Community-engaged courses in a conflict zone: a case study of the Israeli academic corpus

Daphna Golan[a] & Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian[b]

[a] Faculty of Law, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel

[b] Institute of Criminology – Faculty of Law, and School of Social Work and Social Welfare, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel
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Daphna Golan[a]* and Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian[b]

aFaculty of Law, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel; bInstitute of Criminology – Faculty of Law, and School of Social Work and Social Welfare, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel

This article is based on an action-oriented study of 13 community-engaged courses at 11 institutions of higher education in Israel. These courses were not part of peace education programs but rather accredited academic courses in various disciplines, all of which included practice and theory. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how these courses provided transformative learning experiences, allowing Jewish and Arab students to reexamine social issues in a micro-climate of openness and intellectual rigor, thereby developing their commitment to engaging with the 'other' and the 'otherized.' By providing opportunities for reflection, the courses allowed students to build new networks of relationships within a deeply divided society. Nevertheless, the research reveals that though the students in these courses were highly aware of inequalities in society, they tended to self-define as non-political both in their theoretical learning and their action for change. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict and questions of war and peace were almost absent from the academic classroom. The reluctance to engage in political discussion or activism – even in Partnership classrooms where students are given the opportunity to encounter the 'other' first hand – speaks volumes about the fear that prevails on campuses in Israel and other conflict zones.

Keywords: civic responsibility; college/university; community engagement; higher education; Israel/Palestine

Introduction

Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel hardly ever encounter each other in the course of their primary and secondary education; their first encounter usually takes place on the college campus when they are young adults. Nevertheless, few academic bodies in Israel make any conscious or active attempt to explore and develop this encounter. Against the backdrop of violent conflict, distrust, and prejudice, relations between Jews and Palestinians in Israel continue to deteriorate, and the university encounter remains meaningless and fleeting.

   This article is based on an action-oriented study designed and carried out in cooperation with faculty members from 13 community-engaged courses at 11 academic institutions in Israel, all of them part of the Campus-Community Partnership for Social Change (hereafter, the Partnership). The aim of this paper is to analyze

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*Corresponding author. Email: daphna.golan@mail.huji.ac.il

how academic community-engaged courses affect students, and whether and how they can promote education towards peace in a context of prolonged conflict. Our intention is not only to generate theoretical understandings of how shared community engagement can improve intergroup relations in conflict-torn societies, but also to identify the main difficulties of transformative learning for the benefit of educators working in conflict zones. As feminist activists, one Jewish Israeli and one Palestinian, we believe it is our moral responsibility to expose injustices and seek out new and innovative modes of peace building. This article hopes to shed light on how community-based courses can provide transformative educational opportunities for peace education. While the study focuses on an Israeli initiative, we believe that many of our findings can be generalized to other zones of violent conflict.

The paper begins by reviewing some of the critiques of traditional dialogue workshops, and by situating the reader in the context of the formal and informal ethnic segregation that characterizes the educational system in Israel. A description of the research methodology follows, after which we share the results of our inquiry and analyze tensions that permeate the classroom during periods of overt crisis. We conclude by discussing the implications of the findings and submitting recommendations for what we believe might be a new and important field of peace education.

Anti-hegemonic learning in the context of political conflict

A large body of evidence attests to the fact that contact between divided groups can reduce bias, prejudice and animosity, and improve intergroup relations in general (Allport 1954; Brown and Hewstone 2005; Pettigrew and Tropp 2000, 2006). Contact theory has been extremely influential, and intergroup dialogue has long been considered one of the most effective tools for improving relations between groups (Saguy, Dovidio, and Pratto 2008).

While interventions based on dialogue have been eagerly adopted by peace activists and educators in conflict-torn societies from Ireland (Hewstone et al. 2007; Tam et al. 2007) to Rwanda (Staub 2005) and Sri Lanka (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005), they have rarely been grounded in theoretical understanding of the intergroup processes that exist in violent conflicts. There is little systematic study or reflection on the unique circumstances of violent conflict and how these might affect the ways in which dialogue functions between groups (Kupermintz and Salomon 2005; Malhotra and Liyanage 2005). As a result, the effects of many dialogue workshops have been short-lived and limited, leading to diminished trust in dialogue itself as a vehicle for peace and change.

Research has shown that contact has different effects on advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Tropp and Pettigrew 2005). When there are substantial power differentials between the groups involved, as is usually the case in conflict-torn areas, contact has significantly less effect on the attitudes of the disadvantaged group. Moreover, advantaged and disadvantaged groups have different expectations from such encounters. While members of advantaged groups prefer to talk about commonalities, members of disadvantaged groups want to talk about power differences (Saguy, Dovidio, and Pratto 2008). In contexts featuring unequal power relations, the needs of disadvantaged groups are often ignored or silenced, thus reducing (or reversing) the positive effects of contact.

In Israel, there has been much critical reflection on the problematic ways in which dialogue workshops between Jews and Palestinians have been designed and

implemented over the past decades (Abu-Nimer 2004; Bekerman 2007; Dajani and Baskin 2006; Halabi and Sonnenschein 2004; Maoz 2011; Schimmel 2009; Suleiman 2004). Most analysts agree that, on the whole, these workshops have had very little impact – beyond immediate, short-term effects – on changing intergroup attitudes. They have been even less successful in reaching beyond workshop participants to influence attitudes in society at large.

Analysts have pointed to several shortcomings which may explain such workshops' lack of efficacy in effecting long-term changes in attitudes between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. In the first place, most workshops are one-time events, generally, lasting only a few days. In the absence of long-term exposure, the impact of contact is quick to fade (Dajani and Baskin 2006; Kupermintz and Salomon 2005; Rouhana and Kelman 1994; Schimmel 2009; Schulz 2008). Second, such encounters often take place in locations far removed from the daily lives of the participants and the spiraling effects of continuing violence (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009) and as a result tend to feel artificial and forced (Maoz 2004a). Third, many workshops focus on cultural, identity, or interpersonal issues, neglecting (indeed often intentionally avoiding) social or political issues. The conflict between Jews and Palestinians is thus reduced to the interpersonal level, obscuring the deep structural and institutional asymmetries between the two groups (Abu-Nimer 2004; Bekerman 2007; Halabi and Sonnenschein 2004; Salomon 2004; Suleiman 2004). Fourth, practitioners and analysts of Israeli dialogue workshops have tended to disregard to the fact that such encounters affect Jews and Palestinians differently, as their positioning in such workshops is by no means equal (Sonnenschein 2006; Suleiman 2004). Fifth, dialogue workshops are usually self-selecting, and those who oppose peace and reconciliation typically avoid taking part in them (Bar-Tal 2004; Schimmel 2009). Finally, attempts to follow up on the encounters are rare, leaving participants unsure about how to connect their encounter experience with their daily lives. Consequently, the lessons learned from dialogue workshops are usually not applied in a substantial way in everyday life situations (Schimmel 2009).

Rothman's ARIA framework (Antagonism, Resonance, Invention, and Action) is a long-term dialogue and reconciliation process that strives toward integration of words and deeds, thought and action (Rothman 1997, 18). This model has been successfully implemented in Jewish–Palestinian dialogue workshops, for example, the Jerusalem Peace Initiative Project, where the participants suggested 'concrete policy proposals for cooperative change', as well as 'specific confidence-building initiatives to address the policy proposals in education, security, municipal governance, culture, and economics' (Rothman 1997, 98, 102). However, many other joint activity projects have suffered from the aforementioned problems and hence have been of a 'one-shot, short-term nature' (Dajani and Baskin 2006, 98).

