Main Article:

Methodological Quandaries in Joint Israeli-Palestinian Peace Research

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Abstract

This article explores methodological issues central to the undertaking of joint Palestinian-Israeli research, work that is impacted by the violent conflict between the two peoples. Four issues are discussed: (a) collaborating under conflict, that is, how the conflict impacts relations between the researchers on either side of the border, (b) issues of power and equality, as they impact the research process, (c) relationships with participants, that is, how the conflict influences relations between the researcher and the research participants, and (d) rethinking standards, that is, whether the normative standards of research quality are relevant for Palestinian-Israeli collaborative research. The article presents examples from joint research and offers preliminary ideas for dealing with these methodological issues.

Keywords: Palestinian-Israeli conflict; collaborative research; researcher-participant relationship; research standards

1. Introduction

One of the hallmarks of the fields of conflict resolution and peace-building is that the fields integrate scholarly work with field work (Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2006). Many professionals in these fields understand the importance of being scholar-practitioners, because they believe that in order to be good theoreticians, they also need to be connected and sensitive to the arenas in which conflicts are actually unfolding. In order to be good, sensitive, and creative practitioners, and help facilitate conflict resolution and peace building efforts, it is important to be well versed in the theories and

concepts of the discipline of peace research and be able to conceptualize cases and phenomena that they are confronted with "on the ground" (Lederach, 2005).

As a Jewish-Israeli woman who splits her time between academia and nongovernmental and grassroots initiatives in the Israeli-Palestinian peace and social justice field, I come face to face with research challenges that this combination produces. I often ponder: Is there really such a thing as apolitical research? Can a Jewish-Israeli, who is studying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, undertake research that is untainted by political opinions and worldviews? Furthermore, should a person who works for and believes in social justice attempt to undertake such "neutral" research? That is, should s/he wear the hat of the "peacenik" or the hat of the "academic?" What should be the primary goal: to change the face of society or to make a major contribution to knowledge in our messy and complicated field of conflict resolution?

This article explores some of the difficulties in such research and offers some preliminary ideas on what can be done to overcome them. It aims to address whether it is possible or desirable to separate politics from research in such a context (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). Specifically, I discuss four issues: (a) collaborating under conflict, that is, how the conflict impacts relations between the researchers on either side of the border, (b) issues of power and equality, as they impact the research process, (c) relationships with participants, that is, how the conflict influences relations between the researcher and the research participants, and (d) rethinking standards, that is, whether the normative standards of research quality are relevant for Palestinian-Israeli collaborative research.

I begin with a short history of the conflict and some statistics. I then present personal experiences that demonstrate the difficulties that arise from trying to do research in my own conflictual backyard.

1.1. A Brief Background to the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

In the Middle East, Arabs and Jews have been in conflict for over 100 years, since the beginning of modern Zionism when European Jews began immigrating to the region (Bickerton & Klausner, 2004). According to reports, since 1987, when the First Intifada began, approximately 7,200 Palestinians and 1,250 Israelis have been killed. Furthermore, as horrific as these numbers are, these statistics do not reflect the extent of the harm, such as the massive psychological and physical damage, that has been done to the millions of people who live on both sides of the borders.

While Palestinians and Israelis do not always agree on the facts of the region's history and conflict (Bickerton & Klausner, 2004), both sides agree that 1948 was a turning point: This was the year that Israel gained independence--a historical pinnacle for the Jews--and the year that signified devastation for the Palestinians (termed *Al Naqba* or "The Catastrophe") when they lost their homeland. As a result of that war, approximately three quarters of the Palestinian population, an estimated 750,000 people, either fled or were exiled from their homes, and have never been allowed to return. According to [BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights](#), today there are

approximately 4 million Palestinian refugees in the world. A second "wave" of refugees was created by the Six-Day or June War (June 5-10, 1967) in which Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza (Bickerton & Klausner, 2004). The last 20 years have been exceptionally bloody, mostly due to the constant violence and retaliation which resulted in, among others, two intifadas, the Second Lebanese War, "Operation Cast Lead" (the last Gaza war), suicide bombers, and the Qassam rocket attacks on Sderot and southern communities in Israel.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a long-term intergenerational conflict that is often termed an "intractable conflict"--a conflict perceived as impossible to resolve (Coleman, 2006a). Since the end of the Oslo "peace years" (late September 2000), the peace process has more or less come to a standstill. The major issues which continue to divide the two sides include disagreement over the borders, the ongoing Occupation, Jewish-Israeli settlement in the West Bank, the status of Jerusalem, the construction of the Separation Barrier, and the Palestinian refugee problem (Bickerton & Klausner, 2004).

It is within this context of conflict that I carry out my research.

1.2. Some Experiences in Undertaking Joint Israeli-Palestinian Research

In 2000, I was engaged in my post-doctoral work at the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East (PRIME), a joint non-governmental research organization founded and directed by the late Professor Dan Bar-On of Ben Gurion University and Professor Sami Adwan from Bethlehem University. I was part of a research team that explored Palestinian and Israeli non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that worked together on ecological concerns. Bar-On and I headed the Israeli staff and Adwan and Dr Fida Obeidi comprised the Palestinian team. The project began in April 2000, when we were still in the midst of the "Oslo days" and it ended abruptly on September 29 of that year when the Second Intifada broke out. We were in the midst of collecting data when the war began; therefore, we were unable to finish this stage of our research.

