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**CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE  
PEACEMAKING PROCESS.**

**The case of Christians in Israel and the  
Palestinian Territories**

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## **Introduction**

This research constitutes an *in fieri* project which aims at analyzing and problematizing the presence and role of the Arab Palestinian Christian population in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Our focus is on understanding if and how the peace process could undergo revitalization and gain new momentum from the grassroots. We would like to ascertain if religious fervor and motivation have an active role in mending the relationships between the groups involved in the conflict and eventually influence state policies.

As Paul Rowe asserts, in the past ten to twenty years of Scholarship on Christian groups in the Middle East, specialists have begun to «recognize[d] the agency of a population long objectified in both academic and polemical circles» (Rowe 2010, 472). Before then, Christians were long thought of as the objects of other actors such as the “products” of Muslim societies who imposed upon them the status of *ahl al-dimma*, or as «appendages of external forces [...] as vehicles of imperialism» (Ibid.). Although these tropes still persist, over the last years, scholars have begun to consider and analyze the agency of Arab and other Middle Eastern Christians; «today we begin to understand the way [in which] the Christians operate not solely as a minority or as an extension of Western civilization but also as centuries-old groups rooted in the history and culture of the Middle East» (Ibid.). The present study wishes to move precisely in this direction by addressing the agency of the Christian communities in the peace process through religious-based grassroots initiatives.

## **Methodology**

The considerations presented in this work are grafted onto a wider research commenced during the elaboration of my Master’s thesis. The objective of this ongoing investigation verges on establishing whether religious peacemaking initiatives, developed by certain Christian communities and their leaders, could impact the peace process at national level. The fieldwork carried out in Israel and in the Palestinian Territories (hereinafter referred to as PT) during the summers of 2010 and 2011 allowed to examine the experiences of a variety of different interlocutors. The majority of them actively participated in

the Christian community as lay people or as ordained ministers<sup>1</sup>. This past study allowed for an analysis on the historical presence of Christians in this geographical area, on their cultural identity, and on issues concerning the theological interpretation of the Bible. Also, a glance at the peacemaking efforts developed by members of the Christian communities both in Israel and the PT had been undertaken.

In order to understand the origin, aims, and developments of such peacemaking activities, we plan to focus our future research on two cases. The first one concerns the Christian communities of Bethlehem and Beit Jala that celebrate Mass amid the Cremisan olive grove, which the Israeli government is planning to sever from their owners by building the Wall around it. The second case also deals with the issue of land confiscation. In this instance the Nasser family transformed their land, surrounded by Jewish settlements and threatened with confiscation by the Israeli army, into a school for peace open to youth all around the world<sup>2</sup>.

Both cases represent a creative and nonviolent way to deal with a situation of hardship and potential loss of property. Through multiple visits for a few months at the time, we believe that it will be possible to track the impact and changes, both on the community itself and on the wider population, produced by such projects. During the stays we plan to actively participate in the peacemaking oriented events as well as the daily activities carried on by the community. Through interviews, participation to informal meetings as well as religious ceremonies, and drawing detailed autobiographies of the leaders who proposed the organization of such peace oriented activities, we aim at analyzing the potentiality of Christianity in particular, and of religion in general to become a successful vehicle to positively affect the peace process from the bottom up by mending the relationships at the grassroots.

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<sup>1</sup> The research was conducted through a variety of interwoven and complementary forms of investigations such as interviews (with a varying degree of structure), testimonies with the participation of multiple members of the community, and guided visits to the sites and community worship places. The interlocutors were both ordained and lay people, predominantly from the Christian Catholic, Protestant, and Melkite denominations.

<sup>2</sup> Both of these projects have been touched on in the Author's Master's Thesis. Further investigation on these endeavors is scheduled for future field work.

In the present work, we wish to illustrate a selection of predicaments that we think cardinal to pursue the objectives of our research. We have decided to present these subject matters through an analysis on the autobiography of Elias Chacour, a Palestinian, Arab, Melkite Christian Archbishop with Israeli citizenship born in the village of Biram in 1939. Far from implying that Chacour's autobiography can be deemed representative of the entire Christian population, it is nonetheless emblematic because it allows to shed light upon matters such as: the effects of the establishment of the state of Israel on the cultural identity of the autochthonous Christian inhabitants, the escalation of the nature of the armed struggles to intractable conflict, and the creative reaction of the Christian grassroots to the present state of things.

However, we are aware that autobiographies represent a delicate category of documents to handle, mostly because firstly, they often, when not in diary form<sup>3</sup>, are written several years after the events have occurred; secondly because they are written with the aim of being published and therefore the facts narrated are deemed suitable for disclosure; thirdly, because the occurrences are molded into a narrative influenced by hindsight. In particular, in Chacour's autobiography, the justification and explanation transpire of how events developed at the light of his Christian faith. Thus, all the episodes narrated seem to fit orderly in a logical evolution of God's plan for Elias' life. We do not want to imply that the events narrated lack authenticity, but rather that they underwent manipulation as to serve a particular purpose in the narration.

For our study, we have decided to favor events that can be pinpointed and ascertained through other sources and that have been witnessed in varying degree during fieldwork research<sup>4</sup>. Despite the risk embedded in this specific source, we have chosen Chacour's autobiography because it presents some of the

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<sup>3</sup> See P. Caplan, "Spirits and Sex. A Swahili Informant and his Diary", in *Anthropology and Autobiography* (J. Okley — H. Callaway eds.), London and New York, Routledge 1992, 63-80.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to point out here that we used a published autobiography and had no opportunity to hold a personal conversation with the author to be able to comment and question more in depth particular parts of his work. However there are several additional works written by the author and written about the author. See for example E. Chacour, *We Belong to the land*, Notre Dame (IN), Notre Dame University Press 1990; E. Chacour, *Ho fiducia in noi. Al di là della disperazione*, Milano: Jaca Book 2003 (ed. Or. *J'ai foi en nous. Au-delà du desespoir*), Homme de Parole, 2002; P. De Somoni- M. Czerin, *Elias Chacour: israeliano, palestinese, cristiano*, Venezia: Marcianum Press 2009 (ed. Or. *Elias Chacour -Israeli, Palästinenser, Christ.*), Verlag Freiburg im Breisgau, 2007.

critical issues that need to be taken into account when dealing with the autochthonous Christian population.

Furthermore, autobiographies fall under the jurisdiction of the anthropological branch of *life histories*. This field of studies, which found increasing consent and favor from the 1980s post-modern developments, focuses its attention on the importance of autobiographies, biographies and narration of life stories. These types of narratives can be understood, not only as a peculiar kind of interpretative framework, but also as a valuable insight on the contexts in which the events narrated occurred: «approaching anthropology through life histories not only compels us to insert personal events within the wider historical contexts in which they occurred, but also it forces us to focus our attention on the [social actor's] family and acquaintances' vicissitudes, which are indissolubly bound together» (Cinnameo 2012, 164).<sup>5</sup> These narrations help us to unearth the meaning that peculiar events have played in the shaping of the social actors' lives. In the case of Chacour's life, the *fait social total*, that is the event around which life revolves<sup>6</sup> (Franceschi et al. 2012, 12), can be identified as the arrival of the Zionist Jewish soldiers in his village. This traumatic experience will guide his future decision to devote his life to becoming a minister of God devoted to peacemaking. Thus, we will focus on how this experience of eviction resonated with his family's Christian teachings of "love thy enemies" and lead him to build a bi-national school in the effort of teaching the youth to respect and love one another.