Unlike the 'hit-and-run' nature of most peace education and peace-building efforts in Israel (Kupermintz and Salomon 2005), Partnership courses (and a select few peace education courses (Biton and Salomon 2006; Hager, Saba, and Shay 2011; Maoz 2011)) last for an entire academic year. Moreover, they bring Jewish and Palestinian Israelis together in an academic setting, where they collectively engage in promoting social justice and human rights. All of the Partnership courses are part of accredited academic curricula and hence not perceived as 'peace education programs' (a few of which exist on the margins of some academic institutions), but rather as community-engaged (or service-learning) courses that invoke moral responsibility for what happens in the community. Thus, Partnership courses

contribute to the central goal of transformative learning by creating a relationship between NGOs, students, academia, and the community in a democratic, anti-hegemonic setting (hooks 1994, 39). These courses acknowledge and promote the interweaving of learning and change which 'in a war-torn society … are inevitable and inseparable' (Wisler 2010, 16).

Peace education takes diverse forms in different sociopolitical contexts (Salomon 2002). Maoz (2004b, 2010) identifies two major models in peace education encounter programs in Israel that reflect 'two poles on a continuum, from emphasizing coexistence to emphasizing the conflict' (Maoz 2004b, 443). The traditional coexistence model aims at reducing stereotypes and promoting mutual understanding, tolerance, and cooperation through initiatives such as joint work towards a common goal and evading contentious topics (Maoz 2010, 305). The confrontational group identity model, which includes discussion of national identities and national and civil aspirations, seeks to modify how participants construct identity, raise the awareness of Jewish participants with respect to the unequal power relations between the two groups, and empower the Palestinian participants (Maoz 2010, 305). In a third, more recent model that combines elements of the first two models and implements a narrative approach, the participants tell the stories of their lives in conflict circumstances (Maoz 2010, 306).

The community-engaged courses in our study included elements from all three of these models. Each course was located on a different point on the continuum identified by Maoz, and they all used a narrative approach. Yet, they also constituted a challenge to these models by proposing a new approach that seems more relevant to the current conditions and challenges described above. The premise behind these courses is that long-term joint Jewish–Palestinian action for change and learning from such action can allow students to believe that changing reality is feasible. Thus, this approach was seen as empowering and dynamic, providing different perspectives on how to interweave students' personal experiences and the broader sociopolitical context, and encouraging a form of dialogue expected to be more meaningful than that facilitated by models that focus primarily on discussing personal experiences, identities, or narratives.

This type of joint inter-group learning and activism could potentially be in keeping with recent calls by peace education scholars and practitioners to go beyond the traditional (and predominantly unsuccessful) forms of dialogue workshops and encounter groups, and to develop novel and creative forms of politically and socially engaged peace education. These researchers propose to adopt 'a model of change directed towards heightening awareness of the collective and political aspects of the encounter, encouraging group members to participate in collective resistance' (Hager, Saba, and Shay 2011, 194). Bekerman (2007, 34) suggests 'redirect[ing] educational activities … to their work towards changing the relations of power through active participation in the world.' According to Bekerman, this praxis may take diverse forms, such as 'the organization and participation in political demonstrations and activity and/or the creation of regional people forums in which to discuss and locally negotiate land redistribution' (Bekerman 2007, 34). Some researchers emphasize the ends rather than the means in this context, stressing that the improved relations established in the encounter groups are important but not sufficient and should ideally have an impact on the external conflict (Schulz 2008, 47). Community-engaged courses, which bring Jewish and Palestinian students together in collaboration over a substantial period of time in order to generate real-world

change as part of their regular academic studies, seemed a suitable vehicle for implementing these recommendations.

Historicizing the political: Palestinian students in Israeli academia

When studying Israeli academia and relationships between Jewish and Palestinian students in Israel, we are contemplating two groups with different histories and present-day realities, shaped to a large extent by the intractable Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The roots of this long conflict lie in the 1880s with the first wave of Jewish European 'immigrant-settlers' to Palestine (Kimmerling 2001; Shafir 1996). According to Shafir (1996, 20), 'the basic forms and arguments of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict were developed before the First World War' and focused primarily on the issues of control over the land and the labor markets.

Today, Jewish students belong to the majority while Palestinian students belong to the minority of indigenous people who remained within the boundaries of the new state after the majority was uprooted during the 1948 war (Abu-Lughod 1971; Rouhana 1997). Following this war, known by Palestinians as the Nakba, i.e. the Catastrophe, and by Israeli Jews as the War of Independence, the remaining Palestinian population, now a minority, suffered from land expropriation, displacement of their communities, and fragmentation of their families and society. Many lost their homes and ended up trapped in small enclaves (Jiryis 1976; Lustick 1982; Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007).

The Israeli political regime has been characterized as an 'ethnocracy' (Yiftachel 2006); the inequality and gaps between Jews and Palestinians in Israel are multidimensional, deep, persistent, and in many cases institutionalized. According to Adalah (2011, 3), more than 30 laws in fields such as civil rights and redistribution of resources discriminate against Palestinian citizens of Israel. Discrimination and inequality exist in diverse areas such as employment, income, housing, planning and building, infrastructure and development, health, welfare, and education. Thus, for instance, the incidence of poverty in 2010 was 53.2% among Arab families and 14.3% among Jewish families, and the income gap was 37.2% (National Insurance Institute 2011, 20–24). In the field of health, gaps exist between Arabs and Jews in life expectancy. In 2011, life expectancy of Jewish males was 80.5 and of Arab males 76.5. Life expectancy of Jewish females was 83.9 and of Arab females 80.9 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2012, 211). There is an ever-increasing shortage of land and demand for housing amongst the Palestinians in Israel. Since Israel's establishment in 1948, some 700 new Jewish settlements have been established but the government has banned the establishment of any new Arab communities, except for building new towns for Bedouin communities as a means of denying them their original vast lands (Haider, Hamdam, and Awad 2010, 32–33).

The gaps between Jews and Palestinians in Israel are evident in the education system as well. Although some 27% of Israeli youth (aged 0–19) are Palestinian (Central Bureau of Statistics 2012, 112–114), they make up only 9.5% of students on Israeli academic campuses (Council for Higher Education 2013, 34). They constitute 12.1% of the undergraduate students, 8.2% of the Masters students, and 4.4% of the doctoral students (Council for Higher Education 2013, 34).[1] This low representation can be ascribed to two main factors. In the first place, the Arab and Jewish education systems (elementary and secondary) are completely separate, and there is much lower state investment in the former. Arab schools are more crowded, receive

less funding for extracurricular programs and have little backing for art, music, or cultural studies (Golan-Agnon 2005, 2006). Secondly, many Palestinian citizens of Israel who are eligible to attend institutions of higher learning prefer to study in the Occupied Territories and Jordan rather than in Israel.

Palestinian students in Israel report a sense of detachment and alienation (Al-Haj 2000). Courses are conducted in Hebrew at all universities and colleges (with the exception of three Arab teacher-training colleges). Many Palestinians find it difficult to compete with Hebrew-speaking students and others are afraid that they will lose their Arabic – which indeed happens to many Palestinians in Israel, who use a hybrid of Arabic and Hebrew instead (Amara 1999, 2006).