It took us--the Palestinian and the Israeli teams--time to recover from the war and to return to our work. After 2 months, we began meeting again, face to face. Before the war, we would meet once every 2 weeks in PRIME's offices in Beit Jala (near Bethlehem, in the West Bank). After the war began, we could not continue to meet there, mostly because it was dangerous to drive on West Bank roads; I did not want to risk my life for research. In order to find a safe place for all of us, we decided to meet at the Notre Dame Hotel in Jerusalem.

At these meetings, we had many discussions and also a number of difficult arguments. One argument arose over the following: In all of my studies, I transcribe the interviews, word for word. During this stage, I do not change anything; I neither correct ungrammatical sentences nor rephrase anything, such as swear words. This practice follows what I was taught in my research courses; since it is very difficult, if not impossible, to carry out in-depth analyses of the audio recordings of interviews, it is necessary to create a written transcript that follows, as closely as possible, the original

interview (Rosenthal, 1993). While these transcripts are not the interviews themselves--indeed a written text is a very different medium from an oral interview, and is an approximation of the actual encounter--researchers are dependent upon transcripts for the stages of analyses. Once I brought a transcript from an interview with a Jewish-Israeli to my Palestinian colleagues. In this interview, the man spoke about Islam in an insulting manner. The response from my colleagues was very harsh; they demanded that I remove the insulting sentences from the transcript. They were not willing for such remarks to appear anywhere in our research, even in the transcript that no one, other than we, the researchers, would ever see.

At the time, it was very hard for me to accept this demand from my partners. I explained that these were his words, not mine, and that it was important to know his exact words so that we could gain a good understanding of his perspective. My explanations were unconvincing. In the end, I understood that if I wanted to continue working on this joint study, I would have to delete the remarks that my Palestinian colleagues found to be so very offensive. And that is what I did.

That was the first and only time (meanwhile) that I have changed or deleted words in transcripts. At this point, I do not believe that I would agree to do so in joint research with non-Muslim colleagues, since I believe that it is necessary to prepare transcripts that capture as closely as possible the actual taped interview, for the reasons stated above. However, this experience taught me that not all accepted (Western) research standards are necessarily the right ones in all research situations. That is, my experiences during this study, and later in other joint studies, helped me realize the importance of being sensitive to Muslim religious beliefs, and to honor these by sharing with them transcripts and field notes that do not contain insulting remarks against their religion or revered ones. I have learned that insensitivity to this point might not only jeopardize the good working relations that we share as researchers, but more importantly, might sour our good interpersonal relations, which are crucial from both personal and professional standpoints.

We also had disagreements when it came to writing our report. At times, I thought that my Palestinian colleagues had written propaganda; in my mind, instead of producing analyses, they were listing Palestinian opinions about the results of the Occupation, blaming Israel for everything that was wrong in the West Bank. I did not find support for this in their interview transcripts, nor did they provide academic sources that substantiated the claims. I demanded that they change these sentences, or support their claims with solid empirical evidence. After long and hard discussions, we always reached agreement, but it was a very wearing process. These discussions paid off; within 2 years, we succeeded in publishing a book and two articles about the work, not a small feat during that period of intense violence.

Looking back at my reactions to this writing experience, I realized that my stance against this "propaganda" was motivated not only by my belief that an academic study should be grounded in scholarly literature, but also by my inability/unwillingness to realize what life is like for my Palestinian colleagues under Occupation. Furthermore, I had not really

considered the differences between the givens of my personal and academic life, such as freedom of movement, freedom of speech, citizenship in a recognized country, etc., and the givens of my Palestinian colleagues, such as lack of basic freedoms, curfews, closures, and military attacks. Over the years, I have realized how important it is for Palestinians to voice the injustices they suffer under the Occupation in the forums they have available to them, including academic ones. I have come to understand that it is unreasonable to expect Palestinian academics to leave out the experiences of their lives when reporting on their research, especially studies that focus on the conflict. These voices need to be heard, even if they are not reflective of normative standards concerning academic writing (Creswell, 1998; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

The second experience is connected to a study that we did at PRIME on "refugees"; our research participants were Palestinians who have been refugees since 1948, who were still living in a refugee camp in the Bethlehem region, and Jewish-Israeli citizens who came to the country after World War II as refugees from the Holocaust or from Northern Africa. I was in charge of the Israeli side of this project. My team and I interviewed Jewish-Israelis who had established *moshavim* and *kibbutzim* (two kinds of agricultural, collective community) in areas where there had once been Arab villages. The purpose of the study was to learn the life stories of the refugees, understand from them how they saw the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and learn their thoughts on the Palestinian refugee issue.

I had a very hard time recruiting Jewish-Israeli participants for this research; for a number of weeks I tried to get permission from potential interviewees and I phoned many communities in the Negev and Lachish regions of the country, an area where villages had once existed and where former refugees had settled. I met with numerous refusals. I did not understand why, because I had never had a problem finding interviewees. Eventually I reached a Holocaust child survivor who wanted to be interviewed. After the interview, she told me that her eldest son, who lived next door to her, might like to be interviewed because "he is very interested in the topic of the Shoah and his family's roots." I told her that I would be very happy to interview him since we wanted to get intergenerational perspectives as well. The participant told me that I should try to call her son on his day off.