In the present study, preliminary to our fieldwork, we provide firstly a brief description of the Christian milieu in Israel and the PT in order to arouse awareness on the multidimensionality inherent to the Christian population. Secondly, we will present the nature and characteristics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which will help shedding light onto the dynamics that need to be addressed by any peace making effort. Thirdly, we will analyze the directions

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<sup>5</sup> «fare antropologia attraverso le storie di vita ci obbliga a inserire le vicende personali all'interno dei contesti storici in cui prendono forma, ma anche a prestare particolare attenzione alle vicende familiari, ai percorsi delle persone più vicine, indissolubilmente legate tra loro» (Cinnameo 2012, 164).

<sup>6</sup> «Often life revolves around an event: the event shapes the person, in accordance with rules, that is habits that are all culturally constructed [...] the event represents the heart of existence, the axis on which each of us constructs or attempts to construct their own existence in the world» (Franceschi et al. 2012, 12).

taken by Elias Chacour to approach the conflict. We have hypothesized that the agency of Chacour as well as of other Arab Christian communities, or single members of the communities, can be read both as religious peacemaking grafted into the vision of Track Two diplomacy, as well as acts of resilience.

### **Facts and figures**

*I am Palestinian and proud to be one. My mother tongue is Arabic and I am Arab. I am Christian and also a citizen of the State of Israel. I was not born in Israel, but it was Israel that was born in me [...] In my country Israel appeared as an accomplished fact (Chacour 2003, 19).*

On Christmas Eve 2011 there were 154,500 Christians living in Israel, constituting approximately 2% of the population of the state of Israel. About 80.4% of the Christians in Israel are Christian Arabs. On the other hand, the estimated number of Palestinian Christians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, is 51,710, making the percentage of the Palestinian Christians 1.37 of the whole Palestinian population<sup>7</sup>. In addition to representing a religious and national minority, the Christian milieu also represents a heterogeneous reality. Israel and the PT, in fact, host over thirteen different denominations<sup>8</sup>. In addition to the historical repercussions that still affect the dynamics between the different Churches, the birth of the state of Israel brought further splintering to the already fragmented Christian population in regard to citizenship and nationality. The identification that Chacour gives of himself reflects the intricacies of the Palestinians who lived through the birth of the state of Israel. Religious affiliation, nationality, ethnicity, and citizenship all come into play in defining who is a Christian autochthonous of Israel and the PT. The description that he gives of his perception of cultural identity includes a variety of elements. Being at the same time a Christian and an Arab, a Palestinian and an Israeli. Being an Arab Christian, in addition to presenting the richness of a multiplicity of

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<sup>7</sup>The total number of the Palestinian population used in this document (3,767,126) is calculated by adding the population of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip (1,416,543) to the population of the Palestinians in the West Bank excluding Jerusalem (1,986,934), and the estimated Palestinian population in Jerusalem (363,649), which includes both territories administered by the Palestinian Authority and those administered by Israeli authorities.

Palestinian Christian Facts, Figures and Trends 2008.

[http://www.diyar.ps/media/documents/pal\\_chr\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.diyar.ps/media/documents/pal_chr_booklet.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix. Figure 1.

elements, also signifies being both a religious minority and an ethnic minority in the State of Israel. The Palestinian Christians have to deal with the consequences of being a double, and in some cases a triple minority. Not only do they represent the religious minority inside the Palestinian Muslim milieu but, in Israel, they also represent an ethno-national minority<sup>9</sup>. In fact they are associated to the Palestinian Arab people as a whole and inside this Palestinian minority possessing Israeli citizenship, as Christians, they are a religious minority compared to the Muslims: «we felt even less certain than others of our identity, because as Christians we feared we were less Arab and as Israelis we feared we were less Palestinian» (El-Assal 1999,69). Actually, after the birth of this new sovereign state, the issue of citizenship came into place. Consequently, an additional differentiation appeared between who holds and who does not hold an Israeli citizenship. This new classification not only sets the dichotomy between Jews and non-Jews inside the state of Israel, but it also drives a wedge among the Palestinian population.

### **Identity based conflicts and their intractability**

Sociologist Luis Kriesberg defines the surfacing of conflict “when members of one or more of the adversaries minimally combine four qualities: a sense of collective identity, a grievance, the belief that the other side is responsible for their grievances, and the conviction that they can affect the other side so as to lessen their grievances” (Kriesberg 2001, 374). By taking this perspective into account, social conflicts, “always involve one or more groups who see themselves

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<sup>9</sup> Important to note is the emic perception of Arab Christians who feel not only as a minority, but also as second-class citizens. A good example can be found in the call to the military service. «Military service is the great divider. Jobs are advertised for those who have served in the IDF. Mortgages are cheaper for those who have served in the forces. Children’s allowances are higher for those who have served in the forces. Those who have served in the armed forces are to be preferred for entrance to universities and occupational training courses run by the state. They receive loans to pay the fees for higher education. Even as recently as 1991 in the build-up to the 1991 Gulf War, gas masks were distributed first to those who had served in the IDF; then to Arab citizens and much later, under international pressure, to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories» (Abu El-Assal 1991, 10). «Arabs are happy that they do not serve in the army, but they are unhappy about not being called to serve». A. (Margalith, 1999) .«The acceptance of Christian soldiers is a relatively new development, and one which many Arab citizens view as an attempt to drive a wedge between segments of the Arab population. Until very recently, it was rare for Christians to volunteer, but under the current economic pressure they are beginning to do so in greater numbers. Few Muslim Arabs, with the exception of the Druze and the Bedouin minorities, have been admitted to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)» (Ibid.).

as distinct and therefore have different collective identities” (Ibid). An identity<sup>10</sup> conflict, therefore, is said to subsist when one group’s sense of identity “seems to deny the reality or legitimacy of the other group’s identity” (Ibid). Therefore the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is frequently considered as an identity-based conflict. Through the collective identity constructions operated by the two leaders, along with the compliance of the two populations to these identities, the conflict becomes progressively of an intractable nature. Protracted or “intractable” conflicts are stagnant and burdened by inherent obstacles to resolution, while “tractable conflicts” are dynamic and contain potential for resolution (Herzog-Hai 2005, 15). The protracted conflict category requires a vastly more complex resolution than a “tractable conflict”. In fact, it involves a multiplicity of strategies operating not only on political level, but also in the psychological and social arenas.

