

WOMEN CAN DO IT: THE ROLE OF AKKO WOMEN VISION ASSOCIATION (AWVA) ON BRINGING THE TWO NATIONS (ARABS AND JEWS) TOGETHER

Dr. Janan Faraj Falah

The Arab college For Education Haifa

ABSTRACT: *The term 'Mixed City' in the Israeli context usually refers to a city with Jewish and Arab residents, yet there is a distinction between them due to different social and economic class (Fenster and Jacoby, 2006, p. 45). Akko is one of the mixed cities in Israel, where Jews and Arabs live in separate neighborhoods, with only one mixed neighborhood, however in most of the high-rise buildings live Jewish and Arab families. In the year 2008, on the eve of 'Yom Kippur' there were riots and violent incidents in Akko between Arabs and Jews, which greatly affect the residents of the two sectors. The aim of this study is to examine the contribution of AKKO WOMEN VISION ASSOCIATION (Jewish and Arab) on the relationship between the two nations in daily life and in the future. A derivative of the study is then the following questions: Do associations & Arab -Jewish women groups can influence peoples' political views and opinions through its activity, in a manner that will construct a desire to share daily and future life? In order to study the subject, the research includes a use of quantitative paradigm. The data were collected via special questionnaire built by the researcher. The sample included participation of women of Akko Women Vision Association'. The study findings have led to interesting data, especially to the notion that associations with mixed societies contribute to the formation of positive political attitude and affect the willing to live together and the share life aspects without conflicts. In addition, it was found that neither religious origin nor education affect positive attitudes toward the other nation.*

KEYWORDS: Akko Women Vision Association (AWVA), Arabs, Jews

THE RESIDENTS/POPULATION OF THE CITY

In this chapter, the characteristics of the city of Akko will be presented in relation to the development of the city residents in chronological order. Before the 1948 war, the city population was approximately 15,000 people (Luria, 2000 in Ben-Shitrit, 2011, p. 8). According to CBS publications, in 1948 the city had 4,000 residents in total, 900 Jews approximately. In the first decades of the establishment of the Israeli State many immigrants were sent to live in Akko. In the year 1955, the city of Akko was 19.2 thousand residents, 5 thousand, Arab residents approximately. The population of the city continued growing. The changes of the population between the years 1961 to 2008. In 1961 the city population was 24.2 thousand, and the Arab residents' percentage was 25%. In the subsequent two decades, the Jewish population has continued to increase. In 1983 Akko population was approximately 45.1 thousand; the Arab population began to increase again reaching 25% of the city residents. From 1995 to 2006, the Jewish population was decreased (Ben-Shitrit, 2011. p. 7-9). The city variety and ethnicity

provide Akko living in co-existence, however reflects the great gap between the different cultures and populations, differences that emphasized in attitudes and education, which can lead to positive competition on the one hand, yet in practice they deepen the gap when one group considers better than the other, while the other one feels inferior. These feelings of Inferiority lead to the growth of crime and poverty among this group.

I will try to describe the ethnic texture of the city, before the establishment of the Israeli State. The historian- Lurie Reviews in his book 'Akko a city of walls, Jews between Arabs, Arabs between Jews " the history of the city, emphasizing the co-existence and honorable relationships between Arabs and Jews, which had allowed the existence of Jewish settlement also in tensed turbulent periods. In the late 19th century, there was a small Jewish Spanish community in Akko. Arabic was the common language in the city, the small succeeds to maintain the relationship with their Arab neighbors in the old city.

Models of encounters between groups in conflict

Unlike the previous chapters, this chapter discusses the coping of the models of groups in conflict. Researches prove of five main types of encounters between groups in conflict:

b. **The contact hypothesis model:** essence of the model is based on promoting mutual acquaintance, developing partnerships, memberships, and reducing stereotypes. Strengthening the notion of similarity between people, encourages networking, shared identity and a sense of "togetherness"., this model was used in the 1980s (Maoz, 2004).

c. **Joint projects:** the assumption that work on a joint mission intended to achieve the relevant purpose on both sides to create a common identity for this model is operated mainly in home libraries and especially in short term projects that work conducted under a one-time task (the Public Committee to formulate the national policy on the subject (Solomon and 'Isawi, 2009, pp. 15-17).

d. **Confronting models:** essentially based on model that emphasizing the conflict and the differences between national groups and interactions between group-based (and less on personal interactions (Halabi, Sonnenschein, 2004) the model replaces the model of contact and was implemented already in the 1990 's, its use began at the initiative of leaders and Arab participants joined the Jewish colleagues (Maoz, 2004).