I phoned the man on Friday, introduced myself, and asked him if he would be interested in participating in the study. He obviously was expecting my call since he said that he had heard from his mother how well her interview had gone. I began telling him about the study and got to the part where I mentioned that the research was a joint Israeli-Palestinian undertaking. At that point he stopped me in mid-sentence and began screaming at me: "Do you think that I am going to collaborate with you on this, that I am going to take part in something that is Palestinian-Israeli? You are a traitor! They want to kill us and you want me to participate in such a joint project? You must belong to the left-wing, or to B'Tselem" (an Israeli watchdog organization that documents violations of human rights, mostly in the West Bank).

I tried to tell him that we wanted to hear different views: "I will let you say whatever you want. I won't stop you. It's important for us to hear your voice as well." My words fell on deaf ears. The son of the survivor slammed down the phone, putting an end to our talk. It took me quite a while to get over that telephone conversation. My failed attempt to recruit as many interviewees as we had originally planned for (our final list consisted of 30 Jewish-Israelis, but it took over a year and a half to find this number and we had originally hoped to have 100 interviews) showed me very clearly that the idea of participating in a joint Palestinian-Israeli venture was threatening to many Jewish-Israelis. I understood that many people were uninterested, or frightened, in collaborating with "the enemy."

These two experiences connect to joint research studies that explore the effects of the conflict on our lives. The first experience connects to the relationship between the researchers on either side of the border while the second one relates to the relationship between the researchers and the participants, on their side of the border/conflict. There is quite a bit of published research literature on the second issue (e.g., Fine, Weiss, Weseen, & Wong, 2003; Gergen & Gergen, 2003); however there is relatively little about the researcher-researcher relationship ("Collaborative Research," n.d.; Markowitz, 2002; Tiainen & Koivunen, 2006).

These topics lead to four important methodological issues, presented below. Since I am a Jewish-Israeli, I will relate to these topics from this personal and particular standpoint and not present the Palestinian perspective(s). While I mention a number of things connected to these perspectives, I do not attempt to offer in-depth Palestinian understandings, since I do not feel that I can or should speak for my neighbors. There are two main reasons for this decision: (a) too often others have spoken for the Palestinians, often misrepresenting their views, and I do not wish to be another voice that does so and (b) since I am on the "other side" of the conflict, if I were to inadvertently misrepresent their feelings and attitudes, this could be yet another wedge that widens the divide between us. Based on these reasons, I have chosen to concentrate on these issues from a Jewish-Israeli perspective and to hope that, in the future, Palestinian researchers will present such joint work from their perspectives.

Before moving on to the specific issues below, it is also important to note that there is no doubt that the topics discussed here are not unique to the Israeli-Palestinian context; indeed in other contexts of conflict such issues will arise and need to be addressed. Accordingly, it is hoped that discussion of these four topics will be of relevance to researchers working in other conflictual contexts. However, in this article, I focus on my Israeli-Palestinian "backyard," since it is the one I know best and the one in which I work.

2. Four Methodological Issues

2.1. Collaborating Under Conflict

How does the Palestinian-Israeli conflict influence the quality of relationships between Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian researchers who work together?

I have no doubt, that every Jewish-Israeli researcher who works with a Palestinian partner, regardless of discipline or topic of study, has a deep interest in carrying out joint work with Palestinians. I also assume that every Jewish-Israeli who searches for a potential colleague does so from an ideological and political stance, and believes that there is a need for creating work relations between the peoples, at the very least.

It is not easy to find a Palestinian colleague since Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians tend to be highly suspicious of one another and because, for a number of years, there has also been an ongoing Palestinian academic boycott against Israel. Therefore, if a research project begins, the chances that it will indeed last are dependent on the accompanying process of trust-building between the partners. This process should not be taken for granted and it also needs to be recognized that it takes a long time. However, even when both parties are interested in carrying out joint work and they trust one another, the collaboration is never easy.

From the Jewish-Israeli side, there needs to be a high level of sensitivity and ability to psychologically contain the pain and frustrations of the Palestinian side in order to continue having good interpersonal and working relations. In addition, the more Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian colleagues work together, they may find that they do not agree on a number of fundamental political issues.

In collaborative research between two or more Jewish-Israelis, in most cases, differences of political opinion do not disrupt or seriously threaten the research process. That is, while politics are often discussed, and argued over, as they tend to be in general in Israeli society, I have never heard of or read about instances in which Jewish-Israelis who were collaborating on a joint project broke off their joint endeavors due to political disagreements. In my work, I had one experience which did put temporary stress on joint relations but did not disrupt that work. Furthermore, I have continued working with these colleagues.