Below, we present the key characteristics of protracted conflicts identified in the works of Luis Kriesberg, Shira Herzog, and Avivt Hai. Firstly, a protracted conflict is characterized by *substantial length*, which implies that it has been ongoing for numerous generations (Ibid). «This means that young people are socialized to know who their enemies are and what terrible wrongs the enemies have inflicted on their people» (Kriesberg 1998, 333). Secondly, the conflict is deeply rooted in *identity issues*, «the conflict is of an “ontological” nature; the parties perceive it [as being] about needs and values that are absolutely essential to their existence and survival» (Herzog-Hai 2005, 15). Furthermore, «members of one or more of the opposing sides often believe that their very existence is threatened by their adversaries. Consequently they must fight on because if they cease, they will be destroyed» (Kriesberg 1998, 333). Thirdly, this kind of conflict is said to have a *zero-sum*, which implies that each side «sees its goals as radically opposite to those of the other side» (Herzog-Hai 2005, 15) giving to conflict its irreconcilable nature. The fourth key-aspect is *violence*. This trait entails the profuse entanglement of people from both sides in the violent nature of the conflict. «This violence may be targeted at

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<sup>10</sup> See also L. Kriesberg, “Identity Issues”, (G. Burgess H. Burgess eds.), Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted: July 2003  
<http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/identity-issues> Eds. Guy.

noncombatants as well as combatants [and] deep feelings of fear and hatred are generally aroused» (Kriesberg 1998, 333). The involvement in violent interactions between the two sides «often leads to feelings of victimization because both sides view themselves (and seek recognition) as innocent victims and portray the other side as the cruel victimizer» (Herzog-Hai 2005, 15). Victimization<sup>11</sup> becomes a pivotal issue addressed by Track Two diplomacy. As we will see later, one of the aims of this approach to conflict resolution involves the healing of the relationships among the grassroots. In order to take a step forward in this process «the victims need to understand that their sufferings [are] not to be dismissed but instead fully recognized, and that their anger and passion for justice were not wrong, inadequate, or illegitimate» (Botcharova 2002, 290). Therefore, victimization represents a serious element that has to be taken into account and dealt with for any true peace process to become effective. The fifth characteristic of protracted conflicts is identified through *centrality and costliness*. These key factors indicate that conflict dominates the lives of the populations involved, becoming their central concern. It also entails great investments militarily, economically and psychologically impeding its possible resolution. The last trait of “intractable” conflicts involves the *dehumanization of the “other”*. Despite the extreme contiguity of the two factions, denial of the neighboring community and lack of a meaningful communication define the relationships between the two sides. «This stems from –and in turn reinforces – dehumanization and demonization of the other side and a simplistic view of the

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<sup>11</sup> «The designation of 'victim', for those who have known such a horror, it becomes a reference point that gives meaning to his or her suffering allowing it to pass [...] the threshold of isolation and distrust [...], introducing the possibility of a bearable image of him or herself. There is a risk, however, for the subject to become hostage of this image and, due to this reason, making it difficult to express into words the reality of suffering, as well as the unconscious effects raised by the traumatic event [...] In the therapeutic space it is necessary to lead the victim to a work of dis-identification from this precise reference point. In fact, if this designation gives meaning to suffering promoting a bearable image of oneself, however, it is not enough to eliminate the symptoms and suffering provoked by the effect of trauma» (D'Elia 2002:10). Through this citation we desire to point out the delicate matter that peacemakers face when dealing with intractable conflicts. If, in the one hand, the label 'victim' allows the initiation of a humanitarian intervention, it also produces an immobility of the subjects who are 'stuck' within the boundaries of this definition. This category allows recognizing of an individual or people's suffering, however, it impairs their ability to react to hardship, that is, to perform acts of resilience and to reconcile with the enemy. For more information on methods to break the victimization's cycle see O. Botcharova, "Implementation of Track Two Diplomacy. Developing a Model of Forgiveness", in *Forgiveness and Reconciliation. Religion, Public Policy & Conflict Transformation* (Helmick R.G-Peterson R.L), Philadelphia& London: Templeton Foundation Press 2002, 279-304.

conflict» (Herzog-Hai 2005, 16). This simplistic view of the conflict reinforces the idea of an “us” versus “them” or “good guys” versus “bad guys” narrative. Such narrative becomes quite detrimental in the perspective of conflict resolution.

Therefore, we can understand intractable conflicts as deeply implicating members of society in the «construction of a *conflicting ethos*» (Bar-Tal 2000, 352). Because this *conflicting ethos* provides the dominant orientation to the society, «conflict resolution leads only to the formal termination of the conflict. The establishment of peaceful relations between opposing parties depends on a successful reconciliation process, which in turn requires a change of the conflicting ethos and formation of the alternative *peace ethos*»<sup>12</sup> (Ibid.).

### **Track Two diplomacy and religious peacemaking**

Olga Botcharova, Russian psychologist involved in the field of religion and conflict transformation<sup>13</sup>, points out that contemporary ethnic conflicts are characterized by irrationality in the type of targets of violence such as the places where the daily lives of the civilians occur. In these cases, the tools of official diplomacy are insufficient and inadequate to “heal” such conflict. Healing becomes the major necessity to achieve true peace among the victims of the conflicts. In a situation where intractable conflicts turns neighbors into enemies inside the same nation and where, at the end of the conflict these people have once again to share land and spaces, the reconciliation process cannot be expected to occur as an immediate consequence of a truce between leaders; «only a paper peace can be reached on paper» (Ibid., 281).

What official diplomacy lacks is the handling of the wounds, feelings, and stiffened perceptions of the other. «It is next to impossible for victims to look to their enemy or abuser as a partner in search of a solution to conflict unless they undergo dramatic and painful inner changes. This transformation is possible only after the individual’s, and group’s, sense of victimhood is understood, respected, and properly addressed» (Ibid.). «Official diplomacy (known as Track

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<sup>12</sup> On intractable conflicts see also L. Kriesberg, “Coexistence and the Reconciliation of Communal Conflicts, in *The Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence* (E. Weiner ed.), New York, The Continuum Publishing Company 1998, pp182-197; E.E Azar-P. Jureidini-R. McLaurin, “Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Practice in the Middle East”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 8 1/(1978), 41-60.

<sup>13</sup> In particular she has been involved with the conflicts in the Balkans.

One in conflict-resolution terminology) is oriented to a 'carrot and stick' policy and to the short-term results achieved through military pressure. It does not take into consideration the nature of conflict, where perceptual, social-psychological, and spiritual dimensions are core, rather than peripheral, concerns» (Ibid.). However, «it is next to impossible for victims to look to their enemy or abuser as a partner in search of a solution to conflict unless they undergo dramatic and painful inner changes. This transformation is possible only after the individual's, and group's, sense of victimhood is understood, respected, and properly addressed»(Ibid). Although international troops are essential to achieve a cease-fire and bring the conditions necessary to begin a peace process, they do not possess the skills and preparation to deal with healing trauma. Healing trauma has to deal with stereotypes, fear, and prejudice feelings that mine any attempt towards reconciliation. Furthermore, changes will occur if and only if the indigenous people feel involved in the peace initiatives making them their own. The local population must be empowered and the modalities and mechanisms of conflict resolution must arise from the setting of the conflict itself. In this manner, the peace initiatives become embedded in people's lives leading to powerful changes from the inside in order to achieve a long-term commitment to peacemaking.