D. **The model of Narrative :** based on "life stories", the model uses methods of personal stories to recognize the narrative, it combines interpersonal and group interaction by dealing with personal and group identities, family and nationality through contemporary folklore (Bar-on, 2006). The model was implemented already in the late 1990 's.

E. **Theoretical models that deal with issues related to co-existence:** mostly based on learning and theoretical issues relevant to educating to co-existence such as democracy, human rights, equality, humanism, tolerance, citizenship, and multiculturalism, these models include learning, discussion and processing of these issues, and in some cases also the developing of learning materials, this model does not have necessarily a dominant component in the encounters, the model is in use since the 1980s (Solomon and Isawi , 2009, pp. 15-17).

No doubt that many attempts have already been made in the past to promote Arab-Israeli dialogue, most frames included sessions to introduction and changing of attitudes among Jews and Arabs in Israel under the title "Education for life".

These attempts have found expression in the education system. The education system has a dominant role in educating for tolerance and co-existence, for example, the learning of the Arabic language in Jewish schools and vice versa, studying of the Hebrew language in Arab schools.

Even outside of school, there are more attempts at dealing with the development of Arab-Jewish dialogue and bilateral education meetings of Jewish and Arab citizens at all ages. These sessions run in different formats and levels of success and efficiency, and were created, for developing dialogue, positions, reducing prejudice, correct the discriminatory behavior between members of the two groups and to reveal the complexity of the situation. These meetings were held under the auspices of organizations/NGOs aimed to developing and managing a productive dialogue between the two ethnic groups.

As mentioned in previous models it is apparent that with the emphasis on the group rather on the individual do not strengthen mutual understanding, some claim that empowering and stressing the personal pan may lead to openness, understanding and to a reduce of stereotypes (Sagi, Steinberg and Tin Aladdin, 2002). The distinction between the personal and the collective dimension between individuals both of Arab and Jewish groups emphasizes shearing in meetings for the benefit of the Jewish participants, as a result of the vagueness of the relations between the majority and the minority, which restricts the ability to relate to political content (Suleiman, 2000).

In the workshop "Women embroidering a dialogue of tolerance and acceptance of the other", the main purpose was to examine the contribution of the meeting in order to modify numerous negative attitudes on a psychological repertoire (beliefs, attitudes, feelings and behavioral intentions toward different groups) and the need for the promotion and nurturing of cohabitation between Arabs and Jews in Israel. Attending the workshop proves the numerous changes of attitudes among the participants. The workshop meeting included Arab school teachers in alzharawi and Jewish teachers of various schools in Tel- Mond with real dialogue sessions. The findings of the initiative are of great importance to the process of reconciliation between the nations and citizens of the State of Israel, Arab & Jews (from 2012).

Women as promoters of social & peace processes

This section will be a discussion on the issue of the involvement and participation of women in implementing business economic changes and practical peace. Display cases and events, both locally and on a global spectrum, which was attended by women who left their mark on the promotion processes. Furthermore, a concise number of mixed NGOs that women are active in will be represented.

In a special article for Women Day published by the Institute for democracy (2008) under the title "is there a 'female' voice in politics?" raised the issue of the existence of women's voice in politics. From the article, it is possible to infer and understand that in Israel, there is no "feminine voice" in politics resembling and the tendency of the economic Left Party does not exist as in other western democratic countries. In addition,

women in Israel do not poses of equity positions more than men. Regarding the political participation, the female voice is weaker than the voice of men, namely both in Israel and abroad, women less tend to participate politics. Up to this day, the fact that most women who are part of these processes is due to their certain position and not namely by the fact of being women. It is possible to say that their participation is in spite of being women.