Here is the case: My colleagues and I were working on a study that explored Jewish-Israeli young adults' attitudes and perceptions concerning the Holocaust. In addition to an open-ended interview guide that we developed for use with a small number of participants, we constructed a questionnaire to give to a larger number of people. One of my colleagues said that she knew a faculty member who taught a large course at the Ariel University Center of Samaria--an Israeli academic institution located in the Jewish settlement town of Ariel in the West Bank. My other colleague said that it was a good idea to approach the faculty member to see if she would administer the questionnaires to her students, since we could reach another 200 students that way. My reaction was strong and swift: I told them that I was unwilling to participate in research with faculty from that university center since it was located in a Jewish-Israeli settlement in the occupied territories, and I thought that it had no right to be there. By doing so, I said, we would be legitimating the university, and I was not going to be part of such a process.

My colleagues were quite taken aback by my swift and unbending position. They told me that I was over-reacting and being too extreme. I told them that if they intended to approach the colleague there, I would withdraw from the joint work. After a few emails and phone conversations, they decided to forgo the suggestion and to look for more Jewish young adults within Israel's green line. I could tell from their comments that they did so out of respect for me as a colleague and friend, but that they did not agree with my stance, and that my emotional reaction had perhaps even frightened them a bit. As noted above, except for the day that we had this disagreement, there were no other negative impacts and we have continued to work together on a number of studies. It could be, however, that they are cautious with me when issues such as this arise, since from that discussion, and others that we have had, it is clear that we often do not hold the same political understandings.

However, when working with Palestinian researchers, differences of opinion around central topics of the conflict (e.g., concerning the Israeli blockade of Gaza) can signal the end of the joint research. In such work, politics and research are not separate issues, nor are they marginal. Another personal experience, from the study on the environmental organizations, can demonstrate this point.

When the Second Intifada began, I was very angry at the Palestinians, and I did not understand why they had resorted to war, when we were so close to finally reaching a comprehensive peace agreement. In spite of the fact that I was very worried about my Palestinian colleagues, and I called them and emailed them on a regular basis, I was furious with their people, who had once again chosen war, instead of peace. I remember those first few days, when I was unable to concentrate on work. I spent many hours weeding and cleaning up my garden in order to calm the tension that I was feeling during that new and very frightening war.

In addition, I also used another technique that helps me deal with overwhelming stress: I wrote an open letter that expressed my hard feelings. I sent the email to a number of people, including my Palestinian colleagues. I did not expect the answers that I received. One of my colleagues was furious: How could I (a Jewish-Israeli) write about pain and destruction, when I was working in my garden? After all, as he let me know, the Palestinians were under siege, had no water, no electricity, and they were being bombed day and night by the Israeli air force! And I was complaining that things are tough while I watered my garden?! My colleague wrote that instead of feeling sorry for myself-- unjustifiable from his perspective--I should join their struggle and demonstrate alongside them against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the Israeli government, which was carrying out atrocities against innocent people. During those days, I did not accept his point of view, and I was also insulted. I did not believe that they actually expected me to demonstrate against my army and government when I believed that it had been the Palestinians who had begun this round of violence.

It took me a number of months to see the war from a wider and more complex point of view. I began to understand that the changes that we Israelis had felt during the years of the Oslo Accords had been barely felt by the other side. I began to understand the insult

and offense that the other side experienced, during the negotiations, when they felt that they had been left with so little. I also began to understand that my Palestinian colleagues saw joint research as just one (small) part of a greater joint action, and that they really did expect me to voice opposition against the Occupation and against the violence of the soldiers while the war was going on. They wanted to see me by their side, and not listen to my worries when I was sitting in my safe home, with my green and well-kept garden.

I did not go to demonstrate against the soldiers and the government during the Second Intifada, but I did listen more closely to the voices of my colleagues and I was much less insulted. Even though I thought that I had more knowledge than the average Jewish-Israeli about Palestinians' experiences, I began learning more and more about life in the Occupied Territories and gained a deeper understanding of the deep frustrations and pain that they feel all day long, everyday. I better understood that since I was a Jewish-Israeli, for them I was also a representative of the more powerful side that was occupying them. Therefore, I had to be prepared to contain much of their pain and not demand, or even expect, that they would respond kindly. I understood that this process was not separate from our joint academic research and that, without these gestures on my part, there would be no continuation of our work. In spite of the fact that all research partners, whoever and wherever they may be, need to maintain good working relations, in the case of joint Israeli-Palestinian work, good working relations are directly tied to one's political stance, making these relations extremely complex and fragile.

One of the hallmarks of collaborative Palestinian-Israeli research is that there will always be grave interferences from the outside, such as Israeli military operations, wars, terror attacks, or rocket and Qassam attacks. These external events make the joint work very difficult and also negatively influence the relations between the partners. In spite of the fact that researchers will spend much time and energy writing the proposal, looking for funding, and undertaking field work, as soon as there is a resurgence of violence, the Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian colleagues will not be able to ignore these events and carry on as usual. During times of an escalation in the violence, the partners will need to respond to what is happening and reorganize their work. At certain times, an open discussion between the partners is enough to get the work back on track. However, at times, the researchers may need to take a time-out from their joint endeavor. Since the political situation is so dynamic in this region of the world, it is impossible to know how long this break may last and what the future of the research will be.