Most Jewish students enroll in higher education after 2–3 years of military service. Palestinian students, who do not have to serve in the military, are usually younger when they enroll. The campus is the site of the first encounter between the majority of Palestinians and Israeli Jews, yet Jewish–Arab relations are rarely addressed there. Moreover, very few attempts are made to actively incorporate the needs or concerns of Palestinian students. On most campuses, classes are conducted on Muslim and Christian holidays, and students have to receive special permission to be absent on these days. Palestinian and Jewish students tend to congregate separately in classrooms, cafeterias, and public areas. Palestinian students in Israel have very few Palestinian faculty members as models, as Palestinians make up only 2–3% of the academic staff (and 1.5% of administrative staff) in Israel, according to estimations of the Council for Higher Education (2013, 39).

A comparative perspective on the action learning model and peace education

This study draws on data collected from 282 students in 13 undergraduate and graduate community-engaged courses in multiple fields: education, law, urban planning, social work, gender studies, and interpreting. The courses were held at 11 university and college campuses in Israel between October 2009 and June 2010. All were conducted under the auspices of the Campus-Community Partnership for Social Change (the Partnership), a center based at the Hebrew University Faculty of Law that sponsors community-engaged human rights courses in institutions of higher education throughout Israel. These courses were constructed on an action-learning model that encourages students to act to promote human rights and social change and to reflect upon their actions in class (Beaumont et al. 2006). All courses combined theory and practice and encouraged students to bring to class the dilemmas, knowledge, and understanding that they gained from their community-based work.[2]

Six of the courses were taught by joint Palestinian–Jewish faculty teams, and both Palestinian and Jewish students participated in all but one of them.[3] The student cohort consisted of 282 individuals: 185 Jews (147 female and 38 male) and 90 Palestinian citizens of Israel (84 female and 6 male) as well as 2 international students and 5 who identified themselves as others. In other words, while Palestinians make up only 9.5% of the students on Israeli campuses, they accounted for around one third of the participants in these programs. This is a reflection of the Palestinian students' level of interest in community-engaged courses, as well as the intention and willingness of the Partnership and teaching faculty in bringing a diverse group of Jewish and Palestinian students together to promote human rights and social change. The Partnership and the teaching faculty aimed to create spaces in which

Jewish and Palestinian students in Israel could engage in meaningful collective dialogue and collaborative human rights activism.

Only two of the courses were defined as peace education courses per se. Both of these focused on peace education in Israel, combining volunteering/activism with theoretical study. One program took place in the education department at Tel Hai College, which is on the Lebanon border, using the Activist Encounter Model (Hager, Saba, and Shay 2011). The second, 'Education for Social Justice, Environmental Justice and Peace' was held at the Kibbutzim College of Education. This program capitalized on student diversity and provided a space for intergroup dialogue between Palestinians and Jews, migrant workers, students with disabilities, immigrants, and natives, from the center and periphery of Israeli society. The Beit Berl course 'Education and Social Change', was the only opportunity for Jewish–Arab joint learning on offer at this teacher training college, at which Jews and Arabs are otherwise taught separately. In these three programs, all of which emphasized dialogue as part of the curriculum, Palestinian students comprised 30–50% of the cohorts.

The rarity of peace education programs on Israeli campuses is partly the result of the Israeli public's intolerance, particularly over the last decade, of the concepts of 'peace' and peace education initiatives. The events of the last two decades have left the Israeli peace movement considerably weakened and less active than it once was.

During the first Intifada (Palestinian uprising, 1987–1993), dozens of peace organizations and groups of intellectuals called for dialogue with the Palestinians and an end to the ongoing military occupation of the Palestinian territories through peace negotiations (Golan and Orr 2012). After the Oslo peace accords were signed in 1993, most peace activists thought the struggle for peace had been fundamentally won. As David Shulman, himself a peace activist, explains, 'First, the question of the partner had been resolved: Israel clearly had to come to terms with the Palestinian national movement … Second, the principle of partitioning the land was, it seemed, becoming almost universally accepted; the mad dream of a "greater Israel" in the whole of Palestine was relegated to the margins of Israeli society. Or so we hoped' (Shulman 2007, 7).

At the same time, human rights violations in the Palestinian Occupied Territories continued, as did the Israeli settlement enterprise and the regime of checkpoints and separation became much harsher (Golan and Orr 2012). Since the end of 2000, with the collapse of the peace negotiations, the failure of the Israeli state to respect its peace-related commitments, and the beginning of the much more violent second Intifada with many terror attacks, Israeli public faith in peace has been eroded to the point of non-existence (Golan and Orr 2012). The perception that 'there is no Palestinian partner for peace' has become widespread in Israel. On both sides, there has been 'an overwhelming feeling of pessimism for the prospects for peace in the near term' (Kaufman, Salem, and Verhoeven 2006, 218). While prior to the second Intifada, especially in 1993–1996, there were hundreds of joint peace activities, following 2000, they have become rarer, and people from both sides have been increasingly reluctant to work together to promote peace (Dajani and Baskin 2006, 87; Hermann 2009). Today, as Firer (2008, 201) indicates, 'The mere mention of peace education arouses cynicism or even accusation of unpatriotic incitement.'

In recent years, the space once occupied by peace education has often been filled with human rights education, children's rights education, anti-violence education, and civil society education, as well as with first initiatives in virtual, Web-based

peace education (Firer 2008, 202). The aforementioned trends are reflected in academic curricula as well. While there are very few courses that address peace education directly, and these have been relegated to the margins, courses that call for community involvement towards social change have featured increasingly in academic curricula in recent years (Council for Higher Education 2012).

During a time when 'peace' had already become an obscene word among many Israelis and Palestinians and when most believe that peace is unachievable,[4] we elected to examine the implications of civic engagement and joint reflection on action among Jewish and Palestinian students with a view to generating new models of peace education. Unlike other joint activities such as encounter workshops and training programs, whose primary goal is conflict resolution (Rothman 1997),[5] most of the programs examined here do not focus directly on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, peace building, and reconciliation. Rather, they facilitate interaction among Jewish and Palestinian students and leverage this encounter to promote joint action for a shared and just society. Our aim in exploring these programs was to learn more, not only about the narrow margins, the few who choose to participate in peace education, but rather about the broader Israeli student body, particularly those involved in social activism. It was our hope that long-term encounters between Jewish and Palestinian students (all of them citizens of Israel) who are engaged in social change would constitute and put forward a new model for peace education and would lead to mainstreaming of Israeli–Palestinian dialogue.

Our findings demonstrate that there is indeed potential for a new and interesting model that enables Jewish and Arab students to get to know one another (usually their first opportunity to do so) and provides them with a safe space in which to talk about themselves and their communities. Nevertheless, the students and faculty all persisted in trying to evade contentious topics and relate to the encounter and discussion as if they were devoid of politics. The recommendations we present at the end of this article focus on improving this situation.

Methodology

Data on the 13 courses in this study were collected from four separate sources. The first was a qualitative survey comprised primarily of open-ended questions, which the authors designed in cooperation with the faculty members leading the courses. The survey was administered on three separate occasions during the academic year (beginning, middle, and end). It examined the students' motivations for enrolling in the courses; their expectations from the classroom and field experience; perceptions of main problems in reality; and their personal and professional expectations for the future. The qualitative responses were then thematically coded according to key categories and themes in order to facilitate analysis (Danzin and Lincoln 2000). Three research assistants coded the responses (using Atlas software) and processed the data, including frequency of responses and counting of key words in texts.

The second data source was in-depth interviews, which the authors and three research assistants conducted with 24 student participants and 8 faculty members. Interviews were conducted in Hebrew or Arabic according to the interviewee's first language. Students were questioned about their motivation to join the courses, and about what they had learned from participating in them. Student interviewees were recruited by their instructors, who explained that the information gathered would

help the researchers and instructors ascertain whether and how such courses impact students as members of the Israeli academic community.