However, the following two examples indicate of organizing women movement or political party in order to represent women and make their voices heard in peace processes(Faraj Falah 2016). In both cases, these are women that are outside the political establishment, and yet they have succeeded to affect the formal procedures to end the conflict and to gain peace in their areas. The first example is the women NIWC- "The Northern Ireland Peace Coalition ". This Coalition assembled women from different Irish political spectrum, including supporters for a union with United Kingdom alongside those who support detachment from it . The Coalition never identified with neither of the major parties of Ireland and consistently refused to take a stand on whether on Northern Ireland should to be part of the Uk or part of Ireland, however, the Coalition's position was clear and unequivocal regarding its opposing the use of violence on either side, they put two representatives in the election- Monica McWilliams(Catholic) and University lecturer in the field of social policy, and Pearl Sagar, a Protestant social worker. These two representatives were part of the signers of the historic Treaty. On 22 May 1998 the agreement was brought to a referendum in Northern Ireland and Ireland and gained widespread support in both areas (Kaul-Granot &Ben David, 2004, p. 7).

The second example is of a network of women " Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) in Western Africa — The Mano River Union includes the countries of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. The Union was founded in 1973 to establish Customs and economic cooperation and customs union between these countries and in this manner to raise the standard of living , however, since the early 1990s internal civil wars dragged the countries of the region into bloody maelstrom and severe humanitarian crises in certain districts for more than a decade. On the ground of these incidents the Union was founded in 2000 by women of the three countries. The women were determined to create peace in the region by joining forces between organizations that were already active separately in each country. As a basis for its activities, the Union was awarded by the United Nations for human rights in 2003 (Kaul-Granot & Ben-Davidn, 2004, p. 8).

Akko Women Vision Association

In this section, the reference is to the NGO: AKKO WOMEN VISION ASSOCIATION-mixed ethnic group in Akko. The new wave of change has not skipped the Israeli Arab women. The researcher Totry (2011) indicates that most organizations run by Arab women (or feminist ones) share similar goals of Israeli group NGOs in the 1980s of the twentieth century, for example the association of "the Negev Arab Women; " Nissaa Wafaq "and "Aswat" (Totry, 2011, p. 16-17).

These organizations provide tools and services that political parties could not gain from the State, for example, "The Nazareth Day Care Center who was developed into "Al-Tapola"," A-Sindiana". Most of the organizations against violence were established in

the 1990s ", such as "A-Siwar", "Al-Panar", etc., some were established in the 2000s" for a union in the city of Akko. In resemblance to other cities and villages in the state, many NGOs and political women groups belong to the Islamic Movement, some organizations are mainly social.

In the city of Akko there are about 20 clubs of women, more than half belong to the Arab community in the Old City. There are also associations that aim to strengthen co-existence between Arabs and Jews. For example, mixed women's organizations, some are national and institutional such as WIZO, Na'amat or Inerveil (a Rotary club for women: internal), and there are groups formed by the private initiative of the municipality such as "Women and Multi-Cultural" and "The Akko Women Vision of Association" in 2004(Faraj Falah 2015) .

Akko Women's Vision Association

The association was established by Dr. Janan Faraj Falah on 13-2-2004 together with a group of Arab and Jewish women from Akko, who are engaged in various aspects. The group has different purposes, in addition to the promotion of the women's status in the city and the issue of co-existence, an attempt to make Akko an exemplary for many cities in Israel and abroad.

The Group has various goals:

- A. Promoting the status of women.
- B. Co- existence.
- C. Making the city of Akko an exemplary for many cities in Israel and abroad
- D. Peace in the country and with the neighbors.

In order to implement the goals , the association relies on the idea that "woman gives life" by:

- 1. Life Quality .
- 2. An appropriate education.
- 3. Female leadership.
- 4. Creating new circuits to develop the concept.

Many projects conducted by the Vision Association:

- 1) The peace garden in the city center, the garden was donated by U.S. Association by the mediation of the member Dyana Balter.
- 2) Project "Gesture" that combines Jewish and Arab schools and Arab and Jewish students.
- 3) Conference "Women, Art and Peace" a joint Palestinian and Israeli women conference held in Akko and Haifa in April 2009 hosted by 'Golda Meir Center' sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- 4.) The Young author competition: a story contest to the 6th grade in the two sectors. The competition left positive echoes throughout the country, thus it was decided to turn the competition each year nationwide (this is the fourth year it takes place).

The following is the plan for 2012-2013:

- 1) Women's language courses: Arabic language to Jewish women and vice versa.
- 2) Cultural encounters: writers and journalists representing their art , with the participation of Leha Harari, Salma Falah, Samia Kazmuz, Diana Balttar
- 3) International women's day.
- 4.) Young author competition
- 5) Women painting exhibition.

6) Mixed center for diabetics of the city and the region.

