conclusions.

Generational differences were notable in the degree to which the conflict in Israel/Palestine influences the subjects' current lives. Both first generation Jewish Israeli and Palestinian Americans had a stronger connection to the conflict and homeland than their children. This is mainly because they lived through the conflict, were raised and socialized within a culture that was always discussing and dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, and retained vivid memories of terrifying episodes of conflict. Secondly, they remain more connected to the conflict because the nuclear family unit they grew up in were usually still living in the homeland, and thus they were concerned for their safety. I discovered that the second generation also feel strongly attached to the ongoing conflict (albeit less so than the first generation), and the main mechanism that binds them to it are their parents, with their shared memories and firsthand stories.

Variations by ethnic group in defining and relating to homeland conflict were mainly centered on the degree to which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affected their day-to-day lives and what kinds of violence they most often encountered. Jewish

Israelis mentioned things like suicide bombings, the Intifadas, and military service when describing their understandings of conflict, and frequently mentioned how conflict in Israel was just one aspect of their lives and did not consume their entire existence. In contrast, conflict pervaded every aspect of Palestinians' lives in the homeland—from their daily routines, which were encumbered by military checkpoints and ever-moving blockades, to their lack of citizenship rights and personal freedoms. They also endured the traumatizing experience of being forced out of their homes, to which they are still unable to return. Surviving in an impoverished community which was often described as a virtual prison, alongside retaining personal memories of being denied basic civil liberties and access to their own homes, is an experience that is not easily forgotten, despite moving far away.

The second generation members of both ethnic groups were not born in the homeland and lack this emigrant/refugee past. For the most part, they only know their lives in America. Their relatively weaker, yet still strong, concern for Palestine/Israel and its safety and future reflects both their homeland attachment and their generational status.

The second main area, discussed in Chapter Three, was ethnic and generational differences in accessing information about homeland conflict. I observed that subjects predominantly relied on two major types of resources—personal connections to individuals still living within the homeland and mass media. The first generation, with their more extensive homeland social networks, used people in Israel/Palestine more often to acquire information than did their less-connected children, and they also used more homeland-based and international media sources. This was due, in part, to their

greater Arab/Hebrew language skills and their comfort and familiarity with Middle Eastern news, while their Americanized children usually watched mainstream American sources or relied on their parents to get information about homeland conflict. And secondly, as I anticipated, the first generation made more frequent use of and were more emotionally impacted by reports on the conflict than were their children.

As for contrasts by ethnic group, Palestinian Americans were somewhat more aware of and burdened by the conflict than Jewish Israeli Americans, as it remains a never-ending daily issue of concern for their people. This is in contrast to the more intermittent experiences with hardship and violence that most Jewish Israelis reported. As I mentioned before, all but one first generation Palestinian American mentioned that they are “informed daily” and are “totally informed,” while only three Jewish Israelis of the first generation get news on a daily basis and only one felt “totally informed.” The range of how informed they thought they were was much larger for members of both generations in the Palestinian American population.

Despite this slight differentiation by ethnic group, it is important to acknowledge the strong diasporic identity effects resulting from the conflict. The most important conclusion drawn from this third chapter was congruent with that of the second chapter—all members of these two ethnic groups made concerted efforts to remain informed about current conflict in the homeland, and all were significantly influenced by the state of the conflict, despite their distance from it. Once again, it was clear that perceptions of homeland conflict were significant for identity formation and maintenance processes.

My analysis of the overriding third theme of Chapter Four—transnational identities and host country experiences—again brings us back to the central conclusions

of this study. I found additional evidence that immigrants, especially the first generation who grew up in the country of origin, maintain social ties to the homeland after migration and build ethnic communities in their new home—the United States. The second generation were less involved in homeland-based organizations, as they felt more American than their parents, but again it was clear that ongoing homeland conflict did have an effect on their diasporic identity.

When it came to differing elements of their lives in the United States, both macro and micro-level factors proved to matter for both groups' identities. Examples of pertinent macro issues were America's past and present support of Israel and its military actions brought against Palestinians. Interpersonal interactions between the two groups and with Americans at large were commonly-mentioned micro-level instances of importance.