Jewish-Israeli researchers who face this situation may suddenly find themselves without partners who are willing to continue the partnership, or worse, without old friends. It is rare that interpersonal relations between the colleagues completely deteriorate and turn into enemy relations. However, since it is extremely difficult to carry on regular face to face communication during times of danger, and because the actions of the Israeli army are often perceived by Palestinians as being indiscriminate and inhumane, there is no doubt that even good interpersonal relations risk being damaged.

In addition to the points that have been raised so far, deterioration of the political-security situation also impacts the consciousness of Jewish-Israeli researchers, at least regarding

the conflict and the relations between the two peoples. After there is regression in the extremely fragile and poor relations that exist between Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli peoples, Jewish-Israeli researchers need to not only confront their personal relations with the partners, but also find the strength to face the questions: Where am I in all of this-- from the psychological, political, and research standpoints? Will we be able to carry out our joint plans, or God forbid, will this be the straw that breaks the camel's back?

I assume that this (almost) never-ending process of reflection is one main reason why many Jewish-Israeli researchers are not eager, as a rule, to work with Palestinian researchers. There are enough difficulties that exist when engaging in studies with other researchers (not Palestinians)--so why should one pursue extra problems?

At times, the relations between the researchers from opposite sides of the border become complicated due to personal and family reasons. For example, if the son of a Jewish-Israeli researcher is serving in the IDF, there is no doubt that this will influence the relationship between the two researchers in some way. As a rule, Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis hold very differing perceptions concerning Israeli military service. For us Jewish-Israelis, military service is not only a legal obligation, that can put you in jail for not obeying an order to serve, but also an accepted, important, and necessary norm. Very few Jewish-Israelis question if they or their children should serve in the army, an act which is seen as being crucial for the defense of the country. For Palestinians, the soldiers are the everyday symbols of the humiliating and degrading Occupation.

Under such conditions (or in the case when the researcher is called to military reserve duty), it is important that the colleagues on either side of the border share their thoughts and feelings connected to this aspect of the conflict. It is possible to exploit this situation for the additional opportunity of learning more about the other side, but the Jewish-Israeli scholar should not expect the service of her/his son/husband/grandchild will be accepted by the other side. To some extent, the researchers need to be prepared for their study to hit difficulties, even in an indirect manner, because of this fact.

In sum, the conflict influences the interpersonal relations between the researchers who have chosen to work together. As a result, we should expect that there will be an ongoing confrontation with the difficult and many issues that arise due to the conflict and the Occupation. The world of research is not immune to the violence that is taking place on the "outside" and the Jewish-Israeli researcher needs to be aware and sensitive to the frustrations, pain, and anger of his/her colleagues, because they are Palestinians who feel the direct effects of the Occupation everyday. Not every Jewish-Israeli scholar is willing, prepared, and/or able to deal with these difficulties. Therefore, before entering into such a partnership, the researcher should think carefully about these issues before reaching a decision, at least a theoretical one, concerning willingness and ability to face what is ultimately waiting down the road.

2.2. Issues of Power and Equality

What aspects of the research process can challenge collaborative work between Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian researchers??

This issue looks closely at the research itself and identifies aspects that can present problems in joint work, especially during times of escalation of violence between the sides.

All research partners, whoever and wherever they may be, need to respect one another if their work is to have a chance of succeeding. This is one of the bases of successful collaborative research ("Collaborative Research," n.d.). In general, it can be assumed that scholars choose research partners whom they respect, from a professional standpoint. In Palestinian-Israeli studies, attaining and maintaining mutual respect and trust is extremely hard, and extremely important.

Trust and mutual respect are built slowly, yet easily destroyed. Researchers from either side of the border, who work together, do so against all odds. As a rule, they enjoy little to no support from their societies, colleagues, and institutions. More precisely, they work in a hostile environment that often discourages joint projects. Furthermore, this environment often lets the researchers know that such work is naïve or suspicious, at the very least, if not bordering on treason to some degree.

In addition, in the Palestinian-Israeli case, we are not speaking of trust and mutual respect among equals, but rather dealing with asymmetrical power relations (Coleman, 2006b) between a researcher who belongs to the dominant group and a researcher who belongs to the occupied nation. This inequality can become a very problematic factor during all stages of research: when working on its design, when choosing instruments for data collection, gathering the data in the field, during the analysis of the materials, and during the writing stage.

Every researcher has his or her own preferences concerning research design and how to go about collecting and analyzing data. There are those who identify as "qualitative" researchers and those who identify as "quantitative" researchers; there are researchers who are experts in biographical research and those who are experts and believe in the power of close-ended questionnaires. This is the way of the research world. When scholars decide to work together, as a rule, they know how each of them works, the kinds of study that they carry out, and, on the whole, if they are willing to accept any conceptualizations and methods, with some discussion concerning possible changes. For the most part, conversations about the design and/or the ways in which data will be gathered do not turn into arguments between the partners. The academic arguments are not perceived as being dangerous, but rather as part of the routine construction of a joint research study.

In Jewish-Israeli-Palestinian collaborative work, the research design process is far from simple. For the process to run smoothly, the decisions should be made by research equals, between scholars who share the same level, more or less, of experience and professionalism. But as perhaps could be expected, it is more difficult to talk about the

differences connected to research when there is a large and destructive political conflict taking place in the background, which colors every academic discussion. In other words, when trying to maintain good working relations to keep the project going, the Jewish-Israeli scholar may give up on a research-related idea that he or she would normally find very important--something that s/he would not do in any other research circumstance. In such a case, this would be a sign that the researcher feels it is more important to ensure that the collaboration carries on than it is to insist on a research protocol that she or he believes is best for the topic under study.

