

**2nd German-American-Israeli
Comparative Social Cohesion Forum
"Between Cohesion and Coercion"
25th – 28th February 2019**

Opinion Pieces

Injustice: Hidden Right Where We Left It

Mike Brickner

One of my passions is travel, so I typically never hesitate when the opportunity arises to go abroad. Yet I remember staring blankly at my invitation to travel to Israel for a forum on social cohesion, uncertain whether I should attend.

I am a person who has an opinion regarding just about any political issue—from plastic straw bans to the unrest in Venezuela. For over 14 years, I worked for the American Civil Liberties Union where I defended the free speech rights of hate groups, fought for the separation of church and state, advocated for the abolishment of the death penalty, pushed for states to end draconian punishments for sex offenders, and defended abortion access for women. All of these are hot-button issues that have earned me hate mail, online harassment, and awkward family dinner conversations.

Israel frightened me.

I have spent the majority of my life avoiding the topic of Israel. If the topic came up in conversation, I would usually smile, nod along with whatever the person said, and then politely excuse myself at the first possible opportunity. For those not from the Midwest United States, allow me to translate: in the rest of the world, that is essentially the same reaction as screaming “Dear God, make it stop” while running away in terror.

While I could stake a position on nearly every other controversial issue, Israel felt different. From the outside, it appeared there was very little middle ground to be found. I have people in my life I respect deeply who strongly believe Israel must be an independent state and that any actions it takes to preserve that are justified; I have people in my life I respect deeply who strongly believe that Israel has committed unspeakable atrocities against the Palestinian people and must be held accountable. It appeared to be an intractable problem, with countless peace summits, treaties and incidents of violence throughout my lifetime that only added to the complexity.

Even among the progressive community in the United States, the issue has become increasingly divisive over the past year. Charges of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim bigotry have pervaded many social circles, devolving into a circular firing squad that few with a clear opinion can escape.

As I considered whether to accept the invitation, I thought of the various opportunities I had to travel abroad in my lifetime and how each had enriched me. Israel would be a challenge, and avoidance had felt easier for so long, but I concluded I needed to push myself and confront an issue that petrified me.

Before arriving in Tel Aviv, I had a lot of expectations about what I would see based primarily on images of Israel I had seen on the news. As I traveled from the airport to the hotel, the greatest shock was what I did not see.

There were no barbed wire fences.

There were no armies standing outside buildings with high-powered guns.

There were no people protesting out in the streets, throwing rocks at one another.

Instead, what I saw was a modern city that could have been in Europe or the United States. I saw people of various ethnicities and religions co-mingling with one another. I sampled cuisine from a variety of different cultures. Tel Aviv seemed to defy every expectation I had of Israel.

One central commonality I have seen throughout my lifetime is that people do not wish to be reminded of injustice in their communities.

The U.S. continues to have high rates of segregation. In my community of Cleveland, red-lining maps were used half a century ago to prevent Black people from purchasing homes in white suburbs. While red-lining is illegal now, the impact reverberates. If you look at nearly any map that documents injustice—health outcomes, education, poverty, incarceration—the same map appears showing the majority Black communities that were forced into *de facto* segregation by red-lining far worse than their white counterparts in other communities. And those same forces keep segregation in place, as a lack of wealth and income keep Black residents from social mobility, and white residents expand to ever-further-flung suburbs to further distance themselves from Black communities.

Ask a white Cleveland resident when the last time they went to a majority Black neighborhood, and you will likely get a perplexed look.

The implication: “Why would I go *there*?”

The lack of cross-racial interaction is not by chance, it is by design. White residents have bought into a system that keeps Black people marginalized, but they do not want to be reminded of that day in and out. The vast majority of white people would like to think they are open-minded, diverse thinkers. After all, they have a few Black friends or co-workers, so they cannot be racist, right? But if confronted with the systemic racism that keeps Cleveland’s Black infant and maternal mortality as one of the highest in the nation, or that our rates of lead poisoning of Black children easily eclipse that of Flint, Michigan—though with decidedly less media coverage—how can they deny it?

And that is the benefit of avoidance. Those with privilege can live their lives without confronting those questions, blithely pretending that they simply do not exist.

Back in Israel, the forum moved from Tel Aviv to Nazareth. As we traveled north, we exited the freeway, took a back road for several kilometers and then down a ramp with a high concrete wall. The drive was unremarkable, but the view once we parked was searing. There was the barbed wire and the tall fences, surrounding the separation barrier between Israel and the Autonomous Palestinian Authority Area A – constructed following a decision by the Israeli government on 20th February 2005 and constructed in parts along the pre-1967 borders and in parts encroaching into the West Bank / Palestine. Hidden in plain sight, removed from the bustling, diverse metropolis we just left.

My interactions with Israelis as part of the social cohesion forum also illuminated the complexity that many live with on a daily basis. No nation is monolithic, and the participants exemplified the complicated and conflicted beliefs that are inevitable in a diverse society. That struggle is both terrifying and familiar. The U.S. has a long history with confronting—and avoiding—who we are as a nation, and who we strive to be. Observing that struggle in others was reassuring and empowering that we can collectively begin to pierce the veil of privilege that blinds us to inequality.

Confronting injustice is often painful, both for the beneficiaries and victims. Avoidance only benefits those with privilege, as injustice itself is painful for those who experience it. I am still uncertain of where I stand on Israel, and I recognize that I do not have many answers. But I am also resolved that I am going to start asking the questions, and not retreat back into my shell of privilege the next time the subject arises.

Reflections on Social Cohesion/Social Coercion

Dr. Judith Goldstein

Part I

Nazareth, February 24, 2019

“Anticipation”

We are delighted to be in this trilateral conference in Israel to explore some of the dynamics and forces that connect social cohesion and social coercion. This novel approach is designed to look at critical contemporary and historical issues from various international perspectives. Israel, Germany and the US are facing deeply divisive issues of national identity—and nationalism, often in its extreme incarnation—that derive from diverse populations and their leaders—issues that involve race, religion and national boundaries and histories.

According to the Stanford biologist Robert Sapolsky, humans face many obstacles in achieving a balance among competing groups. He recently wrote that “...the resurgence of nationalism—that potentially most destructive form of in-group bias—requires grasping the biological and cognitive underpinnings that shape them.” He is not optimistic: “Our brains,” he writes, “distinguish between in-group members and outsiders in a fraction of a second, and they encourage us to be kind to the former but hostile to the latter. These biases are automatic and unconscious and emerge at astonishingly young ages. They are, of course, arbitrary and often fluid. Today’s ‘them’ can become tomorrow’s ‘us.’ But this is only poor consolation.” (Foreign Affairs, March/April 2019, p. 42) Given his pessimism, it is good that we didn’t invite him to this forum.

If we work from our knowledge of recent history, we can look, in an overly simplistic way, at these three countries in terms of their post-World War II histories and the intersecting impact of national aspirations, traumas and tragedies of their diverse societies. The German Nazi state destroyed Jewish cultures and communities in Europe. In part as rectification for the Shoah, Israel was granted existence as a nation state with the critical support of the United States. This was in fulfillment of the national Zionist idea and not, as it is sometimes claimed, as an exercise in colonialism or racism. The US and its allies forced West Germany to become a democratic state and to accept responsibility for the Shoah. The US and West Germany became the financial patrons of the new state and supported Israel in its wars with Arab states.

As the leading opponent of totalitarian Nazi and Communist states, the US assumed the leadership of the free world—while it denied democratic rights and equity to its own African American and Native American populations. Through oppressive laws and social and economic practices, the US violated its creed of equal rights to all citizens. The US has never fully acknowledged the horrors of slavery nor genocide on its own soil—the almost complete extinction of Native American populations and continuing structural discrimination against that population.

Now seven decades after the end of World War II, all three countries are immersed in the tortured and sometimes dangerous confluence of national, group and individual forms of belonging and identity. All three countries, hounded by their histories, committed themselves in theory over the past decades to renewal through liberal democratic practices. All three began the trek out of disasters to build anew: a democratic German state, a Jewish state, and an improved and integrated American democracy. All three countries subscribed to the Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention that sought to establish the sanctity of individual rights and the containment of genocidal forces. But, as Yehudah Mirsky, associate professor of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University, has written, “the very ideas of human rights for individuals on the one hand, and group rights on the other can pull against one another. Who decides who is out of the group and who is in? Who decides when individuals can override a group, when they must submit to it, and how? What happens when furthering individual freedoms seems to run counter to long-held moral principles and understanding holding society together?”¹

In fact, lines of cohesion and coercion impinge upon societies in confounding ways. In the name of social cohesion, countervailing forces of coercion are often presented as issues of national security that have compromised the idealistic efforts to protect individual and group rights. Thus, Israel, Germany and the US increasingly enforce laws to safeguard their national borders from refugees and migrants with different national, racial and religious backgrounds. In the US and Israel, military power is employed.

External borders are reinforced by equally powerful internal borders in regard to social cohesion and coercion. They relate to language, education, economic, social, health, environmental and political opportunities to enforce the interests of one group over another. These mechanisms are often identified in terms of discrimination but in the US, for example, they derived from coercion through the imposition of slavery and Jim Crow segregation laws. They separated blacks and whites, particularly in the South; served venal economic and political purposes; and strongly cemented and fixed the cohesion of the white population. With the US as a model, the German race laws of the 1930s were employed to make a cohesive Aryan state by isolating, punishing and eventually killing Jews.

¹ Yehudah Mirsky, “The End of the World that 1948 Made,” *Tablet*, January 2, 2019

The Israeli situation today involves Jews, Israeli Arabs, Druze and Christians and those in the occupied areas as well as the relationships among Jews from Europe and from the Middle East and Africa. The German case involves the formerly recruited so-called guests workers from Turkey and recent refugees from the Middle East who wish to remain in Germany and take on German citizenship—as well as populations from East Germany, formerly under Communist rule. In the American case, the tensions involve historic racial issues among black and white Americans (the “new” Jim Crow) as well as Native Americans, immigrants and refugees from Central and South America, the Caribbean Islands and Africa.

Current tensions employ terminology—deeply complex and tension-filled—such as the “other” versus the “privileged.” In regard to the language or doctrines of differences, the historian Alan Wolfe recently disparaged the main thesis of Francis Fukuyama’s The End of History and the Last Man, published in 1992. Fukuyama proposed that liberalism had finally triumphed over fascism and communism as symbolized by the fall of the Berlin wall. Wolfe, writing from our contemporary perspective states: “At a time of populist unrest, bitter polarization and rampantly spreading authoritarianism, Fukuyama’s book now appears to have been written for another planet. Far from avowing the triumph of liberal democracy, in 2019 many believe we will be lucky to hold on to the dwindling number of liberal democracies we have. And the force that may do us in appears to be....the obsessive particularism of ethnic identity.”²

The historic connections among Germany, Israel and the US are not the only ones relevant to our discussion. Today, national borders do not contain or isolate the forces of domestic or internal cohesion and coercion. They spill over from country to country. Is the study of history—and the ongoing construction of a national narrative—an effort of cohesion or coercion? Germany’s ongoing educational and political campaigns to educate its citizens about the Shoah and the fight against Antisemitism finds opposition among diverse parts of its population in response to the Israeli-Arab conflict. Is that post-Shoah narrative used to placate the Americans and Israelis?

Israel’s claim to speak for world Jewry, especially in regard to the Holocaust, deeply affects Diaspora Jews in a continuing debate over Jewish identity as a nation, religion and/or culture. Is that claim also employed to attract the support from Poland and Hungary in response to Israel’s fury over perceived favoritism in the European Union towards the Palestinians? In the US, attitudes towards the Israeli-Arab conflict are imbedded in the policies and attitudes of various ethnic, racial and religious groups—and the increasingly hot fires of political parties.

² Alan Wolfe, “Francis Fukuyama’s Shrinking Idea,” *The New Republic*, January 16 2019, 63-64

Multiple facets of social cohesion and coercion propel populism, nationalism and endanger the future of our liberal, pluralistic democratic countries. White Nationalists in America, supportive of and empowered by the current President, and parties of the extreme right in Germany are reviving anti-Semitism and bringing it into the mainstream of globalism and social and economic disarray. Fanatical settlers in Israel use bigotry and violence in their fight for power in the name of biblically inspired cohesion. And these are far from the only examples of the rise of nationalism globally.