Palestinians were unanimous in describing how they are distressed by living in a country that partially funds (and thus perpetuates) the conflict in their homeland, while they also greatly love and appreciate their new country, with its guaranteed freedoms and personal rights. Jewish Israelis are grateful for the historical and continuing assistance provided to Israel by the United States, and believe it is necessary to secure the future existence of Israel as an independent nation. When it came to personally-experienced discrimination and reception, I discovered that both populations had both types of encounters, although Palestinians additionally expressed how the mass media, with their bias against Muslims and Arabs, made an occasional difference in their treatment by Americans. They also claimed that this prejudice against their group has made it more

difficult for Palestinians to advocate on behalf of their homeland. This was contrasted with the significant power of the Jewish and Israeli lobby in the United States.

Although my study found explicit support for the idea that one does not necessarily have to be directly involved in an ethnic conflict for it to affect their identity, it is important to note that my examination and conclusions are novel. I have just begun to scratch the surface of a new theme and issue in the field of ethnicity and identity. The study has made several accomplishments and valuable contributions. It has presented new ways of understanding and examining identity. My approach fits well within an increasingly interconnected world, where transnationalism has instigated new ways of understanding identity and recognition of its multiplicity. The impact of globalization and transnational communities are the inevitable future of ethnic identity studies, and this analysis offers a vital contribution to a burgeoning literature.

Besides adding to studies of ethnic and diasporic identities, my work also incorporates qualitative methodologies underused by social scientists. I relied on personal narratives, accounts, and social memories to inductively explore how individuals do identity and boundary work, using people's own words to explain the intricate processes involved. I argue that balancing out the power differentials between researcher and subject, by using in-depth, open-ended interviewing techniques, is an important step towards gaining a more accurate and deeper understanding of identity, and towards promoting progress in the social sciences.

Despite the many contributions of this study, it is in part limited by its depth and scope. Class and gender are two main issues that I did not deal with extensively,



and I believe they are important factors to explore in examining identity. In the next stage of my analyses, I will create new questions which explore how individuals' socioeconomic status and gender influence their connections to the conflict.

The overall reliability and generalizability of my conclusions can be better determined by expanding the research to a broader sample. I plan to continue this examination by accruing a larger and more diverse sample. Now that I have established initial support for my hypotheses and know that the research questions work within the context of the study, I can try it again elsewhere. This will assist me in gathering a more heterogeneous sample that accurately reflects the diverse range in Jewish Israeli American and Palestinian American identity as it relates to homeland conflict. It is as yet unverified whether or not my conclusions will hold up once I go beyond the Triangle region of North Carolina. I need to determine if the observable identity effects by distant conflict are unique to this local community or if they accurately reflect these populations nationwide.

The next step will involve locating a new sample in the greater Dayton, Ohio area, as I will be moving there this summer and have already discovered that there is at least a strong Jewish and Muslim community there. I will use the same approach of contacting local religious and ethnic organizations and community programs once I arrive. Should this region prove inadequate in size or variance, there are three extremely ethnically diverse cities well within reach of Dayton—Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Columbus.

I want to include greater variety in the personal attributes of my sample, beyond geographical location. In this study, it was extremely difficult to locate first

generation Palestinian American women who were willing to speak with me, and so there was not equal gender representation within this group of respondents. The overall distribution ratio of males to females was also unbalanced. Locating a larger pool of potential subjects will resolve this issue and assist me in establishing that the conclusions are generalizable.

As I mentioned before, I do believe that gender, and also class, need to be examined as part of understanding conflict and identity. Although there was a broad range of occupations and income in the sample, there was certainly a predominance of highly educated and mostly middle to upper-class people. This was partly because of the high proportion of well-educated individuals living in the Triangle area, and also because of the types of contacts I was able to make and the kind of person that felt comfortable speaking openly with me about such complex and intense topics. Again, I will attempt to overcome these limitations by connecting to a much larger community.

Once I conduct a new set of interviews in a different region of the United States, I will be able to further determine how and in what ways perceptions of conflict affect identity. The ways we see ourselves, others, and our place within the social structure are highly linked to the groups we are attached to and within which we belong. The conflicts we face as part of a group, the way our people are viewed and presented to the rest of the world, and the related experiences we have in our homes, both old and new, all work to shape our identities, our life chances, and also the future course of ethnicity.

**Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics for Whole Sample (N = 29)**

	<b>Jewish Israeli Americans</b>		<b>Palestinian Americans</b>	
	<b>First Generation (9)</b>	<b>Second Generation (6)</b>	<b>First Generation (5)</b>	<b>Second Generation (9)</b>
<b>Mean Age</b>	<b>40.9</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>45<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>33.6</b>
<b>Sex:</b>				
<b>Male</b>	4 (44%)	3 (50%)	4 (80%)	5 (56%)
<b>Female</b>	5 (56%)	3 (50%)	1 (20%)	4 (44%)
<b>Married:</b>				
<b>Yes</b>	8 (89%)	2 <sup>2</sup> (33%)	5 (100%)	4 (44%)
<b>No</b>	1 (11%)	4 (67%)	0	5 (56%)
<b>Children:</b>				
<b>Yes</b>	7 (avg of 2.4) <sup>3</sup>	0	5 (avg of 3)	4 (avg of 4)
<b>No</b>	2	6	0	5
<b>Education (average level)</b>	17.4 years	17 years	17 years	15.7 years
<b>Religion:</b>				
<b>Jewish</b>	8 (89%)	3 (50%)		
<b>Muslim</b>			4 (80%)	6 (67%)
<b>Christian</b>				2 (22%)
<b>Other</b>				
<b>Non-practicing</b>	1 (11%)	3 (50%)	1 (20%)	1 (11%)
<b>Frequency of Contact with People in Homeland:</b>				
<b>Several Times a Week</b>	5 (56%)	1 (17%)	1 (20%)	0
<b>Once a Week</b>	3 (33%)	0	2 (40%)	0
<b>Few Times a Year</b>	1 (11%)	5 (83%)	2 (40%)	9 (100%)
<b>Frequency of Contact with Ethnic Group Members Here:</b>				
<b>Several Times a Week</b>	6 (67%)	5 (83%)	5 (100%)	8 (89%)
<b>Once a Week</b>	2 (22%)	0	0	1 (11%)
<b>Few Times a Year</b>	1 (11%)	1 (17%)	0	0
<b>Average Number of Visits (Since Migration):</b>				
<b>0-5</b>		1 (17%)	1 (20%)	7 (78%)
<b>6-10</b>	3 (33%)	4 (66%)	1 (20%)	2 (22%)
<b>11 or more</b>	6 (67%)	1 (17%)	3 (60%)	
<b>Identifies Country of Origin as their Main Homeland</b>	9 (100%)	1 (17%)	5 (100%)	8 (89%)
<b>Sees Homeland Conflict as Main Homeland Issue</b>	9 (100%)	5 (83%)	5 (100%)	9 (100%)

<sup>1</sup> Safia does not reveal her actual age but says she is 30-something. I averaged her specific age as 35 to get the sample mean.

<sup>2</sup> Sasha identifies her partner as her spouse.

<sup>3</sup> Liat is pregnant with her first child.

## **Table 2. Interview Questionnaire**

### Demographics:

What is your current age?

Are you married or single? Have you been married before? How many times?

Do you have any children or dependents? If not, do you plan on having children?

What languages do you speak?

What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

Are you an American citizen? Are you a permanent resident? Do you have a visa?

What do you identify yourself as—ethnically or racially?

Do you practice a religion? If yes, what denomination are you? Did your family practice a religion when you were growing up? (*If married*) Does your spouse practice any religion? (*If they have kids*) Do your kids?

Where were you born? (*Family background*)

How long have you lived in the United States?

If not for your entire life, name all of the places where you have lived prior to living in the United States?

Do you see Israel/Palestine as your homeland?

How often, if ever, do you visit there?

Do you think that you will eventually return to Israel/Palestine?

Question #1: What are some homeland issues that are important to you as a Palestinian/Jewish Israeli living in the United States? How would you rank them in order of importance to you as a Palestinian/Israeli American? (If conflict is not mentioned) Is homeland conflict something you think about a lot as a Palestinian/Jewish Israeli in the United States? Where would that fall in your ranking?

Question #2: *Since living in America*, please describe for me a homeland event that you consider to be an instance of conflict. What types of activity would fit with your concept of conflict in Israel/Palestine? (If they still do not have an answer) Which type of homeland event best fits with your concept of conflict—A) Military occupation of land and homes, B) denial of civil liberties, C) military-related violence, or D) a bus bombing?

Question #3: Now describe for me your reactions and feelings surrounding such an occurrence of conflict. Would you say that these feelings represent your typical reaction to homeland conflict? If not, how would you describe your usual reaction to conflict in general?

Question #4: What is it about this specific type of conflict that makes it significant to you even though you no longer live there?