I can testify that there have been times when I have stopped insisting on a certain research method since I have not wanted to be perceived by my Palestinian partners as the Jewish-Israeli who is once again giving orders and telling them what they should do. I was afraid that if I insisted on a research issue, such as using a life-story methodology instead of semi-structured interviews, this would be seen by my colleagues as another expression of the unequal and unjustified occupier-occupied relationship, which they confront every day. I am not sure that I made the right decisions at those times; I raise the point because it happened to me and I have no doubt that other Jewish-Israeli scholars have faced this in their work with Palestinians as well. Therefore, it is important to identify this problem, in order to think about possible solutions.

A different research concern that is important for the context under discussion is connected to academic freedom and freedom of movement. All Israeli researchers, regardless of ethnicity or religion, have freedom of action; for the most part they can decide what to study, how to study it, who to study, and how many times to meet the people they have chosen for their sample. All Israeli academics have freedom of movement and they can go wherever they wish in the country (and abroad, if they have the funds) in order to meet people important for their research. For Palestinian scholars, the situation is very different. These researchers are, in effect, locked up, often due to a closure in the West Bank or Gaza Strip, and always behind checkpoints that can change from day to day. At times they cannot even reach their universities. Palestinians from the West Bank cannot travel to Gaza, and vice versa. Collection of data, therefore, needs to be undertaken in an area close to where the researcher lives, or in a place that does not demand complex planning.

The impossibility of moving freely also complicates and hampers the research process because of other reasons. Often the Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli researchers are unable to meet face to face and work on their joint project. In order to sit together and discuss their study, the Jewish-Israeli researcher must arrange an entry permit for the Palestinian colleague. This not only adds additional administrative work for the Jewish-Israeli scholar (if only this were the main problem), but rather demonstrates in a very clear and painful way the difference in status between the two scholars. The main difficulty is a moral and an emotional one; the security situation, in essence, turns the Palestinian researcher into a person who is dependent on her or his colleague. The Jewish-Israeli researcher becomes powerful, even if she or he did not ask for this power. This situation puts both sides in a very uncomfortable and embarrassing position.

When I worked on research for PRIME, I had to arrange entry permits for our Palestinian partners a number of times. This made me very uncomfortable for two reasons: (a) it meant that the power to direct their movement was somehow put into my hands and (b) I realized that I preferred to work for permits for my colleagues rather than travel to the West Bank for meetings there, since I felt unsafe, as a Jewish-Israeli traveling into the Occupied territories. I was torn between uneasy feelings of preferring to have this power over a willingness to meet my Palestinian colleagues on their side of the border.

The thought that I had to worry about the permits made me feel quite ill inside. I asked myself: Who am I to decide, to some degree, if my colleagues will come into Israel or not? If I do not take care of this properly, then they will not be able to enter. If I mess up, I will not only hurt the research, but even worse, I may humiliate them or anger them. How will I be able to look them in the eyes, without feeling shame? I hated the fact that my Palestinian colleagues' freedom of movement was put into my hands. I had not asked for this responsibility. I understood that as hard as we would try to be equals in our research, this "equality" was a lie and so, to some extent, made our research a lie and unethical.

While I do not yet have many solutions to offer, there is one important way that Jewish-Israeli researchers can begin to cope with these challenges and obstacles. They can relate to the obstacles as *research challenges* and look for creative, new, and bold research methods and strategies to confront them. As an important first step, the researcher can keep a journal (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), a recommended and well-known stage in ethnographic research. This writing can help scholars process what they are going through. Keeping a journal also provides researchers with opportunities to reach a higher level of reflection as well as a higher level of social responsibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003)--critical in joint Jewish-Israeli-Palestinian endeavors. As researchers reflect on what they encounter, this can help them conceptualize research issues that arise from the joint work. In addition, as the researchers think about what they are experiencing, and about the different connections that exist between the political situation and the collaborative research process, they can then consider alternative research paradigms that can both remain faithful to social science research and pave the way for creative research thinking.

There is no doubt that our reality demands a different kind of methodology that does not ignore the conflict and its many consequences. In spite of the fact that the time-outs that are forced upon us every now and then can threaten the continuation of the joint scholarly work, these breaks can also help us during the stages of analysis. Interpretation is a critical stage in research that seeks to understand the meanings people attach to their experiences. It demands time and some distancing from the stage of data collection in order to allow the researcher to entertain different interpretations. So, the time-outs can facilitate fresh thinking about the materials collected from the field (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). When we return to our joint project, we can then share our insights with our partners in order to further our work.

It is extremely important for me to note that my suggestions that I put forth in this article do not reflect any attempt on my part to justify the painful reality of the Occupation and the wars which characterize our societies and our lives. These ideas come only to offer alternative ways of thinking about and working on research that may prove helpful for Jewish-Israeli researchers as they try to go on with the work during the most difficult of times. They may help scholars not sink into deeper feelings of depression, frustration, and anger vis-à-vis the political situation, which in the end will help neither the peace process nor the research process.

