

**Brandeis Students on Coexistence:
A collection of student writing**

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INTRODUCTION

In 1999, with support from the Alan B. Slifka Foundation, Brandeis University launched a three-year Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence. The program engages the Brandeis community in the theory and practice of coexistence and, in the process, to contribute to the emerging field of coexistence. The program focuses on three major areas: 1) developing scholarly approaches to coexistence, 2) enhancing coexistence at Brandeis University, and 3) promoting international partnerships and collaborations.

This publication presents Brandeis student voices on coexistence. Student writing on coexistence theory and practice reflect a diversity of thought and experience. This booklet is intended for a variety of audiences, including students, scholars and practitioners interested in coexistence issues, and friends and family of students involved in coexistence courses and programs. It is hoped that the writing presented here will inspire other students to engage with the field of Intercommunal Coexistence, and to submit their writing for future publications.

A majority of the writings are from the papers and reflections of Brandeis Ethics and Coexistence Student Fellows. This Fellowship is a three part program. Each spring, selected students take a course PAX 186a: Introduction to Intercommunal Coexistence which introduces them to the major concepts and debates in the Coexistence arena. In the summer of the same year, they are placed in grassroots organizations in conflict regions and undertake fieldwork for eight weeks. Finally, when they return they take an Internship Analysis course, where they place their experiences within a theoretical context.

Some writings are also taken from two other courses in Coexistence, WMNS 185a: Harmonies and Tensions: Contemporary Issues in Black Jewish Relations in the United States and AAAS 124b: The Rupture of Silence: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Syllabi from all three courses, as well as other publications related to

coexistence, are available in another publication from the Ethics Center. Also, full texts of the excerpts published here will be available on our website

www.brandeis.edu/ethics/coexistence. Finally, under separate cover, we are publishing “South Africa: A Life Experience in Hope, Peace and Reconciliation,” by ’98 Ethics and Coexistence Student Fellow Brahmly Poologosingham.

Devika Mahadevan, ’00
Summer, 2000

THEORETICAL WRITINGS ON COEXISTENCE

In various classes this year, students analyzed and critiqued approaches, definitions, and theories of ‘coexistence’ and analyzed coexistence efforts. Topics ranged from presenting and reacting to controversial interpretations of coexistence, to understanding the successes and failures of international truth commissions, to struggling with issues of justice and compensation in the aftermath of violence. This section presents excerpts from four selections of student writing.

“Throughout my readings and discussions, my thoughts keep coming back to something said during the first session: the more answers we begin to get, the more questions come up. I find that I am really striving to understand, and this has required me to ask questions, mostly of myself, about what I believe and how it fits into this very important work that goes on every day throughout the world. It’s been incredibly difficult, and I struggle with each and every concept. But I see this as a positive sign.”

-- Matt Bryant. Introduction to Intercommunal Coexistence. Spring 2000.

Students in 'Introduction to Coexistence' grapple first with the meaning of 'coexistence' as a concept. Tova Neugut in her paper 'Coexistence' and Zach Sherwin in his paper 'Concepts of Coexistence' explore various interpretations of coexistence. Comparing a minimalist approach to coexistence as explicated by Eugene Weiner to other theorist's views, they attempt to answer the question – What is Coexistence?

An excerpt from Tova Neugut's paper is followed by an excerpt from a paper by Zach Sherwin's. Their complete papers, including references, are available from The Ethics Center, and will be posted on the web.

Coexistence by Tova Neugut, '00

...Weiner does not consider equal access to resources, opportunities and privileges - indeed, equal rights between groups- to be a necessary condition for coexistence. According to Weiner, a relationship of coexistence requires equality between groups only in the sense that common humanity and the shared right to exist must be acknowledged by both groups. A relationship of coexistence can exist alongside injustice (herein defined as inequity). In a situation of minimalist coexistence, where "antagonists 'simply' allow each other to live," fundamental, structural injustice may underlie the relationship, and coexistence work "does not pretend to resolve...[that] fundamental, structural injustice." However, Weiner maintains that the idea of coexistence "creates... 'in-between' time...[that allows] opportunities for non-combative personalities to emerge as leaders within the antagonistic groups...[and] allows common interests...to emerge among the antagonists, giving both parties a strong stake in making the temporary stage a permanent one." Coexistence work may thus lay necessary groundwork for establishing a lasting peace, and a lasting peace may in turn be conducive to advancing the causes of equality and justice. "Through the recognition of a common humanity and making compromise into a habit, a climate of hopefulness is created" in which structural changes can be effected.

Justice in the sense of administering deserved punishment is also not a prerequisite to a coexistence relationship. In Weiner's view, painful history need not and often should not be addressed in coexistence work. "Coexistence work... encourages antagonistic groups to exist together in civil society by avoiding confrontation." The kinds of interventions that best

support coexistence steer around deep cleavages and encourage compromise, thereby minimizing contention. “Coexistence work continuously attempts to blunt differences by making ad hoc arrangements to overcome crises and providing opportunities for face-to-face dialogue.” As detailed above, interventions in support of coexistence adopt a “bottom- up” approach.

Most problematic to me is Weiner’s assertion that coexistence work does not address psychological issues or social structures. I question the utility of encouraging interaction without engagement on the issues. Particularly, how do members of the less powerful group experience this type of interaction? Coexistence work in this context seems to directly serve the interests of the more powerful group in that it does not challenge existing inequity. Victims of structural violence may find it artificial and difficult (if not impossible) to conceptually separate physical and structural violence; they may feel unwilling to work toward an end to physical violence without a parallel agenda to end structural violence.

Hizkias Assefa states that “it is not possible to resolve conflicts and attain peace unless attention is given to the justice and fairness of the process as well as the outcome of the settlement.” As defined by Assefa, “peace goes beyond a preoccupation with the absence of conflict or violence. It is seen as the transformation of conflictual relationships into more cooperative and constructive relationships.” I fear that the preoccupation of coexistence work with the cessation of immediate physical violence systematically undermines the possibility of later attainment of peace (as defined by Assefa). Coexistence work does not aim to resolve conflict or attain lasting peace, only “to get through the day- alive.” However, if the process of coexistence work is not perceived as just and fair - and it may not be perceived as such by the less powerful group if asymmetry of power and underlying structural inequities are not addressed- coexistence work may create/maintain conditions in which it is extremely difficult to effectively work to resolve conflict and attain peace. I maintain that the program of coexistence work must consider how it will effect the achievement of such longer-term goals. Weiner asserts that “it is the example of coexistence work that may cause the structural changes to occur, precisely because people have not lost hope, and because they have seen that coexistence is possible.” However, I suspect that we can be most effective in simultaneously pursuing basic (daily life) changes *and* structural changes....

Concepts of Coexistence by Zachary Sherwin, '01

...It is puzzling to find Weiner talking about the desirability of “accepting [minimalist] coexistence as the end state of human relations.” Weiner proceeds to assert that since deep wounds may never heal, coexistence workers may have to content themselves with merely the cessation of violence. Weiner would seemingly be content even if his coexistence work never progressed into the further steps he offers.

This can be explained by examining Weiner’s idea of the human condition. Humans have a tragic flaw: our self-interest, which may stop us from progressing beyond an initial state of minimalist coexistence. Coexistence work must react to this self-interest, which determines the forms in which we can work for coexistence. It motivates discoveries of common humanity and the right of an “Other” to life. It creates “fantasies of domination and the destruction of enemies, real or imagined,” instincts from which coexistence must save us by bringing us to our senses and forcing us to see the human face of the enemy. The willingness to kill an enemy to preserve oneself or members of one’s ethnic group makes Weiner somewhat skeptical about the prospects of coexistence work evolving into more ambitious projects. He is hopeful and willing to work for more, but he recognizes the possibility that humans may not be able to turn their recognition of a common humanity into anything beyond a cessation of violence. While a coexistence worker must act to create an environment that will enable reconciliation or peace culture to operate sometime in the future, one must not forget that coexistence may be an end state, a terminus largely attributed to self-interest.

However, Sari Nusseibeh argues almost exactly in opposition to Weiner: that every human inherently possesses ‘assabiyah, an altruistic feeling towards their blood relations. The recognition of this human characteristic “clearly has radical ramifications on the entire edifice of any theory on social contract,” and presumably coexistence.

Nusseibeh discusses two types of altruism: what we might call egoistic or purposeful altruism, and genuine or innocent altruism. The first kind implies viewing oneself through the medium of others, ultimately advancing the purposes of the altruist as a result of

benefiting the subject of the altruism. This is what Weiner means when he discusses the self-interested realization of interdependence. The second kind is genuinely “other-oriented” and takes a higher view of human nature, claiming that we have a “primary impulse” to do good for others. Nusseibeh sees humanity more optimistically, perceiving a duality in our nature: we want to enhance our selves, but we also want to extend the ability for self-enhancement to other members of our association. Individuals take actions that genuinely enhance the welfare of others, as well as enhancing their own welfare.

An individual need not be defined as “one human being.” Groups, even large ones, can be linked through their ‘assabiyah into one collective. Initially, Nusseibeh defines ‘assabiyah as limited to one’s blood relatives. But eventually, he claims, our inherent tendency towards altruism “requires an extension” of the sentiment. Once such a sentiment occurs, collectives merge and coexist with others, forming “mutually enriching” multi-stratified communities.

Louis Kreisberg’s *Coexistence and the Reconciliation of Communal Conflicts* also provides a different perspective on coexistence that differs fundamentally from Weiner’s notion that “coexistence is a way to get through the day – alive.” Kreisberg finds it vital that groups aim towards and work for reconciliation while coexisting. Wiener disavows any ability of coexistence work to resolve fundamental structural injustices. Kreisberg advocates such cross-cutting measures as reparation payments, fostering educational practices which emphasize a shared identity, and drawing up provisions for human rights safeguards. Weiner does not claim to address psychological issues. Kreisberg advocates public trials to provide information, placement of responsibility, and retribution. He suggests systems of education to convey an experiential feeling of common humanity. He asks that groups make expressions of forgiveness.

Any efforts at coexistence, Kreisberg suggests, must be informed by a plan for reconciliation. Weiner engages rhetoric about fostering a “climate of hopefulness,” but never asks that people think about how such a mood might be attained. Some of the conciliation work Kreisberg suggests may be aiming too high, yet his point that it should be directed towards future goals as reconciliation is well taken....

**Non-Violent Response To Institutional Violence and the Struggle Towards
Reconciliation: An Argentinean Case Study**
by Wendi Adelson, '00

Wendi Adelson spent the summer on 1999 in Buenos Aires, Argentina working for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. After she returned, she wrote a paper that specifically examines how these women honor the memory of their disappeared sons, and also explores the larger question of how a society remembers and heals after a violent past. Wendi Adelson's paper, excerpted here, was written with the support from Wendi's mentor, Professor Dora Older.

...In the interest of ethics and ensuring a nonviolent future, the voices of those who have endured the violent tactics of the Dirty War military junta should not be silenced, even though the desire to form a democracy after a violent past is understandable. Dwelling too long in the past obviously runs counter to achieving a productive democracy; however, purposely ignoring history serves to ignore the pain of a populace that recently lived in a climate marked by the palpable fear of speaking out against a repressive regime.

The question then arises as to whether history ignored could be repeated, and the corollary to that fear is the worry that if history is erased, through impunity, it might not be recovered.

Those somehow involved in the Dirty War cannot forget the atrocities they witnessed, as even now, more than twenty years after, memories linger. For instance, during my internship with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo-Founding Line, I witnessed the confrontation between a head concentration camp official and a mother of one of the "disappeared". This man was a high official in one of the estimated 365 concentration camps active in Argentina during the last military dictatorship and self-proclaimed responsible for the deaths of over one hundred individuals. One random Wednesday afternoon he came into the office unannounced to ascertain the appropriate legal means of addressing his crimes. The man spoke to me of the enormous weight of killing young men and women weighing on his conscience for the past twenty years. He begged for forgiveness. I stared wide-eyed at the Mother who patiently listened to the former military official, modestly thanking him for coming forward as she directed him to further his legal redress at CELS (Center for Legal and Social Studies).

For the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, an organization positing the motto “*no olvidaremos*,” translated to “we will not forget,” this meeting of oppressor and victim poses an interesting dilemma: is a peaceful meeting between oppressor and victim tantamount to forgetting? I believe that this meeting was a progressive and positive step for this Mother in particular, and for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo movement as a whole. The meeting was an example of forgiveness, not forgetting, necessary in forging bonds of reconciliation integral to the furthering of the fledgling democracy of Argentina.

If reconciliation can then be identified as an integral ingredient both in responding to past violence and in achieving a productive and forward-looking democracy, we must examine the past means that have been attempted for the purpose of achieving this reconciliation. Although reconciliation was not necessarily the reason behind the implementation of various legal, political, and institutional responses to past violence, various efforts to achieve a productive democracy were made by acknowledging history through trials, hearing, and laws. This paper will attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts at reconciliation, and further explore future means of reaching reconciliation among victims and repressors in the context of the Argentine “Dirty War”.

Reconciliation is a term generally referring “to a relatively amicable and potentially stable relationship, generally established after a rupture in the relationship including ... infliction of extreme injury,” such as the “disappearing” of an estimated 30,000 individuals during the Argentine Dirty Water (Kriesberg). Many citizens of Buenos Aires, in fact I wager an overwhelming majority, would assert that such a state of reconciliation exists in present day Argentina. However, for the families of the disappeared (most of whom have been pronounced dead), full reconciliation has not yet taken place. Central to a democratic state would be a reconciliation that includes the acknowledgement of the atrocities that occurred, accepting of those who committed the acts, and the belief that injustices are being redressed (Kriesberg). At its core, the notion of reconciliation combines ways