Question #5: In what ways, if any, do you think that conflict in Israel/Palestine affects the way you think of yourself?

Question #6: Does the conflict make any of the boundaries/divides between different groups stronger for you? To give you some potential examples—Jewish versus Israeli, Palestinian versus Arab, Palestinian versus Jewish Israeli, Palestinian/Jewish Israeli versus Palestinian/Jewish Israeli American, Palestinian American versus Jewish Israeli American.

Question #7: In regards to the group divide, please describe some of the significant differences between you and someone in the other group.

Question #8: Can you come up with any ways that you think an instance of conflict would have a different impact on you as compared to someone in the other group?

Question #9: Do you think there is any connection between your opinions and reactions to homeland conflict and the history of your people?

Question #10: Do you think that your attitudes and feelings about homeland conflict are different now than in the past, based on your current lifestyle and stage in life?

Question #11: Please list for me your membership in any organizations related to being a Palestinian/Israeli/Jew/Arab/Palestinian American/Jewish Israeli American. (If they cannot think of any) A few examples of organizations are: religious institutions or groups—like a synagogue/mosque or prayer group, organizations supporting relations between America and Palestine/Israel, programs aimed at developing peace between Palestinians and Jews, and college campus groups. On average, how often would you say you are typically actively involved in these organizations—every day, every week or so, every month or so, a few times a year, or once a year or less?

Question #12: Please describe for me your personal connections (such as family members or friends) with people linked to Palestine or Israel, both here in America and there. On average, how often would you say you are typically in contact with them? Can you estimate how many of these people know each other? If you had to make your best guess, what percentage of your personal connections here in the U.S. are to other people linked to Israel/Palestine?

Question #13: How do you receive information about conflict in Palestine/Israel? Which source do you think you most often rely upon, and how much of the time?

Question #14: On average, which of the following best represents how *often* you are informed about homeland conflict—every day, every week or so, every month or so, a few times a year, or never? As far as keeping up to date on homeland conflict, do you feel that you are most often uninformed, somewhat informed, mostly informed, or totally informed?

Question #15: For the next two questions, I am asking you to compare yourself to someone (*for first generation*) whose parents lived in Israel/Palestine but they're American-born **or** (*for second generation*) who lived in Israel/Palestine. Do you think that there are differences between you and someone in the other category in how you access information about homeland conflict? Do you think that there are differences in how you react to information about homeland conflict? And now, comparing yourself to someone like a Jewish/Arab American, someone who is still connected but less directly, do you think there are any differences in these same two areas?

Question #16: (*For first generation immigrants*) If there were any, please describe for me a few experiences you had while living in Palestine/Israel that continue to influence your connection to the conflict there today. (*For second generation immigrants only*) Do you think that your attitudes and feelings about homeland conflict were changed by any specific events?

Question #17: Now please describe for me any interactions you've had during your childhood or adulthood with people here in America that you feel have either strengthened or weakened your connection to homeland conflict. (*If they need a prompt—for example, experiencing reception or discrimination.*)

Question #18: Is there anything about America's historical and/or current involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is important for how you personally relate to it as a Palestinian/Israeli American?

Question #19: Is there anything about the mass media coverage of the conflict that matters for how you personally relate to it as a Palestinian/Israeli American?

Question #20: Do you feel that the United States has been supportive of Palestinians and/or Jewish-Israelis? If not, do you think that your connection to the homeland conflict would be different if you lived in a pro-Palestinian and/or pro-Jewish-Israeli nation? If yes, in what ways?

Question #21: As of right now, what do you predict to be the future of the conflict?

Question #22: What do you think is the best solution for resolving the conflict?

Question #23: Do you think that there's a difference between what first generation Israelis/Palestinians and second generation Israelis/Palestinians see as the best solution for resolving the conflict?

Question #24: Do you think that there's a difference between what Israeli Americans/Palestinian Americans and non-Israeli Jewish Americans/non-Palestinian Arab Americans see as the best solution for resolving the conflict?

Question #25: Do you think that there's a difference between what Israeli Americans/Palestinian Americans and Palestinian Americans/Israeli Americans see as the best solution for resolving the conflict?

Question #26: Is there anything we haven't discussed that you would like to add?