Third, both authors and the research assistants undertook participant observation by attending at least one class session of each of the courses. Participant observation allowed us to get a sense of the 'hidden curriculum' and classroom dynamics, including interactions between faculty and students and among the students themselves.

Finally, we gathered data from nine focus groups, each of which included 15–18 participants and was led by a member of the research team. Three of the groups were composed solely of students; the other six also included faculty members and members of NGOs. The focus groups were asked to address such issues as the principal difficulties and challenges of the course; what it means to be part of this endeavor, and whether and how their course differed from other academic courses.

A draft version of this article was sent to all faculty members who participated in the research and their comments were subsequently integrated. We also held a conference to discuss the results of the research with all participants and elicit their reactions to the article. A second draft was discussed with Partnership faculty and students who wished to contribute to a collective book.[6] All participants gave their consent to document all meetings and to publish the data, on condition of anonymity. All their words were transcribed in the original language and grammar as closely as possible. The authors, the first a Jewish Israeli woman and the second a Palestinian woman, translated the Hebrew and Arabic materials into English in a coordinated effort. Both of us also taught community-engaged human rights courses at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Faculty of Law, and used our own experience to better understand dilemmas of students and faculty members.

Data analysis was preceded by learning tours conducted by the two authors in Belfast, Nicosia, Belgrade and Pristina. Our meetings with students and faculty in those locations gave us further understanding of the dynamics and tensions at play in academic education in conflict zones. We learned that, in most cases, the conflict is silenced and left outside the campus. As one Canadian student in a Turkish university in Nicosia stated: 'When you talk about what you teach in Jerusalem, I get the chills. I've been studying here for three years and no one ever mentioned the conflict.'

Findings

The results show, first of all, that all students felt they had benefited from community-engaged courses more than from courses not including praxis. Secondly, most students perceived the Partnership classroom as a safe space in the midst of an alienating campus. Students belonging to the more marginalized groups valued and appreciated this space more, but also struggled, challenged and criticized it more. Third, we found that many Palestinian and Jewish students valued the transformative experience of meeting the 'other' group in these courses. Finally, we found that most students did not see the courses or their practice as 'political', preferred not to bring the politics of the conflict into the classroom and avoided mentioning the political realities of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Crucial issues such as political violence, the military occupation of the Palestinian territories, and political borders were not perceived as legitimate topics of discussion in the classroom. Here, we analyze the lack of discussion about the Free Gaza flotilla as a case study.

Using Freire's understanding, according to which the educational process is never neutral, Partnership courses adopt a 'problem-posing' approach in which students become active participants. As part of this approach, it is essential that students link knowledge to action so that they actively work to change their societies at a local level and beyond (Freire 1985, 2000 [1968]). However, we learned that students focused primarily on the local and hardly imagined or talked about anything beyond that, let alone believed that they could affect real societal change.

Therefore, despite the importance we attribute to the first three findings, the fourth – namely the depoliticization of the courses – is worrying. The Partnership courses' potential to develop new avenues of peace education cannot be fully realized because neither the faculty nor the students in these courses are willing to challenge the hegemonic silencing of political issues pertaining to the conflict in Israeli academic institutions or the artificial separation of the struggle for social justice (which is legitimate on campus) and the hope for peace (which is not). Hence, in addition to presenting the successes of the model of integrated community activism, this article also suggests means to clear the path toward political dialogue on campus.

Learning through activism

Respondents indicated, in various manners and modes, that they enjoyed the combination of action and learning in their community-engaged courses, which, as one Jewish female respondent explained, allowed for 'a more complete and truthful learning' experience. Participants described their rich learning experience enthusiastically, and expressed criticism of teaching methods that are solely theoretical and divorced from seeing, knowing, and being involved in, real life. One Palestinian female student reported:

> Most of the learning occurred when we brought our field experience into class, while presenting our own projects. We needed to examine reality carefully, relate it to our reading material, and then know how to present it. By listening to other students, and when presenting our own projects, we were exposed to new knowledge and new ways of knowing.

Students reported that their involvement in social action had a positive impact on their academic achievements, leadership skills, and self-confidence. Indeed, studies have shown that such involvement increases the likelihood of choosing a community service profession upon graduation, enhances theoretical and learning development, and promotes community engagement and humanistic values and worldview (Astin and Sax 1998; Bringle 2003; Conley Tyler and Bretherton 2006; Harkavy 2004; Hecht 2003; Kiely 2005).

The partnership course classroom as a safe haven

Palestinian students in general, and Palestinian women in particular, stressed the importance of, and urgent need for, a safe space in which they could speak freely on campus. One Palestinian female student stated:

> In class, I realized that it is safe to share, cooperate, create, [there was] an appropriate atmosphere that maintained mutual respect.

The issue of mutual respect and the ability to share without fear was of utmost concern to Palestinian students. One woman explained:

> The most important thing that happened in class was that I was able to speak my mind without fear. I felt safe in sharing my ideas and my own analyses, with no threat.

Students stated that participating in these courses allowed them (in the words of a Jewish female student) to build 'more equal relations with other students.' The need for equal footing was cited as a prerequisite for any fair and just discussion of social problems. Gaps between participants' various social positions notwithstanding, students with different identities perceived the courses as opening new spaces within which they could go beyond the boundaries of their own identity and negotiate with, learn about, and contribute to, the larger social good.

The ongoing (and for most, first-time) contact between Jewish and Palestinian students played a powerful role in defining what they wanted to happen in class. Most students elaborated on the importance of meeting the 'other' and regretted the dearth of such opportunities on campus and in Israeli society in general. One female Palestinian student stated:

> This is the first time I'm participating in a course that combines members from both communities [Jewish and Palestinian]. I see the challenge here. I see it because I want to know the other group a bit more, I want to have contact with them, I want to learn their language, so as to understand them.

Her voice, as well as that of many students continually referred to the otherness of the other group, while searching for commonalities rather than differences:

> I met women from other groups and classes. I listened to them, learned to know them more closely, internalized that every human being is different, and we are similar in some issues and different in others. (Palestinian female)

> The dialogues between class members were filled with action, for each of us raised different positions and analyses. It was very interesting to hear, share and participate. (Jewish female)

These statements suggest that students were willing to learn about each other and welcomed the freedom to discuss what they defined as 'threatening' issues. They also suggest that the contact between the two groups sometimes reduced anxieties, biases, and antagonism toward the other.

Some students compared their past experiences in peace education programs or dialogue groups and noted that they benefitted much more from the Partnership courses (Biton and Salomon 2006; Maoz 2011; Mi'Ari 1999). One Jewish male respondent reported:

> I participated in many meetings between Arabs and Jews. They always brought leftist Jews and very leftist Arabs to the meeting, and it was like convincing the convinced. I believe that in our class we made a real endeavor, a sincere effort, for in our class we also have rightist Arabs and Jews.

Hence, the fact that the Partnership-sponsored courses are regular academic courses taking place at academic institutions across Israel, and are open to all

students on campus and not only to those who chose to participate in 'Peace Education' programs, appears to have turned such new contacts, discussions, learning, and border-crossings into a more sincere collective first step. One clear finding is that both Palestinian and Jewish students were actively engaged in building a community of students aimed at pursuing a more just, equitable society (hooks 1994). As one Palestinian male student explained:

> I think the course constructed a group that could bridge social and ideological gaps. The fact that we all worked together to achieve one goal created a sense of solidarity that could never have been achieved in other settings.

