

**Analysing De-securitisations: Problems & Prospects for Israeli  
Palestinian Reconciliation**

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## **Abstract**

Securitisation theory, which has been developed by a number of scholars affiliated to Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, has become one of the most attractive analytical tools in contemporary critical security studies. The work of Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and others has made a major contribution to our understanding of the dynamics of security both at the level of structure (the concept of 'security complex') and the level of the state (the concept of 'securitisation'). However, while this approach has made a major theoretical contribution, there have been few attempts at applying theory to empirical cases. Moreover, at the theoretical level, there are also problems, notably an under-theorisation of 'desecuritisation' compared to 'securitisation' its antithesis. In this paper it is argued that the implementation of the 'desecuritisation' concept, will take the theory forward. This article is an attempt to apply desecuritisation theory to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is argued that this conflict provides an interesting case for analysing both securitisation processes, which have been shaped by military and political elites, and desecuritisation process which has been initiated by so called 'track two intermediaries'.

**Keywords:** desecuritisation, Copenhagen School, peace education, Israeli-Palestinian conflict

## Introduction

Even though securitisation theory refers to processes of both securitisation and desecuritisation, desecuritisation process, the returning of issues from *emergency politics* to *normal politics*, has left under-theorized by the Copenhagen Scholars. Under-theorisation of desecuritisation leaves the door open for interpretation. Furthermore, compared to securitisation, a few scholars have attempted to analyse desecuritisation theory within the context of empirical cases.<sup>1</sup>

This article is an attempt to apply (de)securitisation theory to an extra-European context, namely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is argued that this conflict provides an interesting case for analysing desecuritisation process which has been initiated by so called 'track two intermediaries' as well as securitisation processes, which have been shaped by military and political elites. With the analysis of desecuritisation moves in Israeli-Palestinian context this study attempts to contribute the development of under-theorised/under-employed desecuritisation concept.

Desecuriting moves of grassroots will be illustrated through a detailed analysis of peace education case in the second part of the article. Before proceeding to the analysis of the possible contributions of peace education programs to the desecuritisation moves, desecuritisation theory will be briefly reviewed. Within this context, the first section of this chapter aims to present the arguments and debates related to desecuritisation theory. In the second section a conceptual framework for the analysis will be drawn. Finally, the third section presents a brief review of the development of the idea of reconciliation and peace, as opposed to the general security discourse, in Israeli-Palestinian context.

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<sup>1</sup> Among all Paul Roe (2004) analyses the conditions of desecuritisation in the context of minority rights in Europe, Rens Van Munster (2004) explores the desecuritisation of illegal migration in Europe and Andrea Oelsner (2005) attempts to explain regional peace in South America through an analysis of desecuritisation theory.

## **I. Analysing Desecuritisations in the Israeli-Palestinian Context: Theory, Concept and History**

### **1.1 Theorising Desecuritisation Process**

Desecuritisation is best understood as the fading away of a particular issue from security agenda when certain threats are no longer valid or replaced with more powerful threat perceptions. Buzan and Wæver define desecuritisation as ‘a process in which a political community downgrades or ceases to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and reduces or stops calling for exceptional measures to deal with the threat.’ (2003:489) Desecuritisation implies that issues, for which the potential use of force had been legitimised before, gradually start to take steps backward, whereby violence ceases to be a legitimate option.

The ultimate goal of desecuritisation is the achievement of a situation in which the issue in question is no longer seen as threatening, and thus is no longer defined in security terms. As far as the question of how to desecuritize is concerned, the Copenhagen School outlines three options regarding how to desecuritize: (1) not to talk about issues in terms of security in the first place, (2) once an issue securitized, try not to generate security dilemmas and vicious cycles and (3) to move security issues back into ‘normal politics’. Since it is too late for the first and second strategies in conflict situations like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the only desecuritisation strategy at stake is the third one: to move security issues back into ‘normal politics’, which is also extremely difficult in such an intractable conflict. Particularly in the societal sector of security, securitisation has a self-reinforcing character. (Wæver 2000:253) The defence of societal identity, as is in Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is conceived as a discourse available to securitising actor(s). To desecuritize in the societal sector requires that the language of maintaining collective identity be taken out of this discourse. In short, for Wæver the best way is to prevent issues from being framed in terms of security in the first place, which is not an issue in Israeli-Palestinian case. Thus, Wæver’s this solution is not satisfactory at all in the cases like Israeli-Palestinian conflict for which desecuritisation requires a drastic transformation of the securitized issue to normal politics.

As argued by Wæver securitized issues can be managed or transformed. However, there exist a distinction between the management of securitized issues and desecuritisation. As Wæver

remarks, 'security' signifies a situation marked by the presence of a security problem and some measure taken in response. Insecurity is a situation with a security problem and no response. Both conditions share the security problematique. There are obviously situations other than these, characterized by 'a-security' or 'non- insecurity.' (Wæver, 1995: 56) The management of securitised issues may bring with the notion of normalising the situation. But the challenge lies in the transformation of the securitised issues, the shifting of an issue from something that is security to something that is asecurity.<sup>2</sup> (Roe 2004:285) For a long time in Israeli-Palestinian context situation have swung from security to insecurity but never reached 'a-security' dimension. In between the periods of violent attacks following securitisation processes both sides have managed to have periods of in-security. The periods of in-security mainly marked by declaration of truce (hudna) by Palestinian fedayen groups and by Israel's introduction of strong defense measures. Since the securitising actors continue to securitize during these periods of in-security any transformation of securitised issues has not realised.

In terms of explaining the transformation of securitised issues, the 'desecuritisation' is undertheorised, and left the door open for interpretation, which is the major weakness of the theory. In this regard in analysing the transformation of securitised issues different scholars interpret the desecuritisation process differently. For example, Andrea Oelsner analyses the ways in which an issue transcends the security language- then desecuritised. According to Oelsner, an issue can transcend the security language in two ways: either it loses its threatening image because agent and audience perceive positive change in the nature of threat or they perceive a qualitative change in the relationship between them and securitised threat. Thus, they gradually begin to trust the fact that it no longer poses an existential threat. (2005:4)

In some cases the beginning of the process is to be found at the regional and/or global level and will encourage domestic desecuritisation. That is to say, desecuritisation process can start as a bottom-up process or a top-down one. It is important to note that even though external conditions might have affects on them, both securitisation and desecuritisation processes are essentially domestic developments. In Israeli-Palestinian case the global and regional developments had led to the initiation of the peace process between Israel and Palestine.

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<sup>2</sup> In the case of desecuritisation, we have neither security nor insecurity. As far as the situation is taken out of the realm of security conceptualisation, the situation might inelegantly be described as one of a-security. (Weaver 1998:81)

During the Oslo Process official negotiators and mediators's peace-making efforts were tried to integrate with bottom-up peace building efforts of two peoples, which will be discuss in the following section. The expected transformation from securitisation to desecuritisation did not realised at the official level and the failure of the peace-making had paved way to the renewal of securitisation processes. However, in spite of the outbreak of the new wave of securitisation process grassroots efforts for desecuritisation have continued.

One can expect peace to be more stable and solid in the absence of mutual security concerns or when issues have been effectively desecuritised. Oelsner identifies two stages in desecuritisation process: the first phase is about peace stabilisation, which involves a change of direction from negative relational pattern to a gradually improving one, and the first few steps towards domestic desecuritisation, and the second phase involves peace consolidation, expansion of mutual desecuritisation, and growth of mutual trust. (2005:11) According to Oelsner, once desecuritisation is perceived as convenient and feasible policy option, the process of desecuritisation and stabilisation of peace may open out. This first stage opens the door to a different type of relation between former antagonists. If the initial changes continue to develop in a positive manner, they will facilitate the advance to the second stage of the process, the one involving a redefinition of the relationship. It is this latter phase that leads to more durable changes, which in turn will result in a consolidated type of peace and a domestic situation dominated by a sense of asecuritisation. (Oelsner 2005:13)

To redefine the relationship implies to simultaneously re-evaluate the vision one has both of the other and of the self. According to Kacowicz and Bar-Siman-Tov this complex learning process 'requires a redefinition or re-evaluation of the parties' national interests, so that each party will perceive a mutual interest in establishing and maintaining the peace between them as the most important factor in assuring each other's security and even existence.' (2000: 24-25) The development towards a more consolidated peace involves in a process of redefinition and reinterpretation of reality. According to Adler and Barnett during this process social actors 'manage and even transform reality by changing their beliefs of the material and social world and their identities.' (1998:43-44)

In this part of the article, it is argued that given the reluctance of the policy-makers in initiating desecuritisation process in diplomatic/political field, in the humanistic field at the grassroots level a number of Israelis and Palestinians have presumed responsibility to initiate

desecuritisation process particularly in the psychological concerns such as education, reconciliatory teachings of trust, respect and tolerance. The following sections will present the initiation of desecuritisation process at the grassroots level in order to contribute to the change of direction from negative relational pattern to a gradually improving one. It is believed that the coexistence work between Israelis and Palestinians gradually contributes to the development of mutual confidence and a change in the rhetoric vis-à-vis the other.

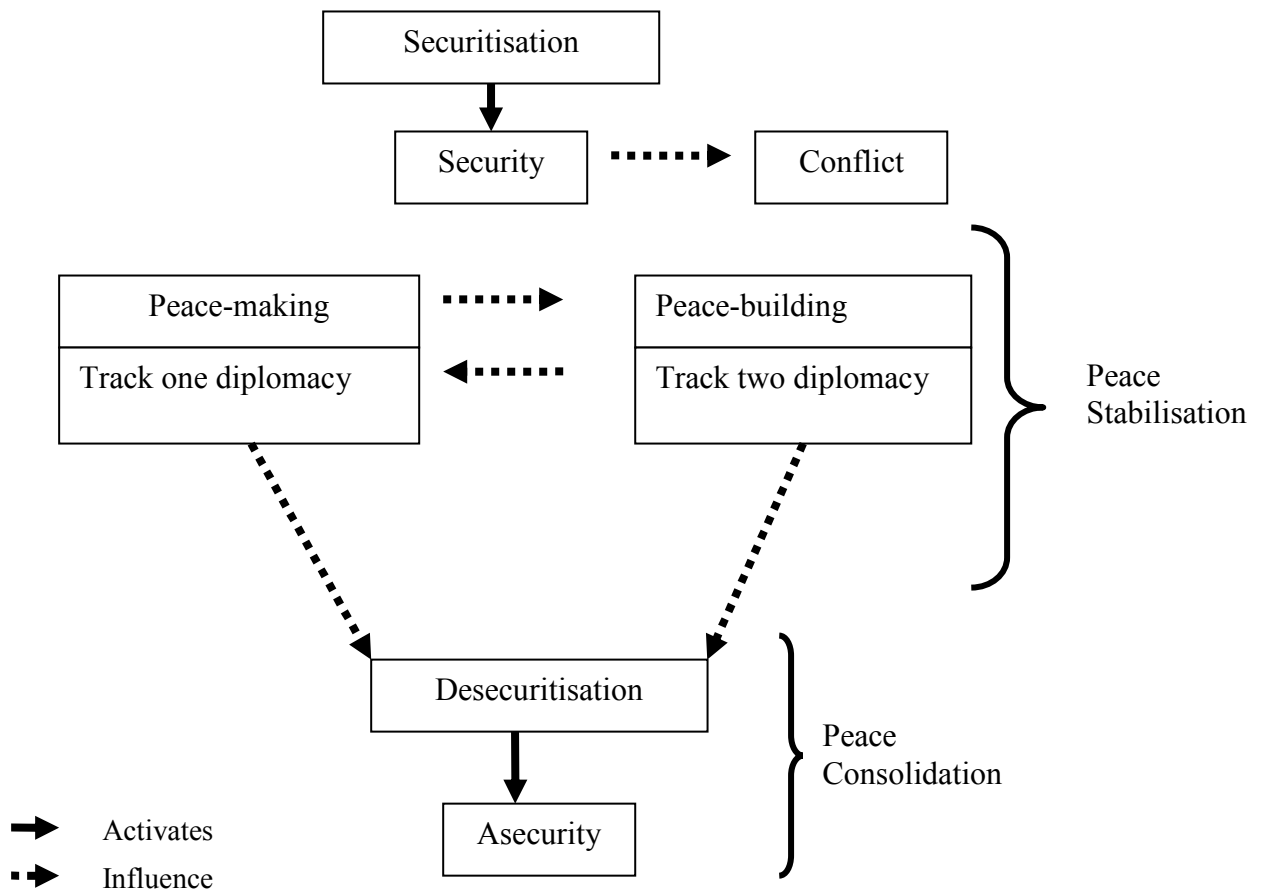
### **1.2 From Security to Asecurity: A Conceptual Framework**

Desecuritisation by downgrading or ceasing to treat 'the other' as an existential threat is an indispensable part of reconciliation and peace between former adversaries. One can assume that desecuritisation and peace are intertwined. Therefore, desecuritisation process is influenced by both peace-building and peace-making.

Ronald J. Fisher defines peace-building as 'efforts for improving the relationship between adversaries toward greater trust and cooperation, more accurate perceptions and attitudes, a more positive climate, and a stronger political will to deal with constructively with their differences.' (1997:11) On the other hand, peace-making is the attempts made by official representatives of adversaries 'through traditional diplomatic activities [to reach] a settlement between conflicting parties' (Fisher 1997:10)

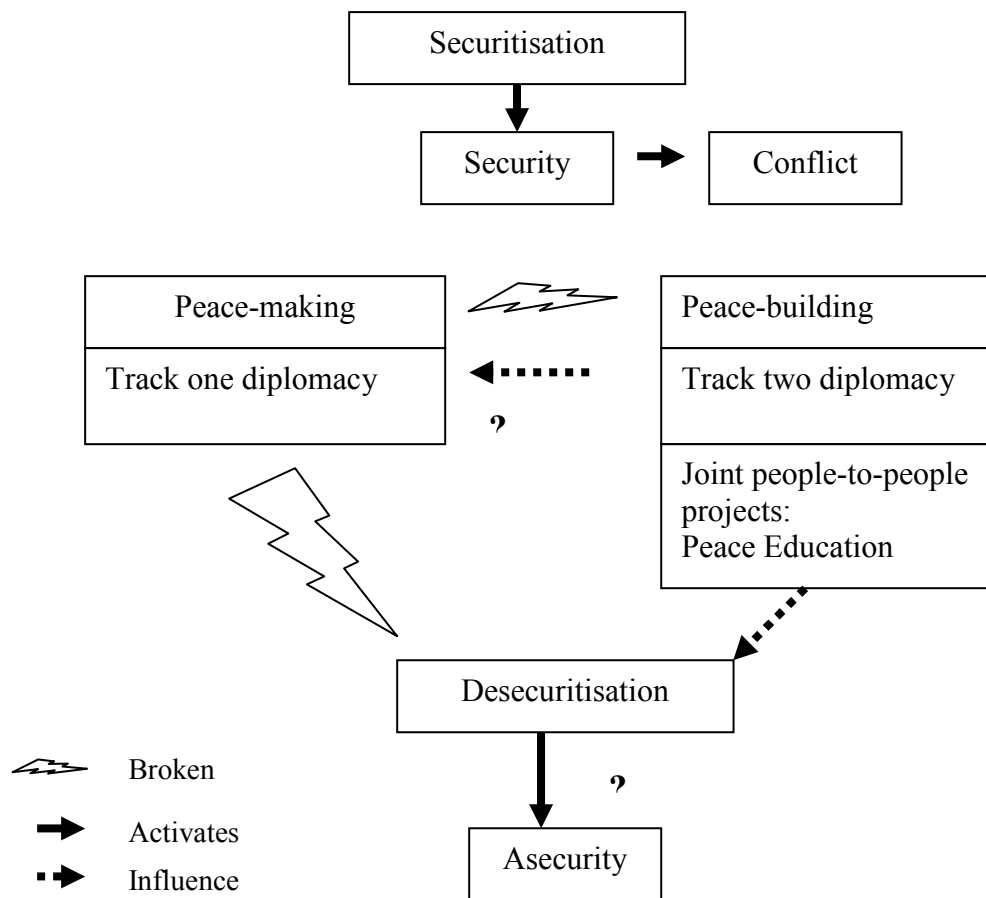
In order to conceptualize the linkages between peace-making with peace-building Joseph V. Montville introduced the term 'track two diplomacy'. According to Montville, track two diplomacy refers 'unofficial, nonstructured interaction between members of adversarial groups or nations that is directed toward conflict resolution through addressing psychological factors.' (Montville as quoted by Fisher 1997:117) Since track one diplomacy is often tangled with political considerations and other distortions, it is the responsibility of track two practitioners to become active in exploring various peace avenues and to aid in activating peace initiatives through all levels of society. In general track two diplomacy incorporates conflict resolution efforts made by professionals, endeavors made by conflict resolution activists who lack direct contact with policymakers including the work of NGOs and all kinds of grassroots projects. Particularly NGOs try to bring about changes by taking direct action themselves through track two processes. Here it is assumed that both track one peace-making effort and track two peace-building activities contribute the process of redefinition and reinterpretation of reality regarding the previously securitised issue.

**Figure 2 Transformation from Security to Asecurity**



One of the main faults of the Oslo agreements, which marked the beginning of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, was the lack of attention and care to the concept of people's peace. The agreement was made in 1993 by politicians who failed to incorporate into the human factor. This fact is acknowledged by scholars, track two and track one practitioners. The initiations and investments in people-to-people activities following the signing of the peace agreement were not enough to prevent demoralization of the Palestinian-Israeli peace. At the end of the day, the efforts of track two diplomacy conducted after the Oslo accords in 1993 did not succeed in preventing the collapse of the process and the re-emergence of severe violence between the sides in 2000. However, peace-building activities have continued even under the situations of mutual violence following the collapse of the peace process. As the track one division of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution tore apart the continuation of track two activities is extremely important in terms of the transformation from security to asecurity.

**Figure 3 Transformation from Security to Asecurity: The Israeli – Palestinian Case**



Generally peace-building is extremely important particularly in intractable<sup>3</sup> conflicts, where a history of hostility and frequent eruption of violence disrupts the normal functioning of society. One of the common devices used for grassroots level peace-building is the practice of transformative dialogue, which lies at the heart of the desecuritisation process. In the second part of the article this specific form of peace-building projects that aim at transforming the perceptions and related language will be analyzed in the context of the current Israeli-Palestinian situation.

### **1.3 Development of the idea of *reconciliation, cooperation and coexistence* in the Israeli-Palestinian Context**

Even though both Israeli and Palestinian community has outwardly presented a monolithic façade, from the very beginning of their interaction there have always been individuals/groups

<sup>3</sup> Intractable or protracted conflict is characterised by being stubborn, violent, central and total (Rouhana & Bar-Tal 1998) These kind of conflicts are accompanied by great uncertainties, stress and strengthened adherence to the collective narrative of one's group. (Foster 1999)

whose rhetoric regarding the other challenge the mainstream security discourse. Besides the ongoing securitisations there are always more reconciliatory approaches that defend and support coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. Moreover, the idea of cooperation and people-to-people coexistence activities is not a phenomenon developed during the Oslo process. However, the Oslo process contributed to the development of peace-building projects initiated by local organisations in order to improve the relationship between the sides on the grassroots community level.

On Israeli part, the very first traces of reconciliatory discourse have rooted in mid-1920s. In the wake of 1929 Arab revolt, a number of Jews from Jerusalem and elsewhere in Palestine initiated an establishment of an organization called *Brit Shalom* (Peace Alliance). They were bounded by a common belief in cooperation between the Jews and the Palestinian Arabs. It is important to note that the earliest signs of reconciliatory discourse underlining the possibility of coexistence, cooperation and peace with Palestinians were found in Brit Shalom's statements. As was stated by Judah Magnes, the first president of the Hebrew University, Brit Shalom believed that Jewish - Arab cooperation as both necessary and possible.

The founders and leaders of the Brit Shalom often used the words, *cooperation*, *peace*, *harmony* and *reconciliation* thoroughly. It was very unusual for Zionist political elite of that time since they prefer to think Palestinian Arabs are just a nuance in Palestine and they will leave Palestine soon and reunion with other Arabs elsewhere. Cooperation with Palestinian Arabs or reconciliation with their national aspirations was the least concerns of Zionist leadership.

According to Brit Shalom in spite of the differences of opinion among the Jews and the Arabs, there would also be a great degree of cooperation. They believed that on issues such as economic development, social security, standards of life, trade, agriculture, industry, labour, commerce, etc, would, in their opinion draw the Jews and Arabs together. Brit Shalom's ideas were quite progressive for the time. With its emphasis on both official and people's level cooperation between Jews and Palestinian Arabs, Brit Shalom's proposals resemble contemporary ideas of peace-building and functional cooperation. Compare to the Zionist leadership, who avoided the Arab reality in Palestine, Brit Shalom stressed the importance of the recognition of Arab reality in Palestine for the peace and stability in Palestine.

Till late 1970s the, particularly after the establishment of the State of Israel, the idea of 'Greater Israel' was the dominant ideology. Consequently, Arabs were seen/shown as the major threat for the 'Greater Israel'. One of the first movements that raise its voice against the ongoing securitisations of the Israeli leadership regarding the Arab/Palestinian threat to the existence of the State of Israel was the *Israeli Council for Israeli Palestinian Peace*. The group was formed in 1975 by a group of prominent Israeli Zionists in response to signs of moderation in the Palestinian national movement and that the Israeli Government keep ignoring. In February 1976 the founders of *Israeli Council for Israeli Palestinian Peace* published a Manifesto<sup>4</sup> and set forth their belief that Israel should challenge the PLO to make peace on the basis of Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in June 1967. The group attempted to put pressure on the Israeli government to initiate peace negotiations with the PLO, which was unacceptable for the time. It was also new for the Israelis to talk about two-state solution.

Following Israeli Council for Israeli Palestinian Peace *the Peace Now* movement was founded in 1978 during the Israeli-Egyptian peace talks by hundreds of reserve officers and soldiers from Israeli army combat units. Peace Now challenged the idea of 'Greater Israel' and saw the existence of settlements beyond the Green line as the major obstacle to the path to peace. Gradually, Peace Now has become the largest extra-parliamentary movement in Israel. Peace Now has consistently supported to promote a resolution to the conflict and continued to press all Israeli parties in power to initiate steps to bring about an end to the occupation and negotiations for peace.

Although Peace Now is an Israeli movement, it also has been engaged in dialogue and joint activities with Palestinians in the occupied territories. Even after the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada, the movement remains instrumental in the creation of the *Israeli Peace Coalition*, which evolved into the *Israeli-Palestinian Peace Coalition*, composed of political and public figures as well as grass-roots activists from both the Israeli and Palestinian mainstream.

Inspired by the Israeli Council for Israeli Palestinian Peace and Peace Now movements, in a short time a so-called 'peace camp' has been developed in Israel. Among all *Gush Shalom* (Peace Bloc) that defined itself as '*peacer than Peace Now.*' As stated in its website and

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<sup>4</sup> [http://members.tripod.com/~other\\_Israel/manifesto.html](http://members.tripod.com/~other_Israel/manifesto.html)

publicity documents Gush Shalom supports almost all conditions most of the Palestinian political groups set up for the peace with Israel. While supporting the Palestinian cause, like Palestinian political groups Gush Shalom constantly identify Israel as ‘occupier’ and it has consistently advocated following ideas: recognition of the Palestinian people, negotiation with the PLO, acceptance of a Palestinian state, acceptance of the principle of return, Jerusalem - capital of two states and dismantling the settlements.

Besides the activist peace groups there exists more technical and institutionalised initiatives like *Geneva Initiative*<sup>5</sup>, which was initiated by Israeli politician Yossi Beilin, one of the architects of the Oslo agreements, and former Palestinian Authority minister Yasser Abed Rabbo in 2003. Compare to the demands and goals of the activist peace groups, Geneva Initiative’s proposal is more fact-based since first-hand Israeli and Palestinian track-one practitioners as well as activists have participated in its preparation. In spite of its merits the draft was not attracted much official support. The Ariel Sharon government disapprove the draft and accused Israelis involved in the initiative of trying to act in place of a democratically-elected government. (Haaretz, January 11, 2004) On the Palestinian side, both Yasser Arafat and Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia declared that the Palestinian participants represent neither the PLO nor the Palestinian government and stressed that the draft peace accord is not officially accepted. (Haaretz, December 1, 2003)

The Oslo process has encouraged the NGOs and independent non-profit groups working for different aspects of peace and reconciliation. Currently, there are hundreds of Israeli NGOs and non-profit organisation on the ground. As is claimed by these groups they make up the ‘other Israel’ and point out that there are not simply two sides -Israelis and Palestinians- but there are Israelis who join with Palestinians in working for a future of reconciliation and peace built on a foundation of justice. (Carey & Shainin 2002) In spite of the differences regarding their focus, almost all of them criticise the security policies and identified themselves around common themes: sovereign independent Palestinian state based on the principles of equality, justice and freedom.

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<sup>5</sup> Geneva Initiative, which is an extra-governmental, therefore unofficial peace proposal, is a joint Israeli-Palestinian proposal of a detailed model for a peace agreement to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As a summary, in spite of the ongoing securitisations of political and military elite in Israel since the very beginning, the idea of peace and/or reconciliation with Palestinians has been developed gradually. Since mid 1920s the idea of reconciliation and cooperation have been developed and institutionalised through non-governmental groups.

On the Palestinian side, in-between Hasan Shukri Bey, the mayor of Haifa during British Mandate period and one of the first Palestinian elite who underlined the necessity for cooperation between Arabs and Jews of Palestine for a peaceful settlement, and Oslo process there was not much development regarding the idea of reconciliation and cooperation with Israelis. After the establishment of the State of Israel, Palestinians together with other Arabs in the region securitised the State of Israel as a threat to their existence in Palestine. Palestinian frustration mounted up with Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank after the 1967 war. In spite of the existence of Palestinian NGOs to raise awareness among the public on human rights, women rights, democracy and transparency, NGOs that support the peace process were established very lately. Particularly during the Oslo Process, organisations have sprung up in the West Bank and Gaza whose aim is to build peace and reconciliation between the two sides.

However, 'coexistence' has never been a popular term amongst Palestinians<sup>6</sup>, who are involved in peace-building. According to Hassasian and Kaufman, since a Palestinian state has not existed yet 'coexistence' within undefined borders is perceived as a false 'normalization.' (Hassasian & Kaufman 1999)

From the Palestinian point of view they have shouldered the sufferings going all the way back to the refugee crisis of 1948. Given the difficulties they faced as a result of occupation it is difficult for Palestinians to believe in peace. For most Palestinians Israel must be the one to make concessions and initiated peace-building and reconciliation. Palestinians who work on peace projects with Israelis have faced the risk of being labelled collaborators by some sections of Palestinian society.

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<sup>6</sup> Coexistence in the Israeli context signifies the peaceful existence of two peoples. The term is filled with political meaning and has been interpreted differently at various times by each group. The majority of Jews define coexistence in terms of social and interpersonal relations as experienced in people-to-people peace building efforts, whereas the majority of the Palestinians interpret in political, civic, and inter-group terms. (Stephan et al. 2004:238)

In spite of the material and psychological barriers, quite a number of Palestinian individuals and groups have initiated and continued peace-building efforts. Palestinian peace movement can be classified in accordance to the aims of the organisations and groups. First of all most of the works done by Palestinian peace NGO's focused on the raising awareness regarding the Palestinian cause (peace for the Palestinians). These groups mainly aim at gaining international recognition for the Palestinian cause based on historical narratives and securitisation of Israel as 'occupier'. As a second category, there are groups focused on the democratisation and peace within Palestinian society (peace among Palestinians). Finally the third category covers all individual and organisational efforts for integrating Palestinian peace-building efforts with Israelis' (peace with Israel). Within this context, there exists a range of groups and individuals working as Palestinian partner of Israeli people-to-people projects. Most of the participants in this category are contributing the joint Israeli-Palestinian project as Palestinian project partner.

On the contrary to institutionalised and long-standing peace bloc tradition in Israel, with the exception of a number of individuals and groups' efforts to link Palestinian peace-building efforts with Israelis' the idea of reconciliation and peace with Israel remains premature in Palestine. Most of the Palestinian NGOs and academic/research institutions that focused on peace and reconciliation have developed around the ideas of peace in Palestinian community and peace for Palestine –without reference to peace with Israel. However, the idea of peace-building has developed at the grassroots level after the Oslo Process and these groups have continued to cooperate with Israeli grassroots to improve the perceptions and conveyed to the audience the re-interpreted perceptions.

#### **1.4 Oslo and after: Israeli – Palestinian Peace-building**

Within the context of Israeli-Palestinian context, NGOs has involved the peace movement and activities relate to joint practice oriented projects in different social realms. While, before the Oslo agreements peace based NGOs initiated cross-society contacts and put pressure on their respective leaderships to start negotiations, during the peace process NGOs focused on helping to prepare their societies for coexistence and cooperation.

While academic and intellectual projects and encounters have been developed since the first Intifada, most of the dialogue and cooperation programs started after 1993 through the people-to-people initiatives of Oslo process. Since the signing of the Oslo peace agreements

in 1993, numerous programs of Israeli – Palestinian activities aimed at peace-building have been conducted. These programs ranged from one-time single events to long-term and continuous series of meetings, and from youth encounters to dialogues among school teachers, university students and professors.

In general, people-to-people activities include ‘civil society cooperation, building constituencies for peace from the ground up, conflict resolution, learning the political narrative of “the other”, bringing people into creative interaction and learning from each other.’ (Baskin & Al-Qaq 2004:544) In the Oslo Peace Accord a provision was inserted for the undertaking of people-to-people activities. By bringing together Israelis and Palestinians for dialogue and cooperative schemes it was aimed to create the relational infrastructure that is necessary to advance the official peace process.

As agents of civil society, NGOs involving peace-building activities are indigenous to the societies in which they operate. Therefore, they are open to the influences of external events, particularly the adverse circumstances of violence, human suffering and the escalation of tensions. Hence, during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, Israeli NGOs devoted to pursuing people-to-people activity with Palestinian partners experienced a dramatic and traumatic change in the nature and frequency of the activity they undertake. (Baskin & Al-Qaq 2004:544)

Even though these activities did not work out to prevent the outbreak of violence, the peace-building activities produced positive results at the micro level. According to follow up studies peace-building activities succeeded in the micro level in terms of improving mutual attitudes of Israeli and Palestinian participants. (Adwan & Bar-On 2000, Chaitin et al. 2002, Sasha-Biton 2002) Another indicator of the success of people-to-people peace-building activities is the number of peace-building activities that continue even under the situations of mutual violence following the collapse of the peace process. Mainly, successful people-to-people activities that continue their work are the ones operated jointly with a process of joint decision making by Israelis and Palestinians in accordance to the principles of partnership in project implementation, joint operations and ownership. (Baskin & Qaq 2004:552) In spite of the obstacles and challenges through insisting on the idea of reconciliation and cooperation these grassroots efforts have tried to contribute a change of direction from negative relational pattern to a slightly improving one.

In the following part, peace education projects which consist as a stepping stone for desecuritising the other will be analysed in terms of their contribution to the transformation of the perceptions and related language vis-à-vis the other.

## **II. Peace Education as a tool to desecuritise ‘the other’: the Israeli – Palestinian Case**

### **2.1 What is ‘Peace Education’?**

The idea of peace education has developed as a means to achieve the goals of the United Nations to ‘save succeeding generations from the scourge of war’, ‘to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained’, and ‘to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom...’ (Preamble to the UN Charter) It is believed that through education ‘understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups’ can be promoted and contributed to ‘the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.’ (Article 26, Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Peace education is seen as an integral part of the work of the UN. It is assumed that through a humanizing process of teaching and learning, peace educators facilitate human development. Currently peace education addresses the broader objective of building a *culture of peace*.

Gradually, the UN’s efforts were complemented with the efforts of committed educators, researchers, activists, and members of global civil society. Acting in partnership with the UN and its Specialized Agencies, NGOs, educational institutions, and citizen networks have advanced peace education by linking ideals with extensive research and practice.

Peace education is considered as one of the ways to change societal perceptions vis-à-vis the other side of the conflict and contribute to the success of formal peace-making process. As peace education aims at changed perceptions, attitudes and feelings that will lead to a different way of relating to the other collective side of the conflict, it is extremely instrumental in desecuritisisation process. Besides the detailed studies on school books and curricula there exists a variety of peace education programs focus on encounters and the development of understanding between youngsters and teachers from both societies. Both through joint works to change narratives and through efforts to provide grounds for encounters, a change in perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs towards ‘the other’ is aimed.

In general the goals of peace education in intractable conflict situations are to change attitudes, increase tolerance, reduce prejudices, weakened stereotypes, change conceptions of 'self' and of 'other'. Primarily it would aim to attain the legitimization of the other sides' perspective, its collective narratives, fears and experiences. According to Haggai Kupermintz and Gavriel Salomon, there are three qualities that distinguish peace education in regions of intractable conflicts from other programs. First, the main focus of peace education in areas such as Northern Ireland, Kosova and Israel/Palestine is the conflict between collectives. The focus of peace education in intractable conflicts is on the treatment of the collective conflict rather than the development of particular skills for interpersonal conflict resolution. Second, intractable conflicts are deeply rooted in each side's collective memories and narratives. History in particular parts the conflicting sides and sustains the continuation of conflict. For example, the collective memory of the Naqba (catastrophe) of 1948 plays a significant role in Palestinians fight against Israel. This is one of the major challenges facing peace education in the context of intractable conflicts. Third, deeply rooted beliefs held by each side about themselves and about the other side pose another challenge for the peace education. In general, such collective beliefs are accepted as unquestioned truths and highly resistant to change. (Kuppermintz & Salomon, 2005:294)

In the next section the Israeli and Palestinian peace education efforts, and consequently their efforts to initiate a desecuritisation move will be analysed. The analysis of selected peace education projects' contributions to the transformation of the perceptions and related language vis-à-vis the other, will be analyzed as desecuritisation moves.

## **2.2 Peace Education in the Israeli - Palestinian Context**

As was mentioned in the previous section, in general the aim of peace education programs is to generate changes in perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs and consequently in behaviour towards 'the enemy' that might lead a transition from a culture of war to a culture of peace. (UN A/RES/53/243, 6 October 1999) In Israel, several phases characterise the evolution of coexistence encounters and peace education programs.

From the 1970s to the early 1980s these activities initiated based on the recognition of Arab culture by the Israeli government and society. This effort was met by the willingness of the leaders of Palestinian citizens of Israel. They encouraged participation in these activities in

an effort to explore the possibility of their integration into Israeli life. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, organisations began applying the prejudice reduction approach. Until the 1990s the primary focus was on the reduction of stereotypes and on increasing cultural sensitivity and understanding. (Abu-Nimer 2004:409) The Israeli ministry of education supported coexistence activities.

Yitzhak Navon, then Minister of Education, initiated a wide-scope program called 'Democracy and Coexistence with Arabs'. This project basically aimed at coexistence with Palestinian citizens of Israel. The program constituted two levels. The first level was to provide training service to Israeli teachers to view Arabs in a more complex perspective and second level to introduce new books to the existing curriculum. Within this context it was aimed to bring Israeli and Israeli Arab students together. The outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987 caused to the end of this project.

The second wave peace education is a product of the Oslo peace process with a particular focus on Palestinian education system and coexistence with Palestinians from the territories. Since the early 1990s the impact and nature of peace education programs have generated an interest among academics, politicians, and the general public. In the last two decades, the Israeli-Palestinian field of coexistence has expanded and diversified. The interethnic encounter remains the primary tool for coexistence and dialogue. Mostly organised and conducted by non-profit organisations in Israel, peace education encounters have brought Israeli and Palestinian participants together for a brief periods of contact. The ministry of education and other government agencies have encourages the work of peace education projects. Since 1993, approximately 45 organisations have used interethnic encounters in their coexistence projects. (Abu-Nimer 2004:406)

When the second Intifada started on October 2000, many Israelis have felt that all the peace education programs had been illusions on the Israeli side. As was stated by Ruth Firer, one of the pioneers of peace education programs in Israel, 'when the Palestinian youngsters and children have been involved in the uprising, at first by stoning Israelis and later by suicide terrorist bombs, these feelings have been enhanced.' (Firer 2004:1) Following the outbreak of the Intifada, Israeli Ministry of Education withdrew its support to peace education programs. Limor Livnat, the Likud Minister of Education, has declared the need to a return to traditional Zionist values, and officially rejected the post-Zionist critical aspects of the national

narrative. Because of the situation the Ministry declared that it was not involved in any peace education activities with the Palestinian National Authority.

As opposed to the gloomy predictions during the second Intifada coexistence education did not stop in Israel. According to Abraham Fund's 2002 survey there were 150,000 people engaged in structured coexistence activities within Israel. For example, by August 2002 IPCRI's peace education program was active in more than 60 high schools in Israel and in the West Bank and there were more than 400 teachers and more than 4,500 students participating in the program. (Gershon 2002)

### **2.3 Textbooks as a means of desecuritising the 'other': Israeli – Palestinian Case**

Even though education will not make peace alone it is believed that it is crucial to educate each side of the conflict about the other and to enrich each side's conceptual maps of understanding the issues in conflict. Under agreements following Oslo, both Israel and PLO (later PNA) were required to foster mutual understanding and tolerance and to abstain from incitement including hostile propaganda. First of all, as an important part of the peace education programs Israeli and Palestinian textbooks were reviewed in order to detect the elements of incitement, racism and hostile propaganda. Within this context, new school books have been developed in Palestine and the existing books are revised in Israel.

The peace agreement signed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in 1993 put the Israeli and Palestinian schoolbooks at the centre of controversy. Particularly the books used in Palestinian schools were criticised for containing anti-Israeli rhetoric incompatible with the peace process. Within this context, following the Oslo agreement a series of studies conducted to examine the Palestinian textbooks as well as Israeli ones in order to get a complete picture of the role the textbooks play in peace education.<sup>7</sup>

While there has been a controversy regarding Palestinian textbooks in particular, the Israeli textbooks were evaluated as well in order to get a complete picture of the role they play in peace education or the opposite. Given the limitations of this study it was not possible to

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<sup>7</sup> Among all, The Middle East Media Research Institute's (MEMRI) study of the new Palestinian Textbooks, The Centre for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP) reports on both new Palestinian textbooks and Israeli textbooks, IPCRI's examination of the Israeli and Palestinian textbooks and The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace's comparative study of Palestinian and Israeli textbooks are the most prominent ones.

examine the Israeli and Palestinian textbooks by the researcher herself, those studies previously conducted by Israeli and Palestinian research teams provide basis for the following analysis. The quotations from the textbooks are provided by these reports.

As universally acknowledged, the curriculum serves as a tool for shaping and educating the coming generations. In addition to their primary pedagogical role of promoting education as well as social and cultural development curricula is usually used in order to shape the national super-narrative. In recent years the national narrative has entered the public discourse in various countries, especially countries or national groups involved in the process of shaping and consolidating nationhood, or young countries in the process of determining their borders or which lack existential security. The Israeli-Palestinian case, in which two nations are simultaneously involved in formulating their national identity, and are involved in the conflictual existential situation between them, is a special case which emphasizes the importance of dealing with the national narrative as part of the elementary school curriculum where the child's collective identity is initially shaped. In intractable conflict situation like Israeli – Palestinian conflict it is normal to assume that the books used in each society reflect the conflict in which they are both engaged, and are also part of a wider societal mechanism to ensure that the conflict becomes part of the development of children's identities. Particularly, history books present children with a narrative about their own history and the history of others. Historical narratives form and nourish the self and national identity. Moreover, the same narratives might constitute the basic arguments for the official security discourses as well as part of the desecuritisation moves.

In Palestinian case, after 1967 war for a long time Jordanian and Egyptian books were used throughout Palestinian schools. These books contained anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic elements. With the establishment of the Palestinian Ministry of Education under the Palestinian Authority in 1994-2000 new Palestinian textbooks were prepared and replaced those books in order to make Palestinian textbooks and curriculum freer of negative stereotypes of Jews and Israelis.

One of the significant characteristics of the new Palestinian books is their avoidance of referring the State of Israel or Zionism directly. In general the narrative regarding Israel develops vis-à-vis the Palestinian nationalism. Most of the Palestinian textbooks ignore the existence of the State of Israel. That omission is especially striking in light of the fact that

Jewish communities have lived in that area continuously since ancient times. The geographic extent of the Palestinian nation, shown in the textbooks, includes all the territory west of the Jordan River. Most of the mixed cities Haifa, Jaffa, Acre, and Nazareth are listed as Palestinian cities, disregarding their present location in Israel. (Our Beautiful Language 2000-2001:58) The maps of the region indicate only a Palestinian state in the territory formerly under the British Mandate as shown in General Sciences Textbook (2000-2001:81) and National Education (2000-2001:42, and Principles of Human Geography (2000-2001:53) The geographic definition of the Palestinian nation along the boundaries of the British Mandate reflects the general Palestinian resentment towards Israel.

The new Palestinian books prepared as a requirement of peace process clearly lessen direct incitement and explicit calls for violence against Israel. But, the textbooks virtually ignore the existence of Israel despite the PLO's (later on PNA) recognition of the state in the Oslo Agreement.

On the Israeli side, according to the different examination reports Israeli textbooks, especially those published after the 1980s include almost no derogative stereotypes of Arabs or Palestinians. Most stereotypical references to Palestinians were modified in textbooks used in Israel after the Oslo. However, particularly the books designed for elementary and junior high school students do not deal specifically with Palestinian national identity, as a distinct collective identity having the status of a recognized nation, with territorial ownership, and the wish for an independent country. (IPCRI Report 2004: 19) These conflictual issues arise in the upper high school classes when the curriculum deals in depth with the twentieth century, and especially the history of the Land of Israel and the relationship between the two nations. In these books the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians is presented as a clash between two national movements.<sup>8</sup>

The main problem common for the both Israeli and Palestinian textbooks that was underlined by almost all of the textbooks examination reports is their failure to teach about the sub-narrative of coexistence. As was underlined by Firer both sides ignore the relative calm periods and coexistence between them such as 1921-1929. (Firer cited by Eldar 2004) As a more striking example, in Palestinian books the Oslo Agreement, which actually means mutual

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<sup>8</sup> Tabibian, K. (1999) *Journey to the Past: The Twentieth Century*, pp.137-150, Zohar et al. (2000) *This is the Land: Introduction to Land of Israel Studies for Upper Grades*, p.4

recognition between Israelis and Palestinians, is barely referred. Moreover, there is no discussion of Oslo, its importance, or the problems it entails for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. (Nordbruch 2002:23) Furthermore, as was stressed previously that both Israeli and Palestinian textbooks avoid elaborating the other sides' right to exist alongside the self. IPCRI's report on Palestinian textbooks (2004) states that 'Palestinian textbooks have confused messages and it is not difficult to come to the understanding that the main political theme imparted to the students is that Israel should not exist and that is essentially the Palestinian goal.' As far as the Israeli textbooks are concerned it is not all certain that on this test the Israeli education system would get a higher grade than its Palestinian neighbour. (IPCRI Report 2004)

Given the inadequacy of textbooks to deliver the messages necessary for the creation of a culture of peace some of the joint Palestinian and Israeli NGOs developed projects to strengthen the textbooks tier of the peace education. In order to illustrate the efforts in this regard IPCRI's textbooks project will be explored here.

IPCRI's textbooks project based on the idea that there is a need to create space in the curricula for peace and democracy studies and this must be done through the formal education. As opposed to the other efforts to develop different texts for the Israeli and Palestinian school systems IPCRI team agreed on preparing only one set of texts for both Israeli and Palestinian schools. The materials have been developed by the joint temas and Israeli and Palestinian book writers have spend a significant amount of time together in order to reach understandings among themselves.

Through the prepared textbooks IPCRI team aims at 'to intervene with life skills-based peace education that helps children and adults understand how conflicts arise and how to work towards peaceful non-violent solutions to the underlying problems' (IPCRI Report year:8) The books that have been preparing develop around the following principles: *affirmation of self and others, cooperation, communication skills and problem solving*. It is believed that to learn 'valuing themselves and others creates motivation and commitment to resolve conflicts non-violently' and 'the recognition that self exist in this world together is central to finding solutions benefit both sides.' (IPCRI Report year:8) In an interview with IPCRI Peace Education team they argue that armed with these tools, individuals can live the principles of non-violent conflict management, and also teach or assist others to find peaceful reconciliation to situations of conflict. Considering the ongoing securitisations and respective

security responses following securitisations the idea of delivering same messages to the both Israeli and Palestinian children in general and the ideas textbooks that are prepared around in particular are revolutionary. Through delivering the idea of coexistence and the ways to reach coexistence to young generations of the both sides of the conflict is a crucial step to change perceptions and re-define the inter-group relations through a gradual generational mind-set change.

All of the reports that examined Israeli and Palestinian textbooks confirmed that textbooks clearly reflect each group's own monolithic narratives. Both Palestinians and Israelis have narrated different sides of the same history and ignored the other's perspective. These competing narratives have been injected in respective school books and curriculum. In some cases, each set of texts presents identical events and dates but offers conflicting interpretations. For example, the Israeli textbooks present the Balfour Declaration as a legitimization of the Zionist endeavour. The Palestinians, on the other hand, view the declaration as an international conspiracy against them. As was done through official discourse the terminology used in the books reflects and arouses different and nearly diametrically opposed emotional associations. While the Israeli textbooks call the 1948 war 'the War of Independence', the Palestinian textbooks refer to it as 'al Nakba' (The Catastrophe). The Israeli textbooks discuss aliyah (gradual Jewish migration to Palestine), but the Palestinian textbooks call it the 'forced Judaization of Palestine.' Moreover, while Israeli textbooks view Zionist leadership's acceptance of the partition plan as proof of its desire for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, Palestinian textbooks either justify its rejection or ignore it completely.

In order to reconcile the dual narratives that has been created by both sides through their in the process of shaping and consolidating their, PRIME (Peace Research Institute in the Middle East) develop with Israeli and Palestinian teachers a project of a joint school textbook. Within this context PRIME team prepared two pilot textbooks that have been jointly authored by Israeli and Palestinian high school history teachers who also tested them in their classrooms. Each books contains three chapters covering crucial historical events determined the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Each page is divided into three columns; the Israeli and Palestinian narratives mirror each other on opposite sides of the page and with a blank column in the middle that creates space for students to think for themselves.

The main idea behind this project is that ‘at the present stage of hostility the Israeli Jews and the Palestinians are not able to develop a joint narrative of their history... in the mean time they could learn to acknowledge and live with the fact that there are at least two competing narratives to account for their past, present, and future.’ (Adwan & Bar-On 2004:514) PRIME team assumed that this is an essential intermediate phase between learning about each other and legitimising the other’s valid reasoning. Instead of criticizing the existing narratives or creating a narrative to deliver a more co-existential messages PRIME’s textbook project simply aims at transforming ‘two hateful single narratives into two *mutually* sensitive ones’ (Adwan & Bar-On 2006b:215) The primary goal of the project is go from a conflict to a post-conflict narrative and to find a mutual level of respect between the Israelis and Palestinian of the other’s narrative, which is necessary for desecuritising the other.

In spite of their limited impact on preventing violence the peace education projects aiming to teach coexistence and peace have influenced the first phase, peace stabilisation, of desecuritisation process. Through the books developed and produced by IPCRI and PRIME teams a redefinition of the relationships between Isarelis and Palestinians have been aimed at. If not all population but at least the young children who read these books at the school recognized and re-evaluated each other’s point of view and the other’s reality.

### **Prospects & Problems**

The interviews conducted in February 2007 with Israeli and Palestinian team members from selected peace education projects proved their dedication and fate for the advancement of peace education in the Israeli-Palestinian context. They all agree that when there is no top-down peace-making initiative, peace-building activities cannot bring about peace all by themselves. Therefore, they should become modest in their goals and habe to focus on maintaining the ability of mutual positive interactions of peace-builders, and/or prepare the ground by initiating small projects that could become widespread once a future synchronisation with top-down initiatives will take place.

Both through joint works to change narratives and through efforts to provide grounds for encounters, a change in perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs and consequently in behaviour towards ‘the other’ has been aimed. According to Professor Gavriel Salomon, the director of the Haifa University’s Centre for Research on Peace Education, despite the ongoing violence,

participation in various programs yield positive attitudinal, perceptual, and relational changes among students who participated in peace education projects. The changes manifested in more positive views of peace, better ability to see other side's perspective and greater willingness for contact. However, given the existence of 1.5 million students in Israel and 1.2 million in Palestine, the scope of these projects has remained very limited.

Besides the unwillingness of respective governments to implement peace education programs, the major challenge for the peace education project teams is the restrictions on movement. Since Palestinians from territories are required special permission to enter Israeli cities and towns and Israelis are not allowed to enter Palestinian territories at all the coordination of joint projects is being extremely difficult. The alienation of young generations from each other has posed serious challenges for the youth projects that aim to develop better understanding between Israeli and Palestinian youngsters and teachers. Last but not least through 2006 and the first half of the 2007 deterioration of diplomatic relation with Hamas-led Palestinian Authority and the temporary freeze in international finance to Palestine had caused a pause in coexistence works in general and peace education projects in particular.

It is normal to assume that in contexts of intractable conflict and in absence of social and institutional support peace education is doomed to fail. But in the Israeli Palestinian case peace education programs and projects have continued to be designed and implemented even in the face of severe challenges. The peace education projects that have conducted after the Oslo agreements has contribute the process of redefinition and reinterpretation of reality regarding the previously securitised issue and succeed in contributing the transformation of the perceptions and related language vis-à-vis the other, therefore positively influenced in desecuritisation process –if not initiated a full-pledged desecuritisation process alone- in Israeli – Palestinian context. However, in spite of their success in injecting a more reconciliatory discourse into overtly securitized relations between Israel and Palestine as was experienced since 1993, securitisation processes have overborne the grassroots efforts to accelerate the desecuritisation process.