## **Appendix: Methodological Note about my Role as Interviewer**

I thought it important to speak not just about the ethnic identities of my subjects, but also about my own Jewish identity (as a partial “Insider”) and how it transformed through the process of writing this dissertation. I engaged new ideas and facts as I did my initial search through the literature to see what others had to say about these issues of distant conflict and identity. I had more direct experience with Jewish Israelis, being that I myself am Jewish, and it was only through reading the words of Palestinians themselves (such as notable scholars Edward Said, Sarah Roy, and Rashid Khalidi) that I began to understand the other half of the story I had been told since early childhood. Having always heard the traditional Jewish story—of founding a land without a people and making the desert flourish—I was obviously disconcerted by Palestinian claims that there had been tribes living in well-established Arab villages there for thousands of years.

As I read further, my fuzzy image and detached understanding of life for Palestinians in the occupied territories grew clearer, and the faceless millions I had refrained from deeply considering became real people who were suffering. I had always empathized with both sides of the conflict in Israel/Palestine; however, now I had a much deeper understanding of the complex explanations and arguments for and against contested related topics such as suicide bombings, the erection of security walls around Gaza and the West Bank, diasporic Palestinian rights, and the limited freedoms of Palestinians living in these occupied territories.

As one can imagine, once I began the process of interviewing Palestinian and Jewish Israeli Americans, asking them specifically about their direct experiences with and opinions on the conflict in their shared homeland, my comprehension of and compassion towards this globally-important conflict became much more real and intense. I witnessed several Palestinians—women and men—cry as I probed them to speak in detail about the loss of their family home or family members. Safia’s weeping as she told me about the visits her family made to their occupied house in Palestine is a moment I still replay in my mind. I listened as Maytal discussed how she is torn because living in Israel, where her heart and family are, means always having to rush through the mall with her daughter, because she fears someone may blow both themselves and them up. Hearing this was heart-wrenching, as were Tziporah’s stories about her childhood experiences with the Yom Kippur War and hiding in bomb shelters.

All of the individuals I interviewed were incredibly kind and willing to share with me their innermost thoughts and feelings about what was clearly a very important part of their lives. They each had a major impact on me and my own identity as a Jewish American. Even over a year later, I can still clearly see their faces and hear them speak their words.

So, how did this experience change me and my outlook on the conflict? To begin with, as I mentioned before, I now know just how incredibly multifaceted and complicated the situation is, and how achieving peace involves a very difficult process of negotiation, reparation, and mutual sacrifice. I believe that I am now better able to step back from the situation and see it more objectively, and this new

perspective has led me to feel compassion for both sides, who are both suffering. I can also see that rather than being the polar opposites with nothing in common, as the media-derived stereotyping leads us to believe they are, at the most intimate and basic level Palestinians and Jewish Israelis have the same desires and goals—to live freely and in peace. As Hassan put it,

...(T)here is a chance for peace. Everyone wants to make a living. Everybody wants to secure the future of their children. Everybody wants to make sure that their children have enough to eat, have an education, flourish, make money, live a good life, like my dad wanted for us.

This elemental factor is one that gives me great hope for peace, and recognizing it is perhaps in part a solution to the conflict itself. I believe that if more people on both sides of the conflict (especially leaders who are not motivated by self-interests and are truly dedicated to a peaceful and fair resolution) created an open dialogue and exchange, then tensions and prejudices could be abated and a land that recognizes both people's needs and rights to a nation could be achieved. Noam noted that in contrast to popular belief, most Israelis do support a two-state solution. Safia's transition from feeling afraid of Jews and Israelis to experiencing mutually-felt kinship with Israeli mothers in her group, Mothers for Peace, is a perfect example of how having immediate encounters with the Other can assuage hatred and fear, and promote an end to the long-standing conflict.

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## **Biography**

Julianne Melissa Weinzimmer was born on September 1, 1978 in Santa Clara, California. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa with Bachelor's degrees in Sociology and Psychology from the University of California, Davis in 2000. Julianne was a recipient of a Department of Sociology Graduate Fellowship from September of 2002 through May of 2008 at Duke University, where she earned her Masters of Sociology in 2004. She was selected by the Graduate School at Duke University to be a Preparing Future Faculty Fellow for the academic year of 2006-2007 and was awarded a Summer Research Fellowship in 2007. Julianne is a member of the American Sociological Association, in the sections of Teaching and Learning and Racial and Ethnic Minorities. She is also a member of the Southern Sociological Society and Sociologists for Women in Society. In the fall of 2008, Julianne will commence a tenure-track faculty position in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio.