Yael Warshel, **Experiencing the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Children, Peace Communication and Socialization**, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021, 474 pp., $99.99 (hardcover).

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Somehow, the concepts of "peace education" and "peace communication" should have more standing in the field of communication than they do. Peace communication should be considered a major intervention tool on par with economic, military, and humanitarian interventions. But alas, peace education is an anemic construct with little sophisticated theory and even less empirical research. Until now.

Yael Warshel's new book, **Experiencing the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Children, Peace Communication and Socialization**, is poised to become the primal text in the areas of children and media, media and conflict, and field research applications, establishing the conceptual and theoretical foundations of peace education and peace communication. Warshel's book is an intellectual and scientific account of the experience of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is a superb and timely work that provides a much-needed reminder of how the Israelis and Palestinians have continued to struggle to deliver the promise of peace. The author encounters the extremism that has infected the conflict management process and provides a compelling narrative about the ensuing strife and disenchantment. The author employs an exceptional use of examples and challenges throughout the volume and helps the reader understand the nuances we must endure to manage the conflict. This is the work of a skilled researcher and worthy of the library of anyone interested in these issues.

The author's work in this long-awaited and much-anticipated volume will pique the understanding of various disciplines and subdisciplines like Middle East studies, communication, sociology, political science, international relations, child development, and global studies, including social scientific concepts related to ethnic conflict, ethnicity and nationalism, and media and stereotypes. Warshel's volume is a wide-ranging journey through media and conflict. She reports the results of a carefully crafted study of the children of this conflict who often suffer from intergenerational trauma. The data reported are extensive (the index is 25 pages long, and there are 31 pages of references) and shed new light on how the conflict persists, with particular attention to the assessment and audience reception of peace communication interventions.

In 1998 the first Israeli-Palestinian version of *Sesame Street* was broadcast to build peace between these two groups. Warshel's description of the politics and decisions involved in designing the *Sesame Street* set is particularly fascinating. How and where the two societies will be located (ultimately termed the "two-street solution"), how clearly demarcated neighborhood streets will be, opportunities for interpersonal
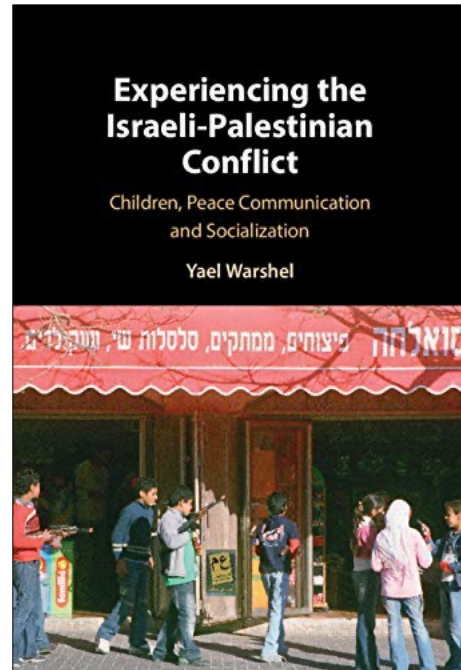
contact, the design and personality of various Muppets, along with decisions about language and how semiotically the two sides will be presented as equal are just a few examples of the complex array of decisions to be made. Such decisions are necessary for all aspects of this research project, which signifies how closely the model for *Sesame Street* approximated the conflict. Such verisimilitude is crucial if one is going to make justifiable generalities.

After an orienting introduction, the book is divided into four sections with three chapters per section. The organizational scheme is fully integrated and sets the logic for the book; that is, the first chapters grapple with the question of why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be studied within the context of peace education. Warshel makes the case that communication is most conducive to achieving peace, and she rigorously reports defensible empirical relations between the dimensions of communication (e.g., messages and media use) presumed to achieve desirable outcomes associated with peace. Peace education teaches people and groups grassroots strategies for preventing outbreaks of violence, managing ongoing conflict, and sustaining newly signed peace accords. It takes place on the macrolevel of the mass communication tradition, and the microlevel of the interpersonal communication tradition (see Ellis & Warshel, 2010).

Each of the four parts comprises a critical and empirical assessment of how the *Sesame Street* structure may or may not have contributed to peace or the achievement of social change. The first part outlines the production of *Sesame Street,* where the second part takes up the matter of audience reception for each of the primary groups, namely Palestinian, Jewish/Israeli, and Arab/Palestinian Israeli. The third part is the heart of the book, and it merges communication, psychological, and anthropological theories to demonstrate how the children who were watching *Sesame Street* were more socialized by glocalization in ways that led them to disregard *Sesame Street's* attempted peace mediation. Finally, in part four, the author provides recommendations for practitioners. These include suggestions for peace communication interventions as well as how to design outcome goals and who to enlist to best achieve these goals.

The field research methods reported in this volume should be a model for future work. The *Sesame Street* studio set represented the materialized imagination of a peaceful neighborhood context. It drew on the literature of the contact hypothesis suggesting that the most ideal form of intergroup relations looks like "friendship." It was possible through the *Sesame Street* model to target individual behaviors in a natural context and track a sequence of everyday activities that resulted in potential friendship rather than creating an unrealistic situation that focused on peace building. Thus, common courtesies such as helping an outgroup member change a tire or providing useful information for an outgroup member were much more semantically and pragmatically representative of communication situations.

The research reported by the author is a unique and commendable example, at a granular level, of how interpretations are constructed and make up the assemblage of stereotypes, misinformation, and perceptions of others that characterize the conflict. She introduces new methodological techniques. Her "multi-sited ethnographies," combined with new techniques termed "ethnographies of violence" (p. 6), are part of the contextualization of audience members' responses with a description of the structural realities and narrative lenses through which each filtered the conflict. She demonstrated the associations of those realities and lenses with the respective three categories and related group narratives.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most persistent intractable conflicts that is particularly resistant to resolution because it is an identity-based conflict rather than an interest-based conflict. That is, as an identity-based conflict, it is concerned with deep psychological and symbolic roots aimed at one's sense of recognition and well-being. The boundaries for identity groups are rigid, and members see their issues (e.g., ethnic group rights, religious freedom, possession of sacred land) as nonnegotiable. Interest-based conflicts, on the other hand, are more rational disagreements over physical resources that are more amenable to bargaining and negotiation. The two sides in interest-based conflicts typically recognize their interdependence, which serves as the primary incentive for compromise. There is a long history of research on bargaining and negotiation (cf. Fisher & Urey, 1981) and its role in managing conflict. But the truly difficult conflicts, the identity-based conflicts, have received much less attention.

The importance of empathic absorption into the narrative of the other side is one reason that identity-based conflicts have not been so closely studied. The researcher must be able to understand and identify with the parties to the conflict, and this is very difficult, particularly when the two sides are characterized by ethnic conflicts with, as stated above, rigid boundaries and nonnegotiable issues. Ethnic conflicts around the world—Israel-Palestine, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Myanmar—defy resolution in identity-based conflicts. More current research trends favor communication as an intervention tool.

This volume constitutes the first effort to assess socially constructed messages from a peace communication intervention in the context of an ethnopolitical nationalist conflict. It gauges audience interpretations at the base of the attitudes, beliefs, and values that form the perceptions and distortions that characterize the conflict. Most attempts at resolution seek ethnic separation or partition. Separation encounters five objections: (1) it encourages splintering of states; (2) population exchanges cause human suffering; (3) it does little more than transform civil wars into international ones; (4) rump states will not be viable; and (5) it does nothing to resolve actual ethnic antagonisms (Kaufmann, 1996, p. 169). Thus, communication becomes even more central to the conflict resolution process. Communication is less threatening, less expensive, moral, and accessible.

Experiencing the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict is a serious achievement, and I suspect it is on its way to becoming one of the most methodologically and theoretically important books in this area. Warshel commands the literature pertaining to children and media, conflict, and peace communication; her call for evidence-based practices applied to the recommendations she poses will reset the direction of the field.

References

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