The association also created a shared array with the vast majority of women NOGs in Akko, and with the movement of 'Learning & Working Youth' and with most of the mixed groups in the city, including youth groups and adult groups such as 'Community charity for the purpose of improving life, co-existence and Peace'.

*** The Association get in(2014) a permanent building which called 'Woman House of Peace'. The house used as a center of culture, research and Gallery.**

**** In 2012 Dr. Janan Faraj Falah received the Governor shield of tolerance of Rotary, as a token of appreciation on its operations for the co-existence in Israel.**

*****Dr Janan Falah get the Rapaport Award for her activities.**

THE METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the city of Akko, the researcher selected for the sample representatives of (A.W.V.A). Some of the participants of the sample are members of several NGOs, some only in this group.

B1. The Research Question and Purpose

B1a. The aim of the study: the study examines the impact of women's mixed group (Arab & Jews) on the relationships between the two nations on daily basis and in the future.

B1b. The research question: Are joining the mixed group of Arab & Jewish women (A,W.V.A) able to affect political opinions in their place of residence, to create good-will and co-existence on daily and future basis?

B1c. Research hypothesis: Mixed groups and non-profit organizations (NGOs) of women (Jewish and Arab) affect positively politics and good will to a better sharing of live, co-existence without struggles.

B 2. The study population and sample : Most of the women participating the research and sample live in Akko, a small percentage of the women do not live in the city ,all of them are members of (A.W.V.a). The sample includes 20 women from Akko. Some of the women are members of both mixed and unmixed groups. Some are new and some have experience. The participants age range from 38 to 79 years, the average age is 58.5 years. The women education differs; some have P.hD and some of high school diploma, the religious origin is also different, Jewish, Muslims, Christian and Druze.

B3 . Research tools

The research tool is a questionnaire, written by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part has 23 questions aimed to collect informative data of the participant. For example, demographic data of age, workplace, religion, gender, education, etc. In addition, there were questions about residential, group/ organizations/associations membership, etc. (see appendix).

The second part of the questionnaire was made up of 33 idioms related to women's associations and activities. The idioms are divided into two parts in order to test the participants' view and perception regarding the efficiency and contribution of the (A.W.V.a) on different aspects of life, solving of problems and conflicts between Arabs and Jews, and the ability of these association to assist disputations, bringing people together, encourage people into social and political activities. The questionnaire also examines the importance of the association in the politics and social.

During the research study participants were required to rate their extent of agreeing with the statements. The questionnaire varies in sequence as follows: 1 = extremely agree, 2 = agree, 3 = tends to agree, 4 = tends to resist, 5 =resist, 6 = extremely opposed. This part of the questionnaire being tested by the exploratory research and has been found highly reliable and consistent. Alpha kroinbch = 0.79. (For more detail see appendix).

B4. The course of study and data collection method:

For conducting of the study and the various different surveys, it took coordinating with the participants by the(A.W.V.A). The research goals and purpose were explained to the participants, confidentiality and anonymity was promised. In addition, the participants were allowed to return the questionnaires to me; in this manner they were able to complete the questionnaires with no pressure, at time that appropriates them.

B5. Data processing:

The analysis and the results was done by the SPSS software. The research examined the distribution of each variable (average and standard deviation) in order to get general information on research variables. The various differences between the groups were determined by F tests and independent samples.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of the mixed groups of women (Jewish and Arab)(A.W.V.A) on the relationship between the two nations on daily basis and in constructing of a common future. As a result of this goal the research question is " whether the membership in(A.W.V.A) enable to affect political views at their place of living, to create good will and co-existence at the present time and in the future?

This study examined the mixed city of Akko in the North of Israel. During the review the study represented the historic element of the city; it also referred the city's present life. In addition, there was a reference to the history of models of encounters between groups in conflict that had begun since the 1980s (of the 20th century). Most of the models were of ' the contact hypothesis model', 'joint projects', 'confronting models', 'the model of narrative' and theoretical models in relation to co-existence. The NGO(A.W.V.A) - use the latest model in order to exercise its goals of creating a dialogue between the groups of conflict and co-existence. There is no doubt that many attempts have already been made for the benefit of Arab-Israeli dialogue. Most frames included workshops and meetings between the two nations in order to get to know each

other and to modify attitudes among Jews and Arabs in Israel under the basis of "educating for co-existence".