Since «the concept of forgiveness is at the core of [this] model and is seen as the culmination of a healing process that makes it possible for the parties in conflict to move towards reconciliation» (Ibid., 304), religions offer a fertile ground to develop Track Two diplomacy approaches. Botcharova explains that religious communities represent a florid milieu for peace building initiatives because “the primary arena of religious activity is still the spiritual, emotional, and relational wellbeing of people [...] It is religion that possesses the most powerful traditions and tools, not to mention doctrines for peace building and reconciliation” (Ibid., 227).

The Tanenbaum Center<sup>14</sup> presents, in its publication *Peacemakers in Action*, a particular type of Track Two diplomacy peace-operator: the religious

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<sup>14</sup> The Tanenbaum Center is a leader in providing practical programs urgently needed to prevent verbal and physical conflict perpetrated in the name of religion. As a non-secretarian not-for-profit organization, the Tanenbaum Center addresses unresolved- and often unrecognized- tensions by helping to change behaviors in areas of armed conflict, schools and workplace. Religion and Conflict

peacemaker. «Religiously motivated peacemakers have unique stature precisely because of their religious identities [...] For these individual practitioners, religion is far more than just a valuable resource and tool for peace making. It is also a personal force that defines them and everything they do» (Little 2007, 5). The peacemakers who hold a religious belief, see their efforts as part of a greater call, as a way to fulfill their duties as envoys or as vicars of God and as emissaries of God's message to humanity. Since they are not involved in official diplomacy, religious peacemakers are situated in local communities among the people. They are committed neighbors who intimately understand the human experience and suffering of the community. Arab Palestinian Christians' clerics, «are trusted to have the long-term interests of the people at heart. They are seen as authentic and, therefore, have standing to speak with all sides [...] When they do so, the expectation is that they can be trusted to act with integrity and fairness, even though they might have strong views one way or the other on the conflict» (Little 2007, 5-6).

First of all, «the peacemakers' effectiveness derives from the positions they hold in their communities. Most are religious leaders or are respected as religious individuals. This gives them stature in the community and credibility to lead. It also gives them the standing to draw on religious resources in a call to forgive and to recognize the humanity of the "other"» (Ibid., 5). In particular, most of these practitioners acquired credibility because they are indigenous to the communities they serve. If this is not the case, however, the peacemakers tend to stay for long periods since their commitment becomes the key to achieve

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Resolution, one of the Tanenbaum Center's core programs, runs the Peacemakers in Action initiative. In a world where religion is increasingly misused in conflict, this initiative identifies and supports the work of relatively unknown men and women who use religion as an effective resource to resolve conflicts. The Tanenbaum Center is a pioneer in the field in its study of the unique techniques of these individual religious peacemakers, the expert training it provides them in order to strengthen their impact, and its commitment to widely disseminating its findings to bring attention to these peacemakers and in other religious leaders as urgently needed resources for resolving today's conflicts (Little 2007). Tanenbaum was founded in late 1992 by Rabbi Tanenbaum's widow, Dr. Georgette Bennett. Although it is a secular, non-sectarian organization, its mission is rooted in the work of the late Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, one of the 20th century's pre-eminent activists and scholars in interreligious relations. The groundbreaking programs he launched – initially involving Jews and Christians, and later including Muslims – laid the foundation for Tanenbaum's innovative work today. First and foremost a fosterer of interreligious education and dialogue, his work had a deeply practical bent. It saw its fullest expression in his determination to confront and address the roots of religious hatred, and to ensure that no victim of bigotry or violence would go unnoticed by the world. This information can be retrieved at this address: <https://www.tanenbaum.org/about>

high levels of respect and integration. Therefore, «as religious leaders living in the community, the Peacemakers are trusted to have the long-term interests of the people at heart. They are seen as authentic and, therefore, have standing to speak with all sides [...] When they do so, the expectation is that they can be trusted to act with integrity and fairness, even though they might have strong views one way or the other on the conflict» (Ibid., 5-6). Due to either their membership in the community by birth or their long-term permanence in such community, these peacemakers can benefit from a developing trust and collaboration from its members. This aspect is not secondary given other extant methods of undertaking Track Two diplomacy<sup>15</sup>.

Admittedly, numerous techniques used by these peacemakers are comparable to the methodologies applied by secular justice workers such as dialogue, facilitation skills, and active listening. However, what essentially distinguishes religious peacemakers «is their ability to use religion as a source of motivation and as a practical tool<sup>16</sup>» (Ibid., 10). Hence, some of their most common techniques are: the use of religious texts; the power of the pulpit; the use of religious and cultural rituals and traditions; the use of religion in debate and finding a common ground; peace education; the use of communication skills; creating philosophies of nonviolence and zones of peace; interfaith mobilization; awakening the global community; adaptation of secular and Western practices (Little 2007). Let us now look into one particular case of Track Two diplomacy involving intergroup education.

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<sup>15</sup> For further reading on Track Two diplomacy see also D.D. Kaye, "Rethinking Track Two Diplomacy: The Middle East and South Asia", Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael 3/(2005) 1-31; D.D. Kaye, *Talking to the Enemy. Track Two Diplomacy in the Middle East and South Asia*, Santa Monica, RAND 2007; J. V. Montville, "The Healing Function in Political Conflict Resolution", in *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice Integration and Application* (D. J. D. Sandole—H. Van der Merwe), Manchester University Press, 112-127; J. V. Montville, "Track Two Diplomacy: The Work of Healing History", *The Whitehead of Diplomacy and International Relations*, (2006), 15-25.

<sup>16</sup> The legal system of state of Israel is characterized as constituting of five basic components: Ottoman Law, British Mandatory regulations; British common law, the legislation of the Knesset, and religious law. «During the Mandatory Period, the British gave each of the major religious groups some degree of autonomy over matters of personal status, including marriage, divorce, wills, and so on. The exercise of influence in these areas by religious courts continue today» (Mahler 2011, 194-195). This clearly denotes the predominant role that religion still plays in the lives of the peoples. For more on the Subject see P.G. Gianazza, *Guida alle comunità cristiane di Terra Santa*, Bologna, EDB, 2008; Y. Reiter, *National Minority, Regional Majority. Palestinian Arabs Versus Jews in Israel*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009; M. Menachem, *Law and Culture of Israel*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

## Education and grassroots peacemaking

Let us now look at Elias Chacour's narration of the Zionist army's arrival at his hometown of Biram at the end of 1947<sup>17</sup>. This event, experienced also by other inhabitants dwelling in Mandatory Palestine before the establishment of the state of Israel<sup>18</sup>, marks the deployment of the intractable conflict in this geographical area and introduces the issue of citizenship to the cultural identity of the autochthonous people living in Mandatory Palestine<sup>19</sup>.