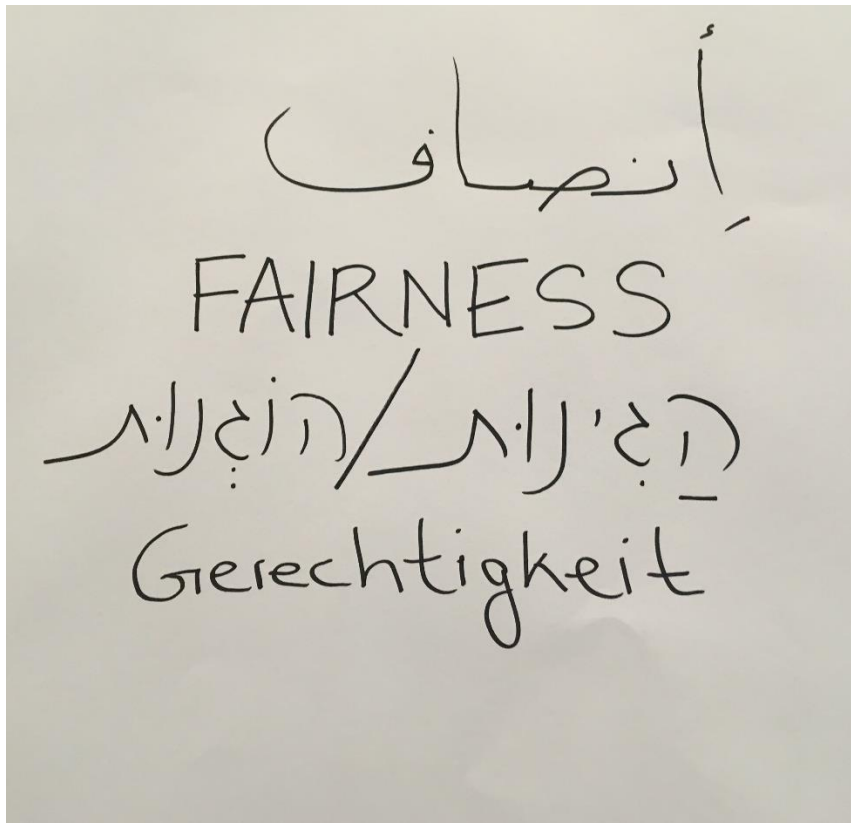
This is a dangerous time in all three countries, and by extension, much of the world. It is our hope that through these days of discussion we will better understand the complexities of these forces that compel us to make more just and inclusive societies.

Part II

New York, March 2019

“Reflections”

The three-day forum in Nazareth proved that the subject “Between cohesion and social and coercion” is a rich and meaningful field for collaborative discussion among peers from Israel, Germany and the US. The multiple perspectives provided many valuable insights as the participants from varied professions and organizations worked over the issues. The topic was broad, substantive and, one might suggest, sufficiently imprecise or open-ended to address critical issues in each of the countries. We compared and contrasted the issues in their national formulations. Among many other subjects, we spent fascinating moments dissecting language differences in terms of words, root derivations and concepts. The word “fairness,” for example, revealed both diverse and similar cultural, historical and moral implications in Arabic, Hebrew, German and English. We stretched our understandings of our languages, beliefs and opinions.



We examined the concepts of cohesion and coercion on many levels as they play out in urban, regional, national and international spheres. We looked at social customs, political practices, economic forces, religion and race. We agreed that social justice, fairness and equity continue to elude too many citizens and members of each of the countries. And we agreed that all three countries are immersed—to a greater or lesser degree—in the turbulent and deep forces of nationalism, populism and xenophobia. They are mechanisms used to create or recreate cohesive states through exclusion, fear and coercion—often led by an authoritarian leader.

Each of the three countries is vulnerable to these divisive and illiberal forces. And yet it should not be surprising at all given their national histories. Each country carries its own burden of a fractured and tainted birth—or rebirth—that shapes the nature of social cohesion today. The emergence of the state of Israel—the means of Jewish liberation and recovery from the Shoah—was felt by the Arab population within Israel and by surrounding countries as a holocaust—the Nakba—of their own. The US Constitution marked the emergence of a cohesive national ethos and structure but one immorally based upon a racial pathology.

The organizing document ratified slavery on the assumption that those of African descent and Native Americans could never be accepted as citizens or human beings who could share in the American promise. And the rebirth of Germany as a democratic state after the Shoah was built out of the catastrophe of genocide.

The three countries face similar essential challenges today in building cohesion and viable modern national identities. Each must deal with the legacies of conflicts that attended their emergence as new or reconstituted national states. Furthermore, social cohesion today, both a national challenge and responsibility, is especially frayed under the pressures of globalism and authoritarian rule. Yael Tamir, an Israeli professor and former member of the Knesset recently wrote in defense of nationalism. Its connects populations to a specific place. “It is this territorial element,” she writes, “that has forged the connection between nations and states” taking upon itself “legitimate authority” to govern over its citizens³. “In order to establish authenticity and gain the loyalty of their members,” she writes, “nations must therefore continuously be made and remade. This constant effort turns nationalism into the most active and engaging social force of the last two centuries.⁴” The state educates, defines a common language, protects borders and national security and establishes codes of belonging. This means constructing both a real and imagined sense of common identity⁵. And yet, she assumes, it is precisely this imperative that conflicts with the claims of diverse populations. “When the threshold of ‘reasonable diversity’ is crossed social cohesion collapses and is tilted back in the direction of homogenization.⁶”

Tamir writes confidently (and somewhat glibly) about “reasonable diversity” but what is the scale or scope of that term in each of the three countries? And how to resolve the tensions between competing needs: inclusive, liberal democratic societies versus deep stratum of belonging to privileged or non-privileged groups within the society? These issues lie at the conundrum of social cohesion “Humans do not yearn only for freedom.” Robert Kaplan wrote in the *Washington Post*, when questioning the viability of liberalism which had seemed to rest on solid ground in the post-war world. That confidence in its power and purpose no longer exists.

³ Yael Tamir, *Why Nationalism* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 35

⁴ Yael Tamir, *Why Nationalism*, 52

⁵ Yael Tamir, *Why Nationalism*, 58

⁶ Yael Tamir, *Why Nationalism*, 163

Humans, he wrote “also seek security—not only physical security against attack but also the security that comes from family, tribe, race and culture. Often, people welcome a strong, charismatic leader who can provide that kind of protection.”⁷ And one might add, that kind of forced cohesion, by law and custom, for the benefit of some and the exclusion by others.

C.K. Chesterton opined: "The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one's own country as a foreign land." Except for the Israeli participants, we the other members were physically located in a dynamic and troubled foreign land. But the social cohesion/coercion forum provided welcomed mental distance and perspectives for all. It grappled with the quandaries of the meaning of ‘reasonable diversity,’ the myths of the previously imagined and continuing yearnings for ‘homogenization,’ social cohesion and the aspirations to make more equitable societies.

It was serious work. To be continued.

⁷ Robert Kagan, “Opinion: The Strongmen Are Back. And We Have No Idea How to Confront Them,” *The Washington Post*

Remembering My Birthday in Nazareth

Claude Grunitzky

I will never forget how I woke up in a Nazareth hotel room on February 28th and felt that my birthday would be different this year. By the time I sat down for lunch, I received a news alert on my phone, indicating that Israel's attorney general had decided to indict Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on serious bribery and fraud charges. Later, as the sun began to set, a cake suddenly appeared, and a surprise birthday celebration was organized for me in a conference room.

I was part of this group in the conference room, but the group was not composed of randomly assembled people. This particular assembly was formed from socially conscious citizens of Israel, Germany, and the United States who were working across a variety of disciplines. The pretext for this gathering was a three-day Comparative Social Cohesion Forum and we were flown so that we could attempt, collectively, to figure out the various tensions between social cohesion and the methods of coercion that might lead to lasting change.

On the first day of the Forum, we were told that the organizers—the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future, the Ted Arison Family Foundation and Humanity in Action—were feeling a sense of urgency, because liberal democracy and the values associated with social cohesion are under attack.

When Judith Goldstein, the executive director of Humanity in Action called me and asked if I'd be interested in participating, I accepted the invitation to Israel for selfish reasons. As a practicing Catholic, I'd always wanted to discover the Holy Land and Nazareth. That spiritual trip would be my birthday present to myself. As a political junkie, I wanted to be in Israel during Benjamin Netanyahu's bruising reelection fight. And as an idealist who still has faith in the power of democratic reform, I wanted to get a sense of what people outside of my immediate circles are thinking in this time of increasing division and confrontation.

Throughout the trip, I made it a point to speak with Jewish, Christian and Muslim Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel—mostly just everyday people—and ask them about Netanyahu, and also about Trump and Merkel. I spoke with the bartender at our hotel, a South African who'd moved to Israel at age 22 under the promise of the Law of Return, "because white South Africans are being unfairly treated" in the new South Africa. I spoke with the hotel maid, a young Palestinian mother of two who complained

about her long commute to work. I spoke with a 40-year-old taxi driver who explained why both Netanyahu and Trump deserved to be re-elected, and why Merkel should have stepped down three years ago.

Contrasting these views with those of my friends back in New York, I once again realized how we often miss the point, because we don't spend enough time listening to people with different affinities and allegiances. If we invested more time in listening, in hearing people out, surely we would come up with better solutions to deal with the sectarianism and misinformation that is fueling the faith and race-based violence we are seeing everywhere.

I am a Togo-born, New York-based magazine editor (and a longtime member of the Humanity in Action board) and I often hear that my New York (the New York that rejected Trump in the voting booth) is not America. Knowing that there are similar echo chambers in Germany and Israel, the opportunity to confront my worldviews with the opinions of working-class Israelis, as well as with those of social scientists, activists, diplomats, and academics from all three countries was too good to pass up.

We got to work and on the first day we began to map our "shared spaces of agreement and disagreement." Irrespective of their faiths and beliefs, irrespective of whether they are conservative or liberal like me, everyone shared something about the implications of aggression and oppression. Beyond the critical abstractions related to peaceful coexistence, our group was able to invent new tools that would help people communicate with each other (instead of with their phones) while sharing rides in public transportation. I was part of a team that explored new ways in which we might be able to regulate Facebook and finally deal with privacy issues and so-called "fake news."

Leaving this group after we shared my birthday cake was difficult, because of the bonds that were formed in those three days. Although we disagreed on how some those solutions could actually be implemented in the real world, I was proud to see how mutual suspicion could turn to mutual respect after a proper debate. As we prepared to return to our "normal" lives in our three countries, it felt as if we'd begun to formulate a statement of intent on fostering social cohesion.

In the past weeks, I've been reflecting on that trip to Israel, and I've tried to formulate new thoughts, especially considering Netanyahu's electoral victory. As I do that, I keep reading about the Palestinian militants who launched 250 rockets and mortars into Israel, killing an Israeli citizen, and how Israel retaliated with bigger airstrikes that killed four Palestinians. There will be more senseless violence in Israel, there will be more hate crimes in Germany, there will be more gun violence in America, but gatherings like these are a reminder that we must work together to save democracy.

Personal Reflections on the Comparative Social Cohesion Forum

Carole Nuriel, Director, ADL Israel

There are certain things that when they happen, you think to yourself, “Why didn’t we think of that earlier?” That’s exactly what came to my mind when I was invited to participate in the Arison Foundation’s Trilateral Forum. As someone who has been involved in social cohesion in Israel for many years, I found this to be a perfect opportunity for me to learn about the social challenges that other countries and cultures face. What I didn’t know was how much it would help me reshape my perception of reality here and the extent to which seeing Israeli society through the eyes of the participants from other countries would provide me with new perspectives I had never thought of before.

The three days of being totally disconnected from the day-to-day, getting to know the American and German participants on a meaningful level and genuinely delving deeply into topics on the level of philosophy and practice were one of the most instructive experiences I have ever had. Our professional lives are filled with conferences of various kinds, but to experience an ongoing brainstorming session that was so highly focused was rare. Rare, because of the length of the encounter, because it was held in a place far removed from my own place of work, because of the nature of the participants chosen by the partners to the initiative and the topics selected for discussion – all of these things enabled us to delve deeply into subjects in a way that does not usually happen in our far-too-busy daily routines.

And of course, there’s something about the Israeli-American-German connection that is very special. It is now almost 75 years since the end of the World War II, an event that led to the shaping of new concepts on a global level, as well as one that continues to have implications for today too. But the fact that we can meet 75 years later as citizens of countries that enjoy a solid and warm relationship is evidence that although healing processes may be complex, it is possible to produce change even when we emerge from painful places.

As a daughter of the Jewish people that lost six million of its members during the Holocaust, I feel a sense of mission that gives meaning to both my personal and professional lives, and that mission is to make sure “Never Again.” My interpretation of this important imperative is extensive, and I consider it binding on me with respect to the Jewish people and to humanity. I believe that “Never Again” means that we must eradicate any expression of hatred or bigotry towards any individual of any religion, race or sex, and that of course includes expressions of anti-Semitism – a hatred with deep historical roots that led to the Holocaust of the Jewish people. As someone who has been working for ADL for 18 years, I can say that this is precisely our mandate for action: “To stop the defamation of the Jewish people and secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Our organizational philosophy is that hatred must be uprooted and that because no one is born a racist, it therefore can be unlearned.

Meeting the seminar participants from the other countries gave me an opportunity to see how similar values can be expressed differently in a different context. Questions of identity, the perception of the “other” in society (and who the “other” is in each of the societies), as well as issues of policy – are all dependent on context and reality. What was common to all the countries, as banal as it may sound, is how complex things are. Another insight that grew stronger during the forum related to the importance of nuanced thinking and drilling down to the details. Because that is the only way we can come up with answers and solutions that both make sense and are sensitive to different populations.

But it was not only the meeting with the participants from the other countries that was meaningful, but also the encounter with the other Israeli participants. As someone who has worked in Israel’s civil society for many years and who maintains ongoing ties with all the communities and groups in Israel, it was very interesting to see the reactions of the participants from other countries to the comments from the members of the different population groups in Israel – Arab society, the LGBT community, the Orthodox Jewish community. The sentiments expressed by the members of the different communities in Israel are not new to me. They are sometimes positive about the situation of their communities in Israel and at other times are critical. But listening to them in the context of an international encounter provided a further layer of thinking. It made it possible to compare the communities to their counterparts in the different countries and this created a discourse that offered solutions that we had not thought of.

And there’s one more thing – the theme of the forum – “Cohesion or Coercion” – offered new space for thought. In Israel, the question of the nature of this cohesion often comes up. Should we, in the name of the social cohesion in favor of which we argue so much, allow a partial or complete blurring of identities? Will each of us have to give up that which distinguishes us from one another for the sake of creating a shared ethos? The immediate answer is no – because diversity enriches and strengthens society. But what should be done when there is a clash of values between groups? To what extent can we impose our values on another group in the name of cohesion? These questions do not have simple answers, but the very fact that we addressed them during the meeting and important points surfaced, caused me to rethink my own perceptions.

Finally, it is very good idea for all those that engage in social activism to pause from time to time and ask questions, to apply critical thinking to ourselves and our perceptions, and sometimes even to “recalculate the route.” That’s what I took away from the seminar and I am indebted to the three partners responsible for it.

Cohesion Starts With Us!

Findings from the German-American-Israeli Comparative Social Cohesion Forum

Dr. Ferdinand Mirbach

When I traveled to Nazareth for the 2nd German-American-Israeli Comparative Social Cohesion Forum, I did so in anticipation of meeting exciting people of different professions and learning more about the state and discussion of social cohesion in Israel and the US. These expectations were met. At the same time - and this was an even more exciting experience, as it was unexpected - I learned a lot about myself and my own country. The comparative confrontation with my own society, sometimes in a positive or negative demarcation to other modern societies, shaped me permanently. This experience can be linked to three personal insights:

1. Germany is doing well!

In current political and social discussions in Germany, such a statement will provoke much opposition. It is true that for nearly five years we have been constantly dealing with the challenge of large-scale immigration from crisis regions in the Middle East and Africa. In this context, right-wing, xenophobic and partially misanthropic groups have been empowered and have strained the political fabric of Germany. After years of economic prosperity, growth rates have recently declined, which is also closely related to globalization processes and emerging economic wars, to which Germany, as an export nation, is particularly exposed. Certainly, the self-image of the Germans also plays a role, as Germans anyway tend to present things and to judge them worse or more negatively than they really are.

But part of the story - and this truth became clear to me in conversation with participants from the USA and Israel - is also this: Germany is experiencing a period of peace that now stretches back many decades. It is surrounded by friendly nations and lies within clearly defined and undisputed borders. Germany may be led by a possibly boring political elite, but those responsible, act rationally, are trustworthy and free from the suspicion of corruption. Democratic values and the separation of powers are not only supported, but defended by the overwhelming majority of Germans, even in stormy times. Basic social security, health care for all citizens and protection against discrimination are in place and applied.

To avert the suspicion of eyewash or naivety: I also see deficits in German society and know that Germany still has no solution to many social challenges. But the framework conditions are very good - not only compared to developing countries, but also compared to other highly developed societies like the US or Israel. One can be proud of that, but above all one should be thankful for it.

2. Coercion is a legitimate means of cohesion

For me, cohesion has always been something that must naturally be wanted by the people and necessarily turns out to be desirable for all. In view of the reflections of the English state theorist Thomas Hobbes, I should have known better: "Homo homini lupus" - man is a wolf to man! Because man is more like a wild animal, without the well-being of everyone in mind, he wants to secure his own survival at the expense of other people, states and governments. First and foremost, elected leaders have the task of regulating and creating legal frameworks to ensure the survival of the people or - in the spirit of Aristotle - to enable a good life. This applies even more in heterogeneous societies in which conflicting interests can occur.

Exercising power – or coercion - is thus a legitimate means of establishing or maintaining social cohesion. In the discussions at the Social Cohesion Forum, the question of coercion was rightly asked again and again, but we also talked about the limits or the misuse of such coercion. Examples from all three countries helped me to understand how coercion can strengthen the cohesion and participation of all people - for example through quota regulations for women or people with disabilities - but also how coercion can bring about the opposite and contribute to the marginalization of individual groups. Here I especially recall the description of the situation of prisoners in the US, who are often placed in circumstances which make their reintegration into society nearly impossible, due to government measures.

3. Cohesion is strengthened through our actions on the ground

Recent years have shown that even liberal democracies and countries that were on a democratic path are not immune to relapse or abuse of power. It is therefore even more important to question the responsibility of civil society and of each one of us. If it is the task of the rulers in a well-functioning state to ensure the survival of all, then it is our task, beyond that, to create something like common sense. This sense of community reveals itself, in my opinion, first and foremost in dealing with other people.

Again, the experiences of the participants from three countries helped to create such a sense of community - and to find out where it is supposed to take place. Together, we developed project approaches and came to a banal yet extremely important insight: cohesion arises where people come together, talk to each other, get to know each other and accept their differences! This place is the shared living environment, the neighborhood or place of residence.

Summing up, my take-aways from the Social Cohesion Forum: 1. It is worthwhile to explore the situation of other people or countries in order to learn from them, to reconcile with them and to value what one has; 2. Coercion can be a legitimate governmental tool, in the ideal case, not only to ensure the functioning, but also the cohesion of society; 3. Creating cohesion is first and foremost our own obligation.

Incidentally, we also practiced developing cohesion as participants in the Social Cohesion Forum in Nazareth. People from different countries, genders, ages, sexual orientations, religious affiliations and ethnicity, lived together and talked for five days. Even though we shared many beliefs, we did not shy away from constructive disputes. In this respect, the forum was a test laboratory of social reality, which I will remember well.

Reflections on the Second German-American-Israeli Social Cohesion Forum in Nazareth

Between Cohesion and Coercion

Ilana Sarig Hughes

The concept of social cohesion has always engaged me from a range of perspectives.

Growing up in a Kibbutz I understood from an early age that the homogenous community in which I lived did not reflect the diversity of Israeli society. I began to ask questions about the place of my kibbutz and the kibbutz movement in Israeli society and our responsibility to it.

As mother to a daughter who was born with very special needs - now a 21-year-old young adult living with severe disabilities - I have spent a great deal of time addressing issues of inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in society and building their lives within the wider community. I have also spent time considering issues relating to the responsibility of the state to create conditions conducive to this inclusion and the implications on society of correct and normative inclusion and access for people with disabilities.

As director of human resources in a company that employed representatives of almost all the diverse groups that comprise Israeli society – Kibbutz members, residents of towns, moshavim and villages, Jews, Muslim and Christian Arabs, Druze, new immigrants, young and old, men and women, traditional, religious and secular communities - I came to understand how a shared goal and clear policies can allow for close cooperation and the provision of a place for all.

As chairperson of a support group in the kibbutz movement for parents with children and adults with disabilities I became aware for the first time of the tension between the inculcation of values and their enforcement through legislation and coercion.

This thinking has been further developed in my current position as director of the Social Cohesion Leadership Program; an initiative of the Ted Arison Family Foundation in partnership with two NGOs; Merchavim – The Institute for the Advancement of Shared Citizenship in Israel and Ruach Tova. This program brings together representatives of 1st, 2nd and 3rd sector organizations over several months including ten days of group activity to generate long-term organizational plans that advance organizational goals together with aspects of social cohesion.

This professional experience has sharpened the distinction between the promotion of social cohesion (relating to future relations between all citizens of a given state) and the solidarity required within diverse organizations as distinct from the concept of solidarity in smaller more homogeneous communities like the kibbutz of my childhood.

The program also encourages deep reflection on the conditions and actions required to promote a more cohesive society and the importance of this endeavor.

Against the background of my long immersion in the issue and the importance of the questions raised, I was very pleased to participate in the Forum, to consider the relationship between aspects of cohesion and coercion and to do so in comparative fashion with colleagues from Germany, USA and Israel, who deal with similar questions from diverse perspectives.

In truth, I was doubtful that it would be possible to engage in a meaningful process over such a short amount of time with a group of this size and diversity. Happily, I was mistaken.

Something in the format of the forum provided the opportunity to quickly build relationships and engage with the core concepts and big ideas together with a great deal of peer-learning based on participants' diverse experiences.

Overall, I was left with many insights regarding the relationship between aspects of cohesion and coercion, especially as relate to people with disabilities. For example, the ways in which legislation in securing the rights and access of people with disabilities – far beyond physical access – should be supported by substantive educational and social processes in order to promote social cohesion.

In another example, Mike Brickner, Ohio State Director of All Voting is Local, described the legislative battle being undertaken to secure voting rights and access for voters with disabilities and incarcerated voters across Ohio. Mike made it clear that he believes such legal battles need to be run in parallel to social and other actions in order to endure over time.

Time and again my life and professional experience has reinforced the conviction that when considering strategies for the advancement of people with disabilities - and apparently the full range of issues related to the promotion of social cohesion - work is invariably required in two parallel tracks:

Persuasion - Ongoing educational and social processes impressing the importance of the advancement of social cohesion for the benefit of all citizens. Such processes require the creation of opportunities for encounters, the overcoming of stereotypes and aversion to "otherness".

Coercion – The use of legislation and enforcement to provide minimal essential standards that provide access of underserved communities to basic rights, resources and opportunities.

Both full group and breakout small group conversations throughout the Forum provided me rich opportunities to reflect on diverse 1st, 2nd, 3rd sector and academic perspectives from different countries regarding the appropriate balance between cohesion and coercion on a diverse range of issues, from the rights of immigrants all the way to banking.

Overall, the composition of the forum – a microcosm of the human and structural diversity of our respective countries - provided us both an effective prism to consider issues of social cohesion and a mechanism for their advancement. The opportunity to share perspectives, knowledge and dilemmas and to consult candidly with colleagues presented a valuable opportunity. One which provided a fascinating and eye-opening opportunity for in-depth consideration in a relative short space of time.

In conclusion, it is to be hoped that the forum and the new connections forged will translate into ongoing professional and personal connections and partnerships going forward.

Social Cohesion Forum in Nazareth

Luisa Maria Schweizer

It is stunning to see what we have achieved: In autumn 2016 we came up with the idea of creating a forum which brings together activists, researchers and representatives from a wide range of organisations for exchanges on good practice to foster social cohesion.

The idea to invite people from the US, Israel and Germany was born both out of a common long-lasting and intense relationship between these countries as well as the belief, that social cohesion challenges (as different as they might be in the three respective countries) offers us a wide space to exchange concepts, methods and experiences, to learn and grow together.

To set up the forum in cooperation with Humanity in Action and the Ted Arison Family Foundation was a smart decision and professionally - as well as personally – an absolutely correct choice for Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future (EVZ Foundation). I am convinced that as organisations we also learned a lot from each other and all of us were able to strengthen our networks in the other countries.

The first forum took place in Berlin in summer 2017. Its focus was on innovative civil society partnering strategies and new approaches to foster social cohesion. This topic responded to a need, which was very present within the community of social cohesion experts as well as for us as conveners at that time. We came up with methods and good practice to build up effective partnerships and cooperation, both internationally as well as between different stakeholders within each country.

The second forum in Nazareth with its focus on the relationship between aspects of coercion and cohesion, allowed us to engage in a burning topic for all participants. It took place in a time when elections in the Europe Union and Israel were approaching, where we saw and still see a rise of populist parties and, with them, a rise in racism, antisemitism, sexism and other forms of group-focused enmity in all three participating countries. For EVZ, as a foundation which works in the fields of critical examination of history, human rights and commitment to the victims of National Socialism, these developments force us to act.

These are tough times for social cohesion activists. Structures and defences, we took for granted, securities along with hopes, values, beliefs and optimism are all suddenly in doubt. Therefore, the engagement of the participants as well as our support as a foundation has probably never been so crucial. Hence, this forum was highly needed.

It was a very valuable experience to attend the second forum. The group was brilliantly talented, empowering and inspiring. It is amazing what a range of knowledge and creativity we had around the table. Professionals from such different sectors shared their experiences, gave insights and connected across countries, fields and sectors.

As part of the forum, I took part in a working group on the topic of social cohesion and the architectural design of public spaces. This is a topic which has been of great personal interest, since when I firstly started researching this issue a few years ago. In a mixed group of Americans, Israelis and Germans we discussed which architectural and urban planning strategies might promote social cohesion and which might erode them. In Berlin, where I am based, this is a central question. You rarely see benches placed in a fashion that allows people to really engage with one another. There is barely any seating arrangement that allows people to look each other in the eyes. To put it bluntly: How can we claim to be an open city, a place of encounters and tolerance when people are prevented from seeing each other?

There are some artistic and politically interventions in Berlin trying to raise awareness of this issue. In some places one can see slow initial developments but there is still a long way to go to create meaningful change.

The issue of the design and use of public spaces might sound like a minor matter in the broad social cohesion discussion, but I am convinced that it is a crucial one. "Placemaking" is a community approach. It creates ownership and with it, responsibility for the shared space. It does not just WANT to integrate all people; it necessarily HAS to integrate all people of a neighbourhood or city to be successful. And "all" means everyone. Neighbours, visitors, homeless people, passers-by, "annoying" teenagers and "snail-slow" grandparents. All the people who use the public sphere know best how it should be designed to suit their needs and wishes. Common Placemaking therefore allows real engagement, both in the design as well as in the usage of the common habitat. Herein lies great potential for inclusiveness and accessibility as basic elements of strong cohesive communities.

In our working group, we discussed ideas relating to how town squares, bus stops, train stations, markets, waiting rooms and public libraries could be designed differently. I have learned that I am not alone with my experiences and ideas, but more importantly: I am not alone in working to improve the situation.

Taking part in this forum enriched all our academic and practical knowledge and I feel that it was a deeply empowering experience for all participants to understand that other people face the same challenges in their work to shape more inclusive and fair societies.

The days in Nazareth were a great experience, for EVZ foundation as well as for me personally. I gained insights I would never had made in a conventional work context. I made new friends and colleagues in the US and Israel and even learned new perspectives on my own country of origin.

There is a lot to do in the field of fostering social cohesion, in all of our three countries. We as a foundation are proudly taking part in this forum to support our common goal of promoting more inclusive, fair and open societies.

Luisa Maria Schweizer

Advisor to the CEO, Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future

Social Cohesion, Social Coercion – A short Note of My Impressions

Marie-Kathrin Siemer, *Liquid Democracy*

Exploration of “the complex and contested relationship between aspects of ‘Social Cohesion’

and aspects of ‘Social Coercion’”, was the goal of the second German - American - Israeli Comparative Social Cohesion Forum, in which I had the privilege of representing my NGO; Liquid Democracy. While, at the outset, I thought I was clear on my position about the relationship between aspects of cohesion and coercion; I was to find out that this was in fact not the case.

Social cohesion vs. coercion

As a member of Liquid Democracy, I was clear about the position I represent. Our vision is a democratic culture, in which active participation is a given for everyone. We continuously explore and develop new concepts of participation which contribute to a more active and democratic culture and to do this; we coerce no-one. Participation is an important value for us and excludes any use of force. Participation can only and truly take place through cohesion. Just as the definition in Wikipedia proposes, “Members of strongly cohesive groups are more inclined to participate readily and to stay with the group.” This is what we aim for as an organization for society.

Coercion, on the contrary, is the exact opposite. Again, referring to Wikipedia, it “is the practice of forcing another party to act in an involuntary manner by use of threats or force.” This is certainly not anything that Liquid Democracy nor I want. I was very clear on that.

With this very clear standpoint regarding social cohesion and coercion in my mind, I came to Nazareth. There, I met many talented and gifted people. I was very impressed by these engaged colleagues, aspiring to make a difference in schooling, voting and many other social systems. And I felt privileged to be part of the conversation.

This exchange took place in full-group discussions as well as during break-out sessions and between them. One break-out session particularly enriched my thinking about the concepts of social cohesion and coercion. The subject was voting rights and obligations.

The joy of cohesion

As Liquid Democracy, we understand voting rights as a crucial element of democracy. But what about voting obligations? Thanks to the multi-disciplinary and international make-up of our group, I learned that in the USA voting is a right which can be withdrawn under certain circumstances in some places. For example, some states withdraw the right to vote if you have not voted in the past. Voting then becomes an obligation – if you do not want to lose this privilege.

As we started exchanging our ideas and experiences of voting rights and obligations, we quickly came to understand that we should focus our attention on one or two topics in order to dive deeper into our deliberations. After brainstorming and internal discussions about voting – yes, democratic structures are also inherent and negotiable in group work! – we decided on three topics:

- 1) What does it mean to be represented?
- 2) Who should be allowed to vote? When?
- 3) What can be done between elections?

We also re-focused on our assignment: To identify areas of agreement and disagreement, to understand different positions. For the first two questions, we wrote our answers on sticky notes. Keeping it short and simple helped us identify differences. We sorted these sticky notes into the categories of “inclusive” and “exclusive”. And even though probably each of us thought we were on the same side and that each of us and our organizations are very inclusive, we discovered that we do have different ideas about each question.

I felt very especially proud when we discussed the question of “Who should be allowed to vote” as my position was the most “inclusive”: “Everybody who feels connected to the topic/place”. Thus reflecting my conviction that inclusivity is a goal in itself.

WheRE coercion comes in...

Other participants had a clear idea that some people should not be able to vote. For example, children; people who are not citizens; those who live outside national borders. And as we discussed these points it struck me that I could only adopt my standpoint as a result of other people having other perspectives. While I took an idealistic position, others took on more realistic perspectives and, together, we were able to expand the boundaries of our discourse, creating a broader space for action.

This process, it struck me, is also required in the coercion and cohesion conversation. Both strategies are required to expand the space in which we become agents. Strategies are required to coerce the state to provide protection from lead in drinking water. There must be strategies coercing jails to inform inmates about their voting rights. And there also must be strategies inviting "others" into the conversation. What is more, all these ambivalent strategies can be carried out by the same people. They complement another.

Related, it occurred to me that at Liquid Democracy we also coerce. By building a software architecture, we force people to behave and to use the software in a certain way – simply because it is not possible to use it differently. Thus, we coerce people in order to invite them to promote cohesion. Hence, what started out at the key antagonism at the start of this Forum, became my final conclusion.

Thank you

During the second German - American - Israeli Comparative Social Cohesion Forum I started to understand the broader definition of the concepts of cohesion and coercion and – particularly - its overlaps. Both concepts cannot be thought about in isolation, but they rather complement another.

It was a pleasure meeting all these gifted people and learning their strategies, both coercive and cohesive. Also gaining an understanding that each of our strategies is complementing another part of a bigger picture towards shaping a more cohesive society. Finally; appreciating that we are united in our goal to campaign for a more inclusive and just world became the true gift I took away from Nazareth. Thanks to all of you.

Between Cohesion and Coercion: Theoretical, Comparative and Partnership Insights from the Nazareth Forum

Mike Prashker

Our three days together in Nazareth and the year-long collaborative process of planning that preceded it; were a source of considerable professional and personal satisfaction, pleasure and learning. Both the process and the program provided me with meaningful theoretical, comparative and partnering insights to the promotion of social cohesion specifically and societal change-making in general.

Ideological: As intended, my key ideological insight resulted from reflection on my own and prevailing liberal attitudes to the character of the relationship between the concepts of "social cohesion" and "state coercion".

Despite the thoughtful preparations, I came to Nazareth harboring the lingering belief that these concepts stand fundamentally opposed, in a zero-sum-gain relationship. In my mind – and reflected in much of my practice – I was firmly in the "pro" cohesion camp and hence equally firmly; "anti" coercion.

This binary mind-set routinely associated "social cohesion" with such positive values as democracy, social justice, inalienable rights, fairness, inclusion and dignity. Conversely, it associated "state coercion" with such negatives as authoritarianism, populism, repression, discrimination, exclusion and exploitation.

I now believe and am ready to concede that this mind-set limited my thinking and censured my voice where, however "uncomfortable", "state coercion" is justified and even essential in the defense of "social cohesion". My silence both reflected and reinforced progressive confusion, apologetics and insecurity that have contributed to the current crisis of liberal democracy.

Uniform liberal condemnation rather than nuanced consideration of the construction of a border fence with Egypt to halt large-scale immigration from North Africa through the Sinai Peninsula, is one example. On one hand, it was simple and entirely justified from a liberal perspective, to condemn Israel's policy – or lack thereof - to 35,000 refugees and asylum seekers who had crossed into Israel. But on the other it was liberally inconvenient to even consider the possibility that construction of the border fence with Egypt was required "state coercion" to prevent the arrival of far larger numbers of desperate Sub-Saharan and North Africans, genuinely straining Israel's worn social cohesion to breaking.

Even considering this possibly – much less writing it to "like-minded colleagues" - feels like a betrayal of my liberal values and community. But it is prompted by the growing conviction that this silence is an abdication of responsibility and willingness to acknowledge the "dirty-work" required to defend state sovereignty. Liberals like me too often prefer to leave this work to "others" while enjoying the security and privilege that developed nation-states provide.

With hindsight, the emergence of illiberal populists to fill the gap we left by not robustly backing justified "state coercion" was to be anticipated.

Hence – however ideologically uncomfortable – those days spent together in Nazareth were for me, highly significant, in developing and daring to share these ideas.

Comparative: I have long been a strong believer in the value of comparative frameworks, and not only for the rich and pleasurable opportunities these provide for travel and meeting colleagues from around the world.

Nazareth – and even the road to Nazareth – afforded me many comparative insights. Here is one, directly related to the uncomfortable ideological insight just presented concerning borders.

As an Israeli liberal, our visit to the ugly and harsh border-crossing, together with German and American colleagues, made that harsh reality still more uncomfortable. But this joint visit turned out to be justified by catalyzing a rich conversation about our respective borders, their similarities and differences, their visibility, their defense and how this directly impacts our respective attitudes.

For all our many differences, Israel, Germany and the United States all employ "state coercion" to defend our borders in the face of large-scale population movements and pressures, driven by poverty, war, authoritarian regimes and climate change. In Israel's case, all these issues are trumped (no pun intended!) by on-going conflict.

Comparative conversations – especially when conducted in what many of us came to experience as a safe and respectful space – allowed us all to reflect on uncomfortable questions: At what point does immigration genuinely undermine social cohesion, even given the most enlightened immigration and integration policies? How do we as liberals find mark and defend that justified and required coercive boundary in the name of social cohesion?

For me as an Israeli father of a serving front-line soldier facing very-real dangers, this conversation was very personal. I hope I was able to convey this in a personal way that did not stymie the possibility of the honest exchange of ideas. But the reality is that in Israel's case, there has been no option to "out-source" coercive defense of borders to "others"; whether other states or fellow-citizens from generally distant geographical and economic communities.

A word of comparative warning to myself as an Israeli and maybe to all of us. The comparative perspective should never be used to justify wrong, in this case unjustified state coercion, with the blanket excuse that "it happens everywhere". As a liberal Israeli, it would be wrong and self-defeating to take comfort in commonalities. Rather, while I can justifiably remind German and American colleagues and myself that geography and objective security-risks matter greatly, I can never defend unjustified coercion through comparison of relative wrongs.

Partnership: While all the conveners have worked together before and are each experienced at partnering in our own right, every new partnership is a unique challenge that provides new insights.

I want to share two moments that were for me significant learning opportunities that I will take-forward, beyond the well-known and entirely correct truths that fruitful partnerships are always open, equal and respectful.

My first learning moment resulted from a significant mistake in our early planning. In what seemed an entirely sensible move, a first concept for the forum was discussed in Berlin without Judy and Antje – more formally Humanity in Action - when I happened to be at EVZ for a book-talk. Of course, it seemed perfectly sensible: "Mike is in the building, the cost of convening has been covered, so let's plan!" This quickly emerged as a mistake, which quite rightly, Judy called-out in her distinctive style! She was completely right to do so. Planning for such an endeavor must be equitable among all partners from the outset, there are no short-cuts. Hence, we went back to the drawing board and all three partners re-convened in Berlin at a later date to begin the planning process correctly; together.

For me the second highlight of partnership occurred during the forum, and it was an unplanned learning moment that has already changed my practice: As I hope was felt, we went to Nazareth after extensive planning; of the goals, of the overall structure, of each session, and so forth. But quite naturally each day had a dynamic of its own that we could not anticipate.

So - probably a result of the level of partnership that was already established – Judy, Antje, Marianna; Yael and I – spontaneously decided to meet on both evenings to reflect on the day and fine-tune for the next. Neither of these evening meetings had been scheduled in advance and both were held despite tiredness and a natural desire to spend time with new friends.

I believe that both meetings substantively benefited the forum and I believe that when --- as I hope we will --- we come together again as co-conveners and friends to plan a third forum, we will formally pre-schedule these meetings.

In conclusion, I want to thank all my fellow participants in Nazareth. Without you, I would have no theoretical, comparative and partnership insights about which to write But above all, I would have many fewer friends and colleagues with whom to continue our distinct but broadly overlapping endeavors.