Before I will discuss the research hypothesis and findings, I would like to present some findings which may shed a light on the situation, for example, the statement "women NGOs assist women progress and development". It appears that women agree that these NGOs do affect their progress, a fact that strengthens the argument that women join those NGOs out of personal choice and as a desire to progress and develop. In statements 14 and 15 "women can resolve disputes and problems between neighbors" and "women can resolve problems within the city", it was found that most participants believe that women can resolve problems between neighbors and within the city. Hence, women are aware to their power to influence and contribute to conflicts and disputes both in a specific local level and in larger social groups.

Also the statements of 16, 17 which refer the power of women in solving conflicts both at the ethnic political level, most women did rate it positively, furthermore, the (A.W.V.A) membership contributes to the formation of positive attitudes towards facing conflicts. The statements indicate that attending the (A.W.V.A) only intensifies the positive attitude and action in favor of promoting solutions and conflicts.

As for the main part of the study which examined the involvement in (A.W.V.A) and their effect on forming positive political attitudes towards each other while striving for better co-existence without struggles.. The findings indicate that the hypothesis is proved. In other words, the study indicates of women's positive attitude towards fulfilling their part in the conflict resolution and the (A.W.V.A) contribution politically and socially. Other interesting findings exemplify the fact that religious origin nor education level or working place disaffect the attitudes toward the other nation. In addition, there is no significant difference in relation to women's parents' participation in mixed groups activity. Thus, demographic variables do not affect the attitude but the involvement itself in the activity is the cause for positive attitude.

. Women have a positive tendency to resolve disputes and conflicts between groups. Furthermore, it was found that mixed groups and NGOs (Jewish and Arab) effect politics and good will, co-existence in peace without struggles, **more than** separated ethnic groups (of Arab Jewish apart). Environmental variables such as religion, education, the workplace and others have no effect on the opinions. Finally, it is understandably that women's positive attitudes are a result of participating and membership in mixed NGOs.

The research results prove that (A.W.V.A) assist to promote women, particularly their ability to solve problems and disputes. Furthermore, memberships in mixed NGOs affect the social and political aspects, while religious identity does not.

An additional interesting finding indicates that mixed NGOs are a sort of melting pot for women, despite the differences of age, education, religion and profession. The efforts to gain peace are the answer for cooperation and co-existence, as in the city of Akko. Finally, the notion of peace is the trademark of the women in the mixed NGOs (A.W.V.A)

THE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NGO'S

- 1) Increasing awareness among citizens, particularly in the mixed cities to the women important role, the awareness will be based on:
 - i. Online platform using the website and other forums to publish and explain the work (A.W.V.A) and goals.
 - ii. A second platform is based on increased awareness to co-existence and the importance of peace through formal and informal education.
- 2) Increasing Jewish-Arab dialogue by meetings and workshops, to enhance cooperation.
- 3) Develop of projects of ethnic Jewish-Arab cooperation to strengthen mixed cities, the assumption is that joint mission intended to create cooperation and mutual identity.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) The Knesset should legislate laws that define the establishment of women NGOs in the mixed cities-duties, financing, goals, etc
- 2) Integration of women of mixed groups in local municipality and mixed cities, to strengthen the relationship in the city.
- 3) Integration of women as representatives of city mediation centers, as defined by the Law.
- 4.) Implementation of multi-culturalism education in schools, from elementary school to high school.

In summary, you can learn and understand the importance and donation of the being a member of (A.W.V.A) to the formulation of personal and political positive attitudes towards each other, to dispute resolution and to the formation of good will and co-existence without struggles.

In addition, it was found that, it was found that neither religious origin nor education affect positive attitudes toward the other nation.

The study provides practical recommendations, thus it can assist the Government and Knesset to implement the models. The models of meetings and workshops would be easy to implement among groups of conflicts. It could Improve attitudes and bridge the gaps between groups in conflict. Finally, I suggest a future research to examine the differences between women's mixed groups (Jewish and Arab) to men's mixed groups (Jewish and Arab) in the aspect of relationship between the two nations on daily routine and future co-existence.

CONCLUSION

The positive attitudes and positions of the women-participants are as a result of their participation and membership in (A.W.V.A) , not as a result of background or surroundings.

To make the description of answers easy, the three categories of agreeing were gathered under the one category "agree", and the three opposing categories were gathered under the one category "object".

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