*[...] Early morning, nearly two weeks after the first word about the soldiers, Biram was still resting, quiet in the mists and growing light of dawn. And then the hillside was flooded with the unfamiliar rumbling of trucks and jeeps. Men in drab-colored uniforms with packs slung across their shoulders filled the narrow streets. My brothers and I watched from a corner of our yard, whispering among ourselves as four or five soldiers strode up to our door. They spoke with Father, who welcomed them, and they lugged their gear inside. For the next week, we were told, the soldiers would sleep in the large room beneath the loft where Mother and Father usually slept [...] two details I recall most vividly. Father had prepared us for house guests –but these Zionist soldiers were not at all like our Jewish neighbors who chatted in the yard with Father over coffee. Not that they were unkind or rude. When Father killed and roasted the lamb, blessing the feast and the men, they politely bowed their heads. Mother served them heaping plates of lamb and vegetables and bread which they ate heartedly. But they remained aloof, almost brusque. To my disappointment, the feast turned out to be much less of a happy celebration than I had expected. I sidled up to Mother, feeling shy and uneasy in their presence. And the second thing I recall was the guns. All the while, my eyes were drawn by their cold glint. They were always present, even when we ate. I noticed the small, carved trigger where the finger would rest, squeezing [...] the long, sleek barrel [...] the tiny, death-spitting mouth [...] an explosion shook my imagination. I shuddered and looked away.*

In this segment of his autobiography, *Blood Brothers*, Elias Chacour, then an eight-year-old child, narrates his first encounter with Zionist Jews at the verge of the establishment of State of Israel. However, the prospect that the Zionist soldiers were in need of hospitality just for a few days soon proved wrong.

*After a week, word passed through Biram that the military commander had some urgent business with the men of the village. Father went along to the*

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<sup>17</sup> The name of the village also appears as Bir'Am, Hebrew name, Kafr Bir'im, former Arab name, as well as Kafar Bir'em. In Chacour's autobiography, *Blood Brothers*, the name of the village in English is presented as Biram. For more information on the village story see <http://edenorion.com/birem/index.php/en/church-of-our-lady-in-kefar-birem.html>.

<sup>18</sup> See I. Pappé, *The ethnic cleansing of Palestine*, London: Oneworld Publications, 2007); B. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revised*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> For historical details see M. Tessler, *A History of the Israeli Palestinian Conflict*, Bloomington (IN), Bloomington University Press 1994; B. Morris, *Righteous Victims; A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001*, New York, Vintage Books 2001; I. Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One land, Two Peoples*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2004.

square, expecting to hear that the troops would soon be moving on. Instead, the commander... had delivered some alarming "confidential news."

"Our intelligence sources say that Biram is in serious danger [...] Fortunately, my men can protect you. But it would risk your safety to stay in your homes. You're going to have to move out into the hills for a few days. Lock everything. Leave the keys with us. I promise nothing will be disturbed." (*Ibid.*, 36-37).  
The commander urged them on, saying "travel light. Take nothing with you. You must leave today –as soon as possible."

Father locked the door behind us. Then he handed the key to one of our soldier-guests who was leaning against the front wall, his gun hanging casually from a strap over his shoulder.

After a few weeks the villagers grew impatient and a delegation of men decided to head back to the village to ascertain the situation. With dismay they found the houses broken in with most of the furniture and belongings taken away while the rest was smashed across the floor. The soldiers who found the men in the village ordered them to leave and the people of Biram set out towards the village of Gish where they would reside until today.

This event<sup>20</sup> brings up several issues regarding the Arab population: the trauma of displacement, the loss of private property, and the dynamics of oblivion and reminiscence of national and historical consciousness<sup>21</sup>. We may say that the State of Israel owns part of its establishment on a great amnesia, a removed fact which still characterizes its politics in regard to the local Arab population, i.e. «the Zionists and settlers *forget* that those lands were not empty at their arrival, or at their return, but inhabited and cultivated» (Beneduce 2010, 93). If we agree with Patrizia Dogliani when she affirms that the «creation of a collective memory, its forms of literary, artistic, monumental and commemorative liturgy help to overcome mourning, creating consensus born from national and group consensus», then the politics of the State of Israel seem to be voted to cancel the collective memory of the people of Biram<sup>22</sup>. This

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<sup>20</sup> B. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revised*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Morris in this work presents a detailed list of Abandoned Arab villages with the relative causes. The map can be found in the appendix: Figure 2. The village of Biram, number 38, is listed as being abandoned due to expulsion by Jewish forces (Morris 2004, 15).

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion on this topic see also P. Dogliani, *Tra Guerra e pace. Memorie e rappresentazioni dei conflitti e dell'Olocausto nell'Occidente contemporaneo*, (Milano: Unicopli, 2001); R. Beneduce, *Archeologie del trauma*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010); G. Agambem, *Quel che resta di Auschwitz. L'archivio e il testimone*, (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> The issue concerning the relationship between social oblivion and recollection plays a central role especially when dealing with archeology and in turn to politics of displacement and right to exist based on historical traceability. Important to point out in this field the efforts of Israeli NGO

experience of cancellation directly connects to the loss of a home and of a people's roots and right to remember, and underscores some of the issues that feed into the intractability of the conflict at hand. When we speak of peacemaking therefore, we must keep in mind that «continued conflicts are directly related to unhealed wounds [...] “re-writing” history opens the way to a cooperative approach, based on newly gained recognition and respect for each other's suffering. Only then can negotiations on the practical issues of preserving restored relationships and changing the structures of the sociopolitical environment lead to true reconciliation» (Botcharova 2002, 303). The approach adopted by Track Two diplomacy, which «recognizes that attending to the relationships among the people ravaged by conflict is essential to achieving sustainable peace» as well as recognizing that «religious leaders and laity are identified as having to play a central role in resolving conflicts in many parts of the world» (Ibid., 304), can be identified in the modality adopted by Chacour when he became a Melkite priest.

In 1951 after spending a few years in Gish, Chacour was taken to Haifa to boarding school and later was sent to Nazareth to study at St. Joseph's Minor Seminary in 1954. He then completed his studies in Paris at Saint Sulpice (Chacour 1984, 101) and returned to Israel in 1965 to be ordained by Archbishop George Selim Hakim of Akko, Haifa, Nazareth, and all Galilee<sup>23</sup>. Once ordained, he was assigned to the community of Ibillin a town situated in the northern district of Israel near Shfaram. Here he commenced to develop his activities of peacemaker starting from the grassroots. Here he made his commitment to a lifetime of actively research for peace. His first calling to be a peacemaker was to «go out as a true servant of God and men» (Ibid.); he also realized that the first step towards reconciliation between the Jews and the

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Zochrot (which means the women remember) that works to keep the memory of the Palestinian Naqba alive and known to the Jewish public. Among the activities that they organize, there is the installment of plaques and signs by the ruins of destroyed Arab villages during the 1948 war. The signs aim at keeping alive the memory and social history of the people who once lived there. <http://zochrot.org/en>. Also see in the Appendix Figure 8.

<sup>23</sup> He later studied Bible and Talmud at the Hebrew University Jerusalem becoming the first Arab to gain a higher degree at this institution. In 2001 he was given the Niwano Prize and named Man of the Year in Israel (Little 2007, 337). He also received the *Peacemaker in Action* award from the Tanenbaum Center and was nominated for the Noble Peace Prize three times (1986, 1989, and 1994). In 2006 he was named archbishop of the Galilee by the Vatican and Synod of the Greek Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch (Ibid.).

Palestinian was the restoration of human dignity. He ministered to «Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Druze» (Little 2007, 328) and he did this by trying «not to change their identities, but rather their minds and outlooks» (Ibid.). He challenged the members of his community «to reflect on how they may relate to others without surrendering their religious, ethnic, and cultural identities» (Ibid.).

With the help of a handful of Christian nuns, Chacour «started providing nursing care for the children of Ibillin. And soon, the love for children that both Christians and Muslims share became the connecting point for people from both traditions. After teaching Muslim women sewing, tailoring, baking, and engaging in joint Bible study, the sisters worked with all of the people in the city to open a school» (Ibid.). The words and actions of Abuna Chacour are rooted in belief that mutual respect based on a commitment to pluralism plays a central role

*I focus my work within the Arab, Palestinian, Christian and Muslim communities. I try to encourage them to believe in nonviolence and the importance of a pluralistic society. It is important that we recognize that we can be different from each other but still be complementary. My main job first is to help these Christians and Muslim communities open up to the outside Jewish community. I try to help them discover what is human versus what is [artificial]. I encourage them to open themselves to others (Ibid.).*

With the conviction that education<sup>24</sup> represents an effective way to approach the divisions and hardships governing the relationship between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, he began his endeavor with the aim to «educate a new generation on the possibility of coexistence in a land as diverse as the religious and ethnic identity he himself represents. The students of his schools<sup>25</sup> hail from different

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<sup>24</sup> Education represents an issue of great concern especially for the contents of the school programs: the curricula of classic subjects such as geography, history, archaeology, and sociology become the vehicles of diffusion and justification of cultural identity. See also W. Newman, "The Formation of National Identity in Israel/Palestine: The Construction of Spatial Knowledge and Contested Territorial Narratives", in *Promoting Conflict or Peace Through Identity*, (Slocum-Bradley N.), London, Ashgate 2008, 61-77; D. Bar-Tal, "The Rocky Road toward Peace: Beliefs on Conflict in Israeli Textbooks", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.35, 6 (Nov., 1998), 723-742.

<sup>25</sup> The Mar Elias Educational Institutions (MEEI), a consortium of six schools. The Mariam Bawardi Kindergarten was the first school founded in 1970 and now enrolls 241 students. In 1982 the high school was established with 80 students and 1,160 are enrolled in 2007. That was followed in 1994 by the forming of the technical college (150 students in 2007). In 1996 a regional teacher training center was formed to train teachers of Arab children throughout Galilee (240 teachers are enrolled). In addition, an elementary school was begun with two first grade classes. A grade level was added each year so that in 2007 there are 686 students in grades one through eight. In 1998 the school for gifted children was formed. It meets one day each week and has 92 students enrolled in 2007. The last of the schools to be established in 2003 is the Mar

religions and cultural backgrounds» (Ibid., 13). The most prominent of his educational initiatives started in 1982 with the establishment of the Prophet Elias High School located on the Mount of Light in Ibillin. Since its foundation, this school developed, from an initial attendance of eighty students, into a larger center known as Mar Elias Education institution (MEEI). This institution in 2003 had grown more than four thousands students from kindergarten to university level.

*The MEEI is a place where students of all backgrounds live, learn, and, are given the opportunity to establish a common future together. Both Christian and Muslim students from Ibillin attend the schools, although there are more Christians than Muslim students. And despite the fact that there are no Jews and Druze living in Ibillin, students from both groups also attend MEEI (Little 2007, 329).*

One way in which Abuna Chacour encourages mutual respect, understanding, and mutual knowledge about each other's lifestyles is through a positive outlook on the communalities between the three monotheistic systems and through a series of exchanges among students

*At MEEI we look at the positive values common to all religions. We do not propagandize for any of the religions. We teach the students to respect each other. We teach the students to look at each other as brothers and sisters. We live peacefully together. We do not simply talk, but we are actively living respectfully. For example, Jewish students come to MEEI for day exchanges. We have many student exchanges. We have also traveled with Jews to Jewish places. When there was a suicide bombing in Haifa, we donated blood [regardless of the religion or ethnicity of the recipients of the blood]. We do simple acts. We are not making miracles, we are not trying to bring Sharon and Arafat together because that would be impossible. But we can bring together the common Jewish, Christian, and Muslim man (Little 2007, 333-334)<sup>26</sup>.*

This technique becomes a fitting example of what it means to pursue Track Two diplomacy. Chacour has no intention of working on a political level, trying to get the two opposing leaders to come to a compromise. He works at the grassroots promoting a forgiving and understanding outlook of the other. He strives to change the perspectives that his students have on the 'other'; he desires to

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Elias University (202 students in 2007), in partnership with the University of Indianapolis.  
<http://www.twelvedaystojerusalem.org/schools.html>

<sup>26</sup> This excerpt constitutes a phone interview conducted in 2003 by David Little, author of the work *Peacemakers in Action*.

promote a debunking of the stereotypes that hinder any opportunity of reconciliation. Abuna Chacour, in fact, believes that

*[...] much depends on the education of the individual to promote the good or evil that is inherent in human nature. I do believe that the goodness that is in every human being is as contagious as the evil, if not much more, provided we do it with conviction, with determination, and with perseverance. This is exactly what MEEI campus aims at doing, at living and at sharing inside worldly and outside worldly (Ibid., 336)<sup>27</sup>.*

Abuna Chacour's words reveal his deeper faith in God and the firm conviction in a pan-human nature of mankind - meaning that all are children of God. The religious dimension of peacemaking adds a deeper meaning to peacemaking and, as H.B. Sabbah affirms «faith in God is, in fact, love of God. Love of God implies love for man. In order to love man, one has to know him, respect him, not to ignore him, not to attack, in whatever form, his person, his patrimony or his faith» (Sabbah 2009, 78).

### **Arab Christians and resilience**

If, on the one hand, Elia Chacour's doings can be read as Track Two diplomacy initiatives, they can be also regarded as actions of resilience. As we understand from Didier Fassin, the concept that today defines the new representation of social conflict and grief is no longer that of *resistance* of the people, but that of 'resilience' of the individuals (Fassin 2008, 532-533).

The term resilience derives from the Latin word *resiliens*, which is the present tens of *resilire*, to "bounce off"<sup>28</sup>. In physics this expression refers to «the capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress»<sup>29</sup>. This acceptance has, subsequently, been extended to different disciplines to mean «the ability that a person or institution has to recover quickly from a setback or misfortune, such as an illness»<sup>30</sup>. In psychology, for instance, this noun indicates the human capacity to face, overcome and come out strengthened from negative experiences (Grotberg, 1995). Therefore, «resilience is the process through which some individuals,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Giacomo Devoto-Gian Carlo Oli, *il Devoto-Oli: Vocabolario della lingua italiana*, Milano: Mondadori Education, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Merriam Webster Online Dictionary <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience>

<sup>30</sup> Collins Cobuild, *Collins Birmingham University International Database. English Language Dictionary*. (Glasgow: William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd, 1987).

families or groups, who find themselves in difficult situations, resist to a negative event [...] activating adequate *coping* strategies»<sup>31</sup> (Manetti et al., 1). «The capacity for resilience cannot be simply defined as a reparative action: it originates from a frustration but it can transform itself in opportunity, producing change» (Ibid., 2). Through this view, the term resilience implies an active role of the subjects, who can shape the context in which they are immersed. The capacity to perform resilience, therefore, «does not simply designate the ability to resist to adversative events, but defines a positive dynamic aimed at achieving control over events and at the reconstruction of a positive path of life» (Ibid.).

Therefore, when we speak of resilience we want to describe creative actions developed as a positive reaction to duress. Although part of the Christian population emigrated and still emigrates<sup>32</sup> in substantial percentage, some have found positive and creative ways to keep steadfast to the land. Once more, let us draw from father Chacour's autobiography to better understand how the concept of resilience may be applied to the initiatives organized by diverse Christian communities. When Elias Chacour made his way back to Israel, the people of Biram were still not allowed to return to their village. In the days following his ordination in 1965, Chacour decided to go back and visit the childhood village.

*Biram, I had learned, had long been abandoned by the soldiers. I had never been back since that day in 1947, but now no one would prohibit my entering the village –my true home. Rising early one morning I left Nazareth before daybreak. The Volkswagen hummed along the highway that threaded flatly through the orchard lands of the north, then angled onto the rising dirt and gravel roads that curved up into the cool air of dawn, a sign caught my attention. In English and Hebrew it said that these “antiquities” were “preserved and protected” by the government. The irony jarred me. Later, I learned that these “antiquities” had become a popular site visited by tourists on guided coach trips... all about me the ruined stone houses were solemn, ghostlike. I climbed a crumbled wall into the dimly lit shell of the church. In the parish house, swallows sheltered in the remaining rafters. I stood frozen, dumb-struck, nearly overcome by the sense of desolation.*

Today the village still lays in rubbles<sup>33</sup> and it had been transformed into an Israeli National Park. As we can read from the brochure, the remains of two

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<sup>31</sup> Study carried by Mara Manetti, Anna Zunino, Laura Frattini, Elena Zina research group from University of Genova. The material can be accessed at this url: <http://www.aipass.org/paper/manetti.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> For further reading on Christian's emigration see M. Raheb, *I am a Palestinian Christian*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995.

<sup>33</sup> See Appendix, Figures 6-7.

synagogues dated back to the late-fourth or early-fifth century, confer to the park its importance. The presence of the archeological remains, which is also reported by father Chacour<sup>34</sup>, however, hides the fact that in addition to the synagogue remains, there are also the ruins of the former Arab village of Biram.

As Dogliani points out, the control over memories of conflicts fulfills therapeutic, consolatory, justificatory, commemorative and recreational finalities which are then linked to the celebration of communal spaces of return such as memorial parks, battle fields, squares, and streets. (Dogliani 2001, 7). Therefore, what is negated to the people of Biram in particular, and to the Palestinians who experienced a similar event in general, is the right to remember their presence on the land. However, Elias Chacour planned a nonviolent way to compel the Israeli and Arab public to remember Biram's story. Along with the new bishop, Joseph Raya, friend to Martin Luther King Jr., Chacour organized<sup>35</sup> in Biram a «six-month camp-in of fifteen hundred people. The number fifteen hundred assumes a particular meaning: it represented exactly the size that the population of the village had been at the time of its destruction two decades earlier» (Little 2007, 331). Father Chacour thus describes the reason of this nonviolent action «our goal was simply to show the government of Israel that Palestinians wanted only to return to their homes and live in peace» (Chacour 1984, 185). Although they succeeded in opposing violence and affirming human dignity, they did not gain the attention of the Knesset that the nonviolent protesters were seeking.

The six-month camp-in was not just a form of nonviolent protest, but it can be considered as an act of resilience in as much as the town of Biram became once again alive with its inhabitants «voices mixed with laughter, women cooked over blazing wood fires, boys and girls played beneath the olive trees again» (Ibid.). The camp-in aimed at restoring everyday lives with its ordinary activities to infuse life back to the village ruins. Thus «along with arranging for food and water, medical supplies and tents, [Chacour] had to assure that a number of

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<sup>34</sup> The parish house, a small stone building huddled next to the church, doubled as a schoolhouse during the week...Tottering at the edge of the square were the stony, skeletal remains of an ancient synagogue. On this spot, Father had told us, the Roman legions had built a pagan temple many centuries ago. The Jews later destroyed the temple and raised on its foundations a place of worship for the one, true God. Now the synagogue stood ruined and ghost-like, too. It was forbidden to play among the fallen pillars and any child brazen enough to do so suffered swift and severe punishment, for it was considered consecrated ground. (Chacour 1984, 14).

<sup>35</sup> This six-month-camp-in took place at Chacour's return from Geneva in 1970 (Little 2007, 330).

teachers would join [them], since the demonstration would continue into the school year» (Ibid.).

In addition to the symbolic nonviolent sit in, which did not achieve the resonance they hoped for at the Knesset, the village of Biram became once more center of resilience. The church<sup>36</sup>, partially destroyed during the Galilee earthquake of 1837, has been maintained since 1972 and renovated by the uprooted Maronite Christian villagers who celebrate mass there every week. The Christian population who was once detached from their homes, fields and religious center, has decided to react positively and creatively to this situation. Through this minor, but regular activity, this small Christian community has found a way to empower itself and recover and adjust to the traumatic events faced in the past. Thus the question on Christian involvement arises «as a Christian do you speak out against the actions of your enemies –or do you allow them to crush the life out of you? So many seemed to think that submitting to humiliation was the only Christian alternative. Should you not, sometimes, be stinging and preserving like salt?» (Chacour 1984, 128).

## **Conclusions**

Often the over sixty-year-long altercations subsisting within the boundaries of Israel and the PT have been labeled as intractable. With the present study we attempt to draw the attention to an often-ignored section of the population involved in the intractability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the Arab Christian population.

We have employed the autobiography of Melkite Archbishop Elias Chacour in order to introduce some of the core issues surrounding our objective of understanding the role of Christian peacemaking endeavors in impacting the peace process from the grassroots. His story allows us to shed light on the scant presence of Arab Christians in Israel and the PT. Furthermore, it raised our

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<sup>36</sup> «Baram had been a totally Christian Palestinian village. The Maronite Church [...] denominated "Notre Dame", was the center of our life [...] In the village, just approximately seventy people were Christian Byzantine Melkites (Greek-Catholic), and my family was among them. Our bishop had entrusted us to the pastoral care of the Maronite pastor Abu Eid. Everyone in the village were baptized, married and buried in this little church and there we celebrated liturgy on Sunday and on week-days» (Chacour 1990, 21). See picture of the Church in the Appendix: figure 3-5.

attention to the sociological definition of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as intractable. Its intractable nature made us question the efficacy of Track One diplomacy in achieving a sustainable peace. Therefore, given the insufficient impact of peace treaties signed by government officials, we have introduced a different approach: that of Track Two diplomacy. The objective of this methodology entails mending the relationships from the grassroots. In particular, we have focused on the efforts undertaken by religious peacemakers. Elias Chacour has been recognized by the Tanenbaum Center as a religious peacemaker. This mode of peacemaking operates within the framework of religious faith. In a society, where religion still plays a central role for the majority of the population, such as Israel and the PT, faith can become a powerful tool to motivate people to engage in peacemaking activities. Chacour's autobiography allows us to witness how a traumatic experience, such as his eviction from his home by the hand of the Zionists, can give birth to a constructive and creative reaction. Chacour's development of the Mar Elias Education Institution provides the interreligious student body with the opportunity to get to know each other and give to the despised "other" a human face and, through time, write a common history. It is our intent to lay emphasis on how Chacour's endeavors fall within the main concerns targeted by Track Two diplomacy, which addresses the healing of the relationships and the restoration of human dignity.

Also, Chacour's autobiography opens the floor to a discussion on the applicability of the concept of resilience. This term depicts a creative reaction to misfortune and allows the individual and/or the community to recover and produce change in its circumstances. The uprooted villagers of Biram hold steadfast to their homes, whose ruins have become enclosed in an Israeli National Park, by celebrating Mass in the restored Church. They keep the memory of their village alive, as well as the memory of their origins and presence on the territory.

Through our future research planned to focus on the community of Bethlehem, and on the Nasser Family, we hope to be able to incorporate Chacour's autobiography inside a forthcoming network of peacemaking

initiatives and understand the role of religion in devising strategies to impact the peacemaking process in Israel and the PT form the grassroots.

## Appendix

	Israel	Palestinian Territories	Total Holy Land	Total in the World	Primary See
<b>ORTHODOX</b>			<b>65.000</b>		
Greek-Orthodox	35.000	30.000		10.000.000	Istanbul
Rumanian-Orthodox	400			20.000.000	Bucarest
Russian Orthodox	150			80.000.000	Moscow
<b>ANCIENT ORIENTAL</b>			<b>7.250</b>		
Syrian Orthodox	500	2.000	2.500	2/3.000.000	Damascus
Armenian Orthodox	200	2.800	3.000	6.000.000	Etchmiadzin (Armenia)
Coptic Orthodox	1.000	500	1.500	8/10.000.000	Alexandria/Cairo
Ethiopian Orthodox	240	10	250	25/30.000.000	Addis Abeda
<b>CATHOLIC</b>			<b>115.410</b>		
Latin	24.000	20.000	44.000		Jerusalem/Rome
Greek-Catholic	60.000	3.000	63.000	1.540.000	Damascus/Rome
Maronite	7.000	500	7.500	3/4.000.000	Bkerke (Lebanon)/Rome
Armenian Catholic	80	420	500	350.000	Bzommar (Lebanon)/Rome
Syrian Catholics	100	150	350	350.000	Beirut/Rome
Chaldean		50	50	700.000	Bagdad/Rome
Coptic Catholic		10	10	300.000	Cairo/Rome
<b>PROTESTANTS</b>			<b>9.100</b>		
Anglican	2.000	1.000	3.000		Canterbury (Great Britain)
Lutheran	500	2.000	2.500		
Baptist	1.500	100	1.600		
Various Denominations	1.000	1.000	2.000		
<b>OTHER GROUPS</b>					
Crypto- Christians	250.000 (?)				
Expatriated Workers	30.000				
Messianic Jews	10.000				

Figure 1. Source: P.G. Gianazza, *Guida alle Comunità Cristiane di Terra Santa. Diversità e Fede nei Luoghi di Gesù*, EDB, Bologna, 2008

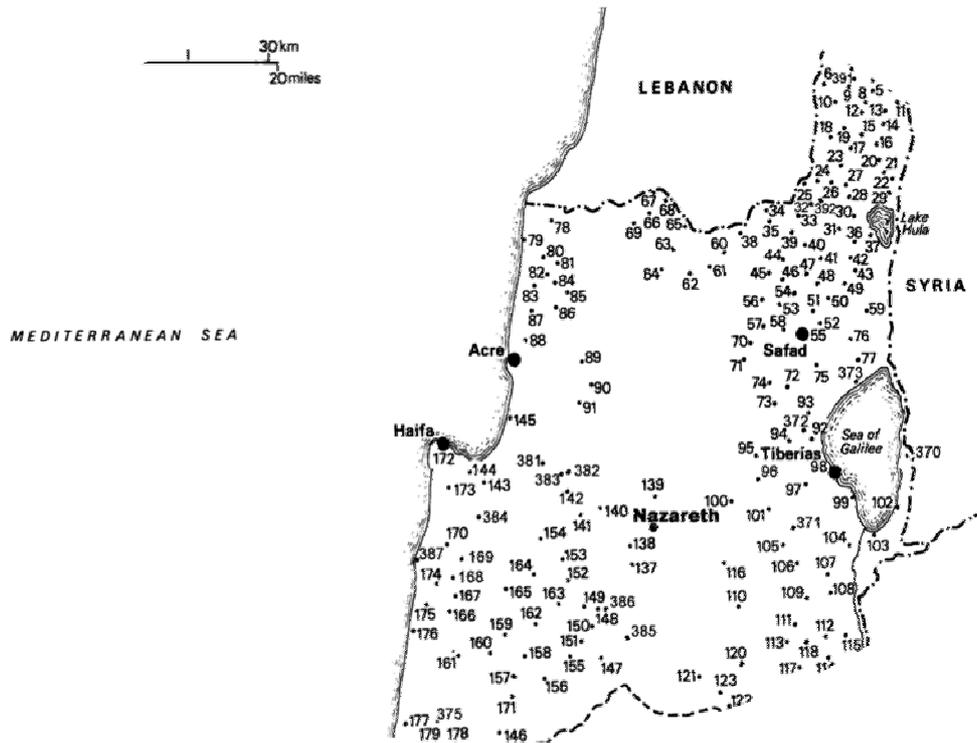


Figure 2. Source: B. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revised*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.



Figure 3

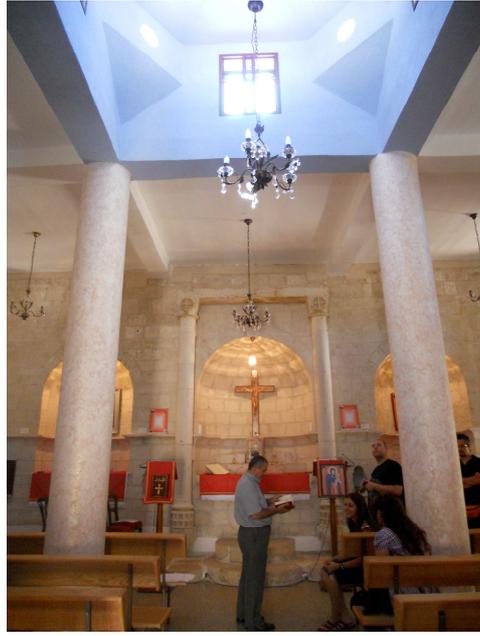


Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

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