Encountering the other and otherized

Many of the Palestinian students reported that the courses enabled them to better understand the nuances and connotations of the Hebrew language. This was most evident in courses on education, as well as in the Community Interpreting course, in which the discrimination that can result from not knowing Hebrew was a key topic of discussion. In this course, students whose first language is Amharic, Russian, or Arabic studied together and interpreted for four hours a week at hospitals, public clinics, municipal welfare offices, and well-baby clinics. One Jewish female participant said:

> It's not important what language we speak, or what culture we belong to. What's important is that we acquire new tools to help us help others.

A Jewish Ethiopian woman described how this course had increased her self-esteem and self-advocacy skills, and enabled her to strengthen her own identity as a woman belonging to an excluded socioeconomic and ethnic group in Israel.

Students described how Israeli society turns a blind eye to some social groups, such as minorities, women, youth, newcomers, LGBT, and more. They reported that the courses allow them to cross internal Israeli racial borders and become active in preventing apathy towards 'otherized' groups. Nonetheless, when asked which groups in Israeli society they were committed to, some of the students noted their 'own' groups. For example, 'the Bedouin community that I come from'; 'I would be glad to contribute to children with learning disorders, because I myself have one'; 'definitely my group: the Arabs. I think we need a lot of help, from me and from anyone who can help'. Or, as one Jewish student wrote:

> I feel I am committed to every Israeli community, without distinction. I don't want to lie to myself – I mean the Israeli-Jewish community, be it newcomers, the handicapped, children, from all countries.

Yet, the vast majority of the participants noted the importance of the encounter and the opportunity to learn about another group. As Dr. Yusuf Jabarin commented on the early research findings:

> Do I, after three years of experience [teaching the course at the University of Haifa], believe that it has a positive effect on Jewish Arab relations? I certainly do. Does it give Jewish students a better understanding of the circumstances of Arab students and of the Arab minority in general? It certainly does. They don't have to agree on everything, but at least they are getting a different perspective. I wish policy makers had to take these courses.[7]

The elephant in the room

Despite the importance of sharing and raising awareness of 'unspeakable' issues such as discriminatory policies of planning and zoning, inequality between Jewish and Palestinian students and between women and men, participants preferred to avoid discussing what they called 'politics' – the proverbial elephant in the room. The students held a narrow conceptualization of 'politics' and identified this term with issues and questions pertaining to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and to reality in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. Both faculty members and students were reluctant to openly discuss these issues in the classroom.

For instance, responses to our survey question as to what bothered them in reality were extremely varied, yet only ten students out of 282 mentioned the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and only four mentioned the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Furthermore, when asked at the end of the year whether the political situation affected their activism, the vast majority of students in all courses, both Jews and Palestinians (almost 80%) stated either that the question was irrelevant or that the political situation was irrelevant to their social activism. They viewed their activism as apolitical, thus sharply distinguishing it from the irrelevant politics of the conflict. The word 'peace' appeared a mere 10 times in the collected answers of all students in all surveys.

Most Jewish respondents tended to answer the question of what bothers them in reality by invoking of concepts such as inequality, social and structural gaps, discrimination and unfair policies, and laws. One Jewish female student replied: 'There are major social gaps, and lack of tolerance and motivation by the upper class to resolve such gaps.' Another Jewish woman responded: 'Generally speaking, it is the social and economic structure … inequality, and also racism.'

Palestinian students, by contrast, were less 'politically correct' in analyzing the effects of the course and how the reality of injustices in Israeli society affects them. For example, a Palestinian female student stated:

> The situation is very frustrating, because in class we talk about the entire society as a whole … yet, upbringing in Jewish society is rooted in a very unshakable ideology … and they are getting more and more extremist and racist.

Another Palestinian female student stated:

> We live and breathe injustices … this country was built on injustice. We just need to forget … to live.

In response to the survey question that inquired about participants' motivation to enroll in Partnership courses, only two students stated explicitly that they did so because of their interest in learning more about politics; these were the only two foreign students in the study. Both attended the *Unit for (In)Formal Architecture Studies*, in which most students were Jews, the senior faculty member was Palestinian and his teaching partner was Jewish, which took place on the campus of Bezalel Academy in West Jerusalem and in a neighborhood in East Jerusalem. This course involved informal planning for a Palestinian community under occupation that was largely ignored by formal city planning. Students in this course worked with a small Palestinian community in East Jerusalem to plan a public school in an area where there had been no city plan since the occupation in 1967. Yet, while most students

in this course thought that meeting Palestinians was 'a privilege which only the Partnership course could provide', they still avoided discussing the politics of the conflict. With the exception of the two foreign students, participants in this course referred to the rare opportunity to meet Palestinian communities and work with them, but hardly mentioned the political conflict. When they did, it was to explain why some of the meetings in East Jerusalem were canceled.

Students on campuses outside Jerusalem could be engaged in civic work for democracy and human rights in Israel and at the same time completely ignore (and even remain ignorant of) what was happening in the Occupied Territories. The students considered talking about Israel within the Green Line to be a discussion of social justice, democratization, and human rights rather than of 'politics' (although these issues are of course political as well); to discuss what happens 'there', 'over the Green Line' in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, was perceived as political. Respondents preferred to talk about 'hardships, pain and inequalities' within Israel, not over the Green Line. Students want to do justice close to home: support youth at risk, help NGOs, build projects in their community – but leave questions of war and peace and the Palestinian–Israeli conflict outside the campus.

By the end of the year, most course participants tended to professionalize their analyses, rather than call them political. Students of gender studies or interpreting wrote about the importance of gender sensitivity and language barriers. Law students talked of hardships in implementing the law and claimed that if laws were more accessible and fair to some social groups, then inequalities could be decreased. Planners used specialized urban planning terminology to describe problems.

Several factors can be identified as leading to this avoidance of discussing the politics of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Like most Israelis, many lecturers and students experience feelings of despair, fatigue, numbness, and a lack of faith that anything can be done to promote a peaceful solution to the conflict. This sense often results in a lack of interest in this topic, in choosing alternative agendas, such as the social-economic agenda reflected in the protest movement that emerged in the summer of 2011 and in the 2013 elections.

Furthermore, both teaching faculty and students attempted to build and later preserve good and stable interpersonal relations between the Jewish and Palestinian participants in the programs. Students as well as professors appeared to fear that talk of the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict might create tension in the group and reveal their political ideologies and should therefore remain outside the classroom. In the interviews, some students expressed fear that raising harsh political issues might disrupt the safe haven created in class. They relied on the support of the group and valued the friendships they created and were afraid to lose them over politics.

The research also revealed a third and interesting factor: Palestinian students raised their concerns about expressing political views that are considered illegitimate in the hegemonic discourse in Israel, particularly in view of their sense that the Israeli educational system in which they study has them under surveillance, including on campus.

David Lyon (2007, 14) noted that surveillance is 'the focused, systematic, and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction.' Palestinians in Israel have been under surveillance with respect to land, life, and body, as noted by both Palestinian and Israeli–Jewish scholars (Cohen 2006; Korn 2000; Sa'di 2005; Zureik 1979, 2001). In examining surveillance in the educational system, scholars have argued that the appointment of teachers (in which

approval of the security agencies is a condition of their appointment) and the control over what is being taught, and how, were found to be an additional mode of disciplining those who were active in political parties or were believed to have political orientations promoting the rights of Palestinians in Israel as a homeland minority. Surveillance in the education system has also involved the planting of informants in the education system itself (Abu-Saad 2006; Cohen 2006; Korn 2000; Makkawi 2002; Zureik, Lyon, and Abu-Laban 2010). The imposition of visible and invisible modes of surveillance has affected Palestinians' ability to speak out, act, organize, write, and/or resist discriminatory policies and ideologies (Cohen 2003, 2006; Sa'di 2003, 2005; Zureik, Lyon, and Abu-Laban 2010).

Contrary to the supervision imposed on the study materials and on the personal background of teachers and principals in the elementary and high schools, higher education has a greater degree of independence. Yet in the colleges and universities as well, limitations are imposed on freedom of expression and freedom of protest among students who oppose certain Israeli policies. Palestinian students are also limited in their ability to use Arabic.[8]

During personal interviews held in Arabic, in which students were asked to explain the avoidance of the politics of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict found in the research, some Palestinian students talked about their fear.[9] As one Palestinian female student explained:

> The walls have ears [*Il hittan ilha dinein*] … So, we study, we promote ourselves and societies, we make friends, meet teachers, intellectuals … But we are kept in prison, for, as our parents were told in 1948 and as we were raised to remember, the walls have ears.

Another Palestinian female student explained in an interview:

> You could talk about what can be talked about. Issues that should not be talked about are not talked about. [*illi ma binhaka … ma binhakash … wala bitnaqash*]

The position demonstrated here might reflect a culture of fear in academia, one that undermines so-called academic freedom. In the interviews, some students said that they preferred to focus on their own personal struggles, as the price of challenging the political system might be too taxing. A female Palestinian student at the Technion explained her choice to remain silent regarding the conflict in view of the ideological stance adopted by the academic institution and by the students and their intolerant attitude toward a non-hegemonic position:

> I never talk to the students who study with me. I never state my opinion about what they say or about the usual jokes about Arabs that they tell. I remain silent … Once I did respond and state my opinion, and they shunned me during my five years of studies, but I'll get through it. That's not a place for arguing.

Caution and a sense of isolation are in evidence not only among the students but among many of the lecturers as well. The data collection coincided with a period of intense ideological rhetoric in Israel that involved severe attacks on academic freedom, as well as on the rights of Palestinians in Israel and the human rights and NGO communities generally. The Israel Academia Monitor and the ultra-nationalist Im Tirtzu organization made Israeli academia a prime target, seeking control over

curricula, and urging foreign donors to withhold funds unless the targeted faculty members were removed. These organizations published blacklists and ranked each university and department in terms of political legitimacy. This created an atmosphere of intensified fear, threat, and danger across the campuses in Israel. Some of the faculty members who taught the Partnership courses (including the authors) were specifically targeted by Im Tirtzu, which complained of 'illegal use of politics' in the classroom.[10]

This atmosphere was reflected in the feelings that faculty expressed in various contexts. Lecturers who participated in the research described their feelings of fear, alienation, and silencing. One tenured university lecturer noted that the academic institutions regard the leaders of these courses as an 'intrusive foreign body' or 'step-child.'[11] A lecturer at one of the colleges said 'we feel we are being silenced … and that we need to self-censor. We know what is allowed and what is not.'[12] The lecturers also noted the fear and sense of being silenced that the students, particularly the Palestinian ones, experience.

The elephant in the room that did not rock the boat

What happens when the reality of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict shakes up the reality of the academic process? Our survey started a few months after the 2009 war on Gaza, and, just as we were preparing the end-of-the-year survey, the Free Gaza flotilla was halted by the Israeli army. Nine of the people on the boat were killed, the rest were arrested and deported. According to the Israeli army and government, the Israeli soldiers were attacked on the boat. As Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu maintained, these soldiers 'were going to be killed and they had to act in self-defense … the attackers had prepared their violent action in advance. These were violent supporters of terrorism.'[13] These claims have often been put forward through Israeli news outlets to which the Jewish students were exposed. The Palestinians, on the other hand, pointed to an Israeli attack, which they described as a massacre and a crime. Palestinian Authority's President Mahmoud Abbas stated: 'The attack on the Flotilla is an attack against humanity.'[14] According to the UN fact-finding mission, 'a series of violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, were committed by the Israeli forces …'[15]

We intentionally designed our survey to focus on community-engagement rather than peace or Palestinian–Jewish relationships, as we wanted students to answer freely and we were aware of students' fear to deal with 'peace and conflict issues.' Following the flotilla incident we asked the faculty members in the study for permission to add a more specific and concrete item to the end of the year questionnaire, regarding whether or how the flotilla event was mentioned in class.

While some course instructors agreed, others thought it wrong to bring up such an issue at the end of the year. Yet, others did not want to bring the politics of the conflict into the classroom in such a way. Our study benefitted both from our discussions with the faculty, whether or not they chose to include the question, and from the responses of those students who were asked.

As people who live and teach in Israel we could not contemplate forming relations of trust with our students without talking about the issues being discussed off campus. In retrospect, we acknowledge that we barreled indelicately into one course

where we were given permission to include the flotilla question in the survey although this issue was not discussed in class.

We received permission to ask the question about the flotilla at a college in the periphery, where the majority of students are Palestinians. This college is situated in the middle of Zefat, a town whose official rabbis ask their constituents not to rent apartments to Arab students and where violence against Palestinian students occurs frequently. The question about the flotilla was asked in the course, 'Strengthening the Welfare of Women through Awareness and Empowerment', where all but two students were Palestinian. Their answers reveal some of the difficulties of openly discussing political issues related to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. A Jewish male student in the course said:

> We did not discuss it. I think the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] operated in the most cor-
> rect manner. As a former combatant, I know it takes a long time until a military opera-
> tion is approved. If it was approved, then apparently none of the other options worked.

Indeed, the majority of Jewish students in Israeli universities served in the army before their studies and continues to do reserve duty for a few weeks every year. Their ongoing military service affects not only their attitude, but also their analyses of military interventions and decisions.

One of the Palestinian female participants in the course stated:

> We did not discuss it [the flotilla] in class, and I did not go to class for two days to dis-
> tance myself from it and not get in trouble with my extreme opinions because it was
> very hard for me.

To define her own reactions and positions towards the flotilla as 'extreme' suggests that the politics of one's identity shapes and constructs not only one's positions and opinions, but also one's perceptions of how such positions may be seen by others.

The response of another Palestinian female student in the course supports our analysis that perceptions are colored by one's historical and present identity as a homeland minority, as part of an underprivileged group:

> We did not discuss it in class. But I really did want to discuss it because it's a perfect
> example of Israel's cynicism. Because it's a terrorist state, it thinks everybody else is.
> They dropped soldiers from planes and said the others attacked them. What did they
> expect them to do, embrace them? Give them flowers?

Other Palestinian students' reactions revealed that some feared discussing the issue, others preferred to discuss 'positive issues', while still others were confused about how to raise such contested and painful topics.

The second course in which we were given permission to ask the flotilla question was one in which the flotilla had been discussed. The 'Legal Feminism and Social Change' course at the University of Haifa included some of the best students in the university's law school, along with women leaders from marginalized communities (mainly Palestinians and Druze but also Jewish immigrants from Russia and Ethiopia). In this course, the class worked together on issues of importance to the women leaders. When reading their responses to the question about class discussion of the flotilla, we were aware of the heavy weight that students felt when sharing their opinion. Each side felt they were being attacked and needed to defend themselves.

Palestinian students stressed the importance of breaking the siege on Gaza and the need to allow the ship to bring in medicine, medical equipment, and immunizations for newborns and to meet other humanitarian needs, like food. Their sense of fellow-ship with their imprisoned sisters and brothers in Gaza conflicted with the position of the Jewish students, who stressed their security concerns and fears about allowing ships to reach the Gazan shore.

Students' positions varied as to the problematic importance of raising such an issue in class. A Jewish female student responded:

> I think the discussion about the flotilla was very important and for the first time con-tributed profoundly to creating such relations [between Jews and Palestinians in the course and the community]. Until then, relations were relatively superficial.

A Palestinian male student explained:

> We disagreed, but the mutual listening made me believe in humankind again and got me out of my despair.

Others claimed that, as important as the issue was to discuss, it might have caused severe damage to the relationships between the two groups, as one Jewish female student explained:

> I think it helped and hurt at the same time. It helped because it was an apolitical pro-ject that managed to connect women from different extremes, different cultures and dif-ferent communities, and it hurt because the moment we did the activity about what happened in the flotilla, everybody's 'real' sides and political opinions came out, and I felt we had been dishonest with each other throughout the project.

Analysis of the students' responses to the flotilla issue raises a complex picture of the meanings and ramifications of introducing the politics of the conflict into the classroom and its effect on the potential for creating a safe space for Jewish–Pales-tinian dialogue on campus. On the one hand, some of the students in the course where the issue was addressed described the discussion of this sensitive and painful political subject as a watershed that led to more honest and open relations between the Jewish and Palestinian students. The moment the barrier of political silence was removed, the 'real' discussion began.

On the other hand, discussion of the flotilla exposed deep conflicts between Pal-estinians and Jews. The result was a crack in the safe space conceived by students as apolitical, a wedge driven between interpersonal relations and the 'war out there.' Moreover, while there is a clear advantage to broaching these controversial and sen-sitive issues after trust, openness and willingness to listen have been established, there is a risk that doing so might reflect negatively on previous discussions and damage the delicate relations that have formed in the group. In other words, despite the importance we accord dialogue that does not deny the political conflict, we should be cognizant of the heavy price it might incur. The example of the flotilla demonstrated how highly controversial political issues must be introduced into the classroom with adequate time allotted, much patience, and in a manner that does not undermine the students' sense of being in a stable and supportive environment. The legitimacy of open political discussion must also be clarified and reinforced, espe-cially given the hegemonic discourse that prevails in Israel, and on Israeli campuses.

The flotilla was, of course, just one event in the years of tension and uncertainty during which this research was carried out. This event, like the wars, and the ongoing Palestinian–Israeli conflict, affected all students – those who belong to the Jewish majority, most of whom still do reserve duty while studying, and those who belong to the Palestinian minority and despite being citizens of Israel, have family and identity connections with Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. While a few students stressed the importance of raising and discussing such issues, most students and teachers preferred not to discuss such overwhelming events.

Conclusions

As leaders of the future, university students are an important target group for peace education. Therefore, changes in student attitudes towards the other, and the creation of a space for transformative learning, can be expected to have a wide-ranging effect on society at large.

This study found that the community-based courses in question provided transformative learning experiences, enhanced students' self-examination, and allowed them to reflect on their fears and stereotypical beliefs, while acknowledging other people's conditions, status, and behaviors. The courses allowed them to reexamine social issues in a climate of openness and intellectual rigor; to better understand their own identity, including how it affects the workings of power; and to develop their commitment to engaging with and working on behalf of the other and otherized. By providing opportunities for reflection, the courses allowed students to build new networks of relationships in a deeply divided society. While their responses revealed that injustices caused much confusion, emotional negativism, fear, sadness, and even some feelings of despair and hopelessness, their experiences also increased their critical thinking and added insight into social injustices, raising their commitment to do more for social justice. Student responses allow us to understand the importance of dialogue with community members, for, as students explained, this increased their willingness to learn more, allowing them to question what is taken for granted, and to critique hegemonic Israeli education.

At the same time, our research shows just as clearly that, while students were highly aware of hardships and inequalities in society, and while they were committed to seeing, acting, and being alert, they tended to define as non-political, both their theoretical learning and their action for change. The boundaries of what can and cannot be brought into the classroom are clear to all. The 'political' is considered by participants anything connected to the military and is taboo on campus. The military occupation, ongoing war, border control, siege on Gaza, and militarization of Israeli society are all out of bounds because they are perceived as political. Everything else, social justice, equal rights, and civic engagement are legitimate topics of discussion and action.

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict was almost absent from the students' surveys, and students as well as their teaching faculty preferred not to mention the Palestinian Occupied Territories. The elephant in the room was ignored, and students and faculty clearly preferred that it does not rock the classroom boat. In the world of Israeli academia, there is a hidden message that, yes, there is a large and protected space defined as 'academic freedom', but political discussions are not encouraged or even allowed. Discussing or acting on issues of social change or civic engagement within Israel is fine – as long as the most important issues of war and peace and the

ongoing military occupation of Palestinian Territories are not brought into the classroom.

The findings of this research shed light on one aspect of depoliticization in Israeli academia, where the teaching and studying of issues such as the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories are quite rare (see, e.g. Shenhav 2008, 265). This depoliticization is also evident in many of the NGOs in which the students interned (e.g. Orr 2011, 2012). It was particularly evident in the 'social protest' that took place in the summer of 2011 in Israel. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis protesters demanded 'social justice' while insisting on keeping their struggle 'apolitical.' As Shenhav (2012) maintains: 'The exclusion of the political from the discourse, in actual fact, negated the political conflict and normalized it …'

This depoliticization serves, often unintentionally, the powerful and perpetuates the status quo. As Brown (2006, 211–212) asserts, 'While depoliticization may not be an explicit aim of the powerful, it does conserve the status quo and dissimulate the powers that organize it.' Therefore, the propensity to deny the politics of the conflict a space and a weight can be interpreted as the Jewish participants' (often unintentional) internalization of the hegemonic position (Gramsci 1971). This includes fear of disclosing the role of the political situation, refusing to disclose it, and thus neutralize its power and deny its multiple effects. It should be noted, however, that depoliticization is evident in many peace education programs. Bekerman and Zembylas (2012, 28) contend that, '… particular manifestations of peace education … essentially depoliticize the issues involved and put aside inequality and injustice.'

According to Freire, when students understand the reality of inequality and injustice in which they operate, they will act to prevent inequality and injustice in broader contexts as well (Freire 1985, 2000 [1968]). Yet, our study shows that thus far students have drawn a clear boundary between what they define as 'social' and what they define as 'political' and they choose to act only in the 'social' context. In certain respects, the practices adopted by the faculty members and students are parallel to what Bar-Tal, Rosen, and Nets-Zehngut (2010, 27) defined as 'indirect peace education' which 'does not challenge directly themes related to conflict, such as its goals, its course, its costs, or the image of the rival.'

The fact that issues related to the conflict remained outside of the safe space made it easier, perhaps even possible, for students and faculty to discuss everything else freely and without fear, including Jewish–Palestinian relationships in Israel and joint activism on the community level. The flotilla case-study demonstrates the threats of bringing the politics of the conflict into the classroom.

If the students in the community-engaged courses – the same students who enjoyed the opportunity of meeting students of the 'other' group and saw the Partnership classrooms as safe havens where they could discuss their feelings and who felt they had been transformed personally and professionally – were reluctant and often afraid of talking or doing or learning 'politics', what must we conclude about the despair, numbness, and fear on campuses in Israel and other conflict zones?

This study proffers a new model for peace education, albeit under a different name (since peace education is a non-viable commodity in today's Israel). This is the preeminent developing model in Israel because it enables students to feel that they are working for change and for a more just society. The community-engaged courses make it possible for Jews and Palestinians to engage in a safe space for the first time, on campuses which on the one hand are the locus of such initial

encounters and on the other do very little to facilitate contact and dialogue between different groups.

Future research is needed to study the long-term effects of these courses on the students and to examine whether students' positions and patterns of actions have changed as a result of participating in community-engaged academic programs. At this stage, we aver that these courses constitute an important and innovative alternative, or a new field in peace education, which should be further expanded and developed. Even if the Israeli–Palestinian conflict was not directly discussed, the courses provided most of the participants with a unique opportunity to encounter students from the other group, and learn about their personal dilemmas and structural inequality that emerge from their community volunteerism.

Unlike the one-time dialogue events generally lasting only a few days, we found that the one-year community-engaged courses had a deeper and more profound effect on both Jewish and Palestinian participants. The combination of activism and study enabled them to learn not only about one another, but also about the communities in which they are active off-campus. They became a learning community, with the vast majority of the students confirmed that these courses were an extremely important part of their academic careers and requesting an additional year's extension. These courses proved their worth in comparison with dialogue or peace workshops, which are usually self-selecting, and in which those who oppose peace typically avoid taking part.

Moreover, in contrast to workshops that remove the participants from their lives and bring them together in organized encounters that are short-term and usually lack continuity, the Partnership courses are part of academic life on campus, earn participants academic credit, and are hence legitimized by the academic establishment. As such they influence not only the students and faculty, but also the campus and the communities in which the students volunteer. We propose to continue investigating action-integrative courses, supporting and assisting Palestinians and Jews who teach on campuses where political discourse is delegitimized, and enabling them to continue breaking new ground in peace education. The objective is a framework that encompasses safe spaces for Jewish and Arab students to engage in discussions of identity, to share knowledge they gained from their community-engagement, and to jointly reflect on the structural and institutional asymmetries and ways to change them.

Notes

1. In the academic year 2010–2011, these figures do not include the Open University of Israel.
2. For a list of all the courses, their disciplines and main objectives, see http://law.huji.ac.il/upload/Toolkit.pdf.
3. The course 'Planning, Sustainability and Human Rights: Theory and Practice – the Right to Adequate Housing in Jaffa Gimel' included only Jewish students who worked in a Palestinian–Jewish area with a Jewish community.
4. About 65.4% of Israelis (68.3% of Israeli Jews) and 62.3% of Palestinians think it is impossible to reach a final status settlement these days (Truman Institute and PSR 2012, 8). Note that most surveys include information about Jews in Israel and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and not about Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel, who are the focus of this research.
5. A prominent example is The School for Peace in the Jewish–Arab village of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam. See: http://nswas.org/rubrique138.html.
6. Tel Aviv University, 16 February 2012.
7. Discussion held on 20 June 2010 at the fourth national conference of the Campus-Community Partnership, entitled 'A Multicultural Academy?' at Tel Hai Academic College, 20–21 June 2010.
8. For example, the administration of the Western Galilee College outlawed posting announcements of any sort that were not in Hebrew, at a time when the student body at the college was 30% Palestinian (Motion 156/99 [Haifa District Court]: *Western Galilee Student Association et al.* v. *Western Galilee College et al.*). Recently, the School of Education at the College for Academic Studies in Or Yehuda, where the student body comprises 20% Palestinian students, issued a directive prohibiting lecturers to talk to students in any language that is not Hebrew (Kashti 2013). Political protest by Palestinian students on the campuses is subject to strict supervision and limitations. For example, during the military campaign in Gaza in 2009, a legal protest vigil was held near the entrance to Ben Gurion University. The university's Security Unit documented the demonstration using a hidden camera and called the police, which in turn arrested and charged five of the demonstrators, four of whom were Palestinians (Criminal Case 345-09 [Beer Sheva Magistrate Court], State of Israel, Prosecution Office, *Negev-Beer Sheva Region* v. *Tzoref et al.*). Security officers from that same university dispersed other protest demonstrations of Palestinian activists on campus and exclusively barred leftists from distributing political propaganda materials (http://www.acri.org.il/he/?p=13135). On several occasions, the administration at the University of Haifa suspended public activities on campus for periods ranging from 7 to 15 days around the time of Naksa Day (Day of Setback marking the outbreak of the Six Day War in 1967), during the Gaza Flotilla and during various Israeli military campaigns. See, for example, Motion 9232-06-11 [Haifa District Court]: *Khatib* v. *University of Haifa*; Motion 51057-11-12 [Haifa District Court]: *Minski et al.* v. *University of Haifa*. Another area of supervision and limitation has to do with access to positions of influence. For example, at Zefat Academic College, where 60% of the students are Palestinians, a clause was introduced to the college regulations stipulating that those running for president of the Student Association must have completed military service or national/civil service for a period of at least 24 months, thus blocking Palestinian students from running for this job (http://adalah.org/heb/?mod=articles&ID=1237).
9. Note that this fear was expressed in the interviews and not in the written survey, apparently due to the fear of writing about this topic in an official survey bearing the university logo.
10. This threatening atmosphere worsened and found concrete expression in the attempt to close down the Department of Politics and Government at Ben Gurion University of the Negev. On 4 September 2012, the Sub-Committee for Quality Assessment of the Council for Higher Education in Israel (MALAG) recommended not permitting registration of a new group of students for the academic year 2013–2014. Many viewed this recommendation as politically motivated blow to academic freedom, in view of the fact that several members of the department faculty are human rights activists or known opponents of the occupation (see, e.g. Nesher 2012; Ophir 2012). Following a struggle led

by the university and Israeli and international academics, the Council reversed the closure recommendation (Nesher 2013).
11. Meeting of faculty members teaching community-engaged courses, held at Tel Aviv University, 16 February 2012.
12. Meeting of faculty members teaching community-engaged courses, held at Tel Aviv University, 16 February 2012.
13. Statement by Prime Minister Netanyahu: 'No Love Boat', 2 June 2010, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2010/Statement_PM_Netanyahu_2-Jun-2010.htm.
14. Statement from the Palestinian presidency, in: Aljazeera, Global outrage over Israeli attack, 3 June 2010, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2010/05/20105316216182630.html.
15. United Nations, Human Rights Council, 'Report of the international fact-finding mission to investigate violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, resulting from the Israeli attacks on the flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian assistance', A/HRC/15/21, 27 September 2010, 1. http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/15session/A.HRC.15.21_en.PDF.

Notes on contributors

Daphna Golan is the director of the Campus-Community Partnership, and of the Minerva Human Rights Fellows Program, in the Faculty of Law, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She authored or edited several books, including 'Next Year in Jerusalem: Everyday Life in a Divided Land', 'Inequality in Education' (in Hebrew), and 'Inventing Shaka: Using History in the Construction of Zulu Nationalism.' She is a peace and human rights activist, was the founding director of Bat Shalom, a feminist peace organization which together with the Palestinian Jerusalem Center for Women was entitled The Jerusalem Link. She was the co-founder of B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories.

Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian is a feminist activist, associate professor at the Faculty of Law – Institute of Criminology and the School of Social Work and Social Welfare, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the director of the Gender Studies Program at Mada al-Carmel, Haifa. She has published extensively on gendered violence, crimes of abuse of power, surveillance, securitization and social control, and trauma and recovery in militarized zones. Her latest book is 'Militarization and Violence against Women in Conflict Zones in the Middle East: A Palestinian Case Study' (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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