2.3. Relationships with Participants

What is the quality of the relations between Jewish-Israeli researchers, who are working on joint work, and their Jewish-Israeli participants?

At the beginning of this article, I presented an experience I had with a son of an interviewee who refused to take part in a joint Palestinian-Israeli research study and saw me as a "traitor" to our people. I also noted the difficulty I had recruiting interviewees for our study on the refugees. In spite of the long list of potential candidates that I had, time after time, people told me: "I am not interested"; "Why should I get involved in something so complicated?" or simply, "No thanks." So many refusals were new for me.

If I try to interpret these many refusals, I reach the understanding that among Jewish-Israelis, there is a general distrust and suspicion toward Jewish-Israeli researchers who are working with Palestinian researchers, as well as suspicion about what might happen with their interviews. More than once I heard the following questions: What are you going to do with the results of the study? How can you promise me that the Palestinian researchers will not exploit what I said for their propaganda? How can you promise me that the study will not fall into the wrong hands, such as the Hamas?

To be honest, I could not promise that the results would not reach the "wrong" people. I could not promise that the results of the research would be used for purposes of Palestinian "propaganda." In spite of the fact that I could assure the potential participants that I had no intention of distorting what had been told to us, or to knowingly "arm" hostile others with "weapons" against us, I could not guarantee, in good faith, that others who read our study--either on the Palestinian side or in other places of the world--would understand and interpret our results the way I had intended. This fear, of course completely understandable given the hostile reality in which we live, certainly decreased the number of people who in the end agreed to be interviewed.

Another aspect that is connected to this issue of relationship with participants is the difficulty dealing with the social-political opinions of the participants, when their opinions differ from those of the researcher. I know that I have this difficulty. In spite of the fact that I know it is forbidden to judge my participants, if I want to carry out an ethical research project (Christians, 2003), I am not always successful at completely meeting this challenge. Given the nature and content of my research projects, I hear many opinions and worldviews; at times they are very different from the ones that I hold. I try

hard to be tolerant and open to listening to these dissimilar views that often anger and annoy me. I assume that this is a challenge other researchers face as well.

What can be done in order to help facilitate better researcher-participant relations? First of all, it is possible to let the participant lead the study, as much as feasible. That is, the researcher can let go of the strict control that s/he feels is necessary for completion of the study and allow interviewees to speak about whatever they want, as long as it is connected to the topic of research. This step, of course, is not without its dangers; after all, it is possible that the interviewee could decide not to answer any of the research questions and to only talk about topics that s/he wished to discuss.

My experience has shown that this does not occur; indeed there are questions that do not receive answers, but the knowledge that is gained when the research participant feels free to talk about whatever is relevant for him or her, opens up a number of new windows into understanding the topic under exploration. Furthermore, the ability to speak freely allows the researcher to rephrase/rethink the research questions, to look at the topic from a new angle, and to ponder additional populations worth researching. In general, this approach can widen and deepen the knowledge in fields that have not been fully studied.

Another important by-product of such a procedure is related to the personal impact that this can have on the researcher. When I need to deal with attitudes that do not fit my worldviews, I am required to reflect closely on my attitudes and to try to understand why I am so bothered by what the participant is saying. Furthermore, at times the participant raises an issue or a perspective that I had not previously considered. That is a golden opportunity for me to check myself, check my knowledge, check my preconceptions, and to decide what I want to keep and what I want to change. This can help me reach further and more complex thinking as well. My opinions, like the opinions of my participants, and like the opinions of my Palestinian partners, are not static. As we meet others in this world and confront difficult problems, such as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is no doubt that something moves within us, sometimes just a bit, sometimes rarely noticed, and sometimes in a very strong and conscious way. Acknowledging this movement is not easy, but it is necessary in this field of inquiry. Furthermore, it helps us grow as researchers, but perhaps more importantly, as individuals.

2.4. Rethinking Standards

How does the conflict impact the quality of research? In other words, are the accepted standards devised for research in "normal" times relevant for joint Jewish-Israeli-Palestinian research, and if not, how should we address this problem?

Because of all of the obstacles and problems that I have noted so far, it is not surprising that at times it will be very difficult for Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli researchers who are working together to produce a study that meets the accepted standards of quality in social science research. Difficulties in meeting, differences in status, uncertainties about the future of the study during hard times, difficulties in recruiting participants, and difficulties in finding academic and/or economic support for the work--all of these can

lead to a study that fails to live up to, or has great difficulty in meeting, accepted standards. Therefore, we can ask, if accepted standards of research do not take into account the difficulties of doing research in a war zone, is there a need for researchers working under such conditions to relinquish the desire to work together on a collaborative study? As can be expected, my answer is that we should construct new standards and criteria that are more relevant for the social-political world in which we are living and carrying out research.

In 2008, I gave a talk at a university about the issues involved in carrying out joint Palestinian-Jewish-Israeli research. One of the members of the audience asked me: "If it is so complicated, why do you insist on working on joint studies? Why not wait for quieter political times before entering into such collaborations?" I answered that research is a part of life, and that we could ask that question about all other aspects of life. Why should we meet and not wait for peaceful times? Why should we create joint businesses while we are still in conflict and not wait for the political problem to be solved? I answered that if we wait, nothing will ever change. And in spite of the fact that we are working against all odds, throwing up our hands and giving up is not the answer. The opposite is true; in the circumstances that have been created, scholar-practitioners need to be pioneers and undertake ground-breaking work, precisely when all the signs point to a mountain of obstacles, and probable failure.

This way of thinking connects to the objective of social science research. Researchers agree that the main goal of research is to further knowledge (Delanty & Strydom, 2003). However, this is not its only aim. Theoreticians and researchers that adhere to critical and feminist perspectives (e.g., Haraway, 2003) or who undertake participatory action research (such as Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003) aver that an additional objective of social science research is to bring about change in an unequal, racist, chauvinistic, and ethnocentric environment that characterizes many social and political contexts, such as the Palestinian-Israeli context. This is my view as well.

Therefore, the question is not whether we should embark on joint research, when the attaining of quality may prove extremely challenging, but rather, how can we design and undertake quality research in the context of an "intractable" conflict?

It appears to me that the best place to start is with the fervent desire of the partners who are creating a joint study, trying also to construct a new reality, and who are not surrendering to the violence that prevails in their societies. This courageous thinking can lead to the birth of new and creative research ideas. Innovative insights and solutions often appear when the individual (researcher) finds himself or herself stuck and then, almost miraculously, finds a completely different way to solve the problem that beforehand appeared to have no solution (Kohler, 1976).

When working together on a study, Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli researchers need to be able to continue on with their work even when they cannot actually work together, but rather must work in parallel; that is, each one works on her side of the border and they "meet" (by phone, via email) for consultations or in order to report on what they

succeeded in doing so far. For example, in the refugee study for PRIME, the Palestinians and we interviewed our participants in different ways. On the Jewish-Israeli side, we used biographical interviewing with our interviewees (Bar-On, 1995, 2006; Rosenthal, 1998) while our Palestinian colleagues used semi-structured interviews with theirs (Creswell, 1998). The reason for the difference was derived from our different perspectives on interviewing, cultural differences, and differences in expertise and skills of the researchers. Furthermore, because we could not sit together in order to devise an agreed upon interview guide that would be relevant for both populations, we settled on writing questions that concerned the experiences of the participants and how they viewed the conflict. I am not claiming that this was the ideal solution--it was simply the only option that we had at the time since the Second Intifada was still raging.

Therefore, parallel work, instead of fully joint work, can lead to differences in the ways data are collected, and as a result, in the ways the data are interpreted and analyzed. After all, data collection instruments and research approaches have their own different methods for interpretation of the materials (Creswell, 1998).

The difference does not end there; often there will be differences in styles of writing, due to the fact that the scholars come from different cultures. Multi-voice writing (Gergen & Gergen, 2003) is not a phenomenon that is unique to Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli researchers, or to scholars from other conflict areas in the world; the moment that members of a research team sit down to write their article or book, we will hear different voices in their text. However, when the researchers are "enemies," who, in addition, come from different cultural backgrounds, it can be expected that this diversity will be even more conspicuous and create new challenges during this stage of the study. The result of all of these phenomena is that we cannot expect a high level of uniformity in such a research study. And when there is little uniformity, there is a greater risk that the quality of the research will suffer.

In this article, I will not offer a solution to this problem. This is a challenge that demands more thinking, and so this will be my next step in this field of inquiry. However, what can be noted now is that this challenge requires understanding on the part of editors and publishers of journals and academic books. Should they not be willing to accept unconventional articles or books from scholars pursuing peace, then joint research would run into even more problems. However, if they are open to different kinds of research, there is a chance that collaborative research will succeed, at least from the aspect that the researchers will succeed in producing a product that shows others in Palestinian and Israeli societies, as well as in other parts of the world, that joint research in a war zone is not only possible, but also publishable.

3. A Few Concluding Remarks

The overall topics that I have discussed above are not only specific to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, the methodological issues are surely relevant for all researchers from past and present-day conflict areas around the world. Therefore, while this article focused on the Israeli-Palestinian context, it is hoped that researchers who

either study their own backyard, or who are interested in undertaking joint work with "enemies," will be able to draw parallels between this specific case and their cases as well. It would be very interesting to read about the challenges that researchers from other conflict zones face and how they deal with them, on personal and professional levels. It would be especially interesting to read about these topics from former "enemies"--such as researchers who undertake joint scholarly work from Northern Ireland or South Africa who were once on opposite sides of their conflicts.

When returning to the Israeli-Palestinian situation, there is no doubt that those of us from this region have lived and continue to live through difficult times. The peace that we long for so badly continues to elude us. We scholar-practitioners, who jointly research the conflict, have not yet succeeded in creating partnerships that have indeed changed our violent reality. As a result, there is now an understanding that our task is not to change our present-day reality, but rather to focus on helping create a solid foundation for more people-to-people processes, which will be necessary when a binding peace agreement is eventually put into place by our leaders. Therefore, until we reach that day of peace, we need to continue paving the challenging, winding, and uneven way that embraces joint peace-building research, even if only a few of us are meanwhile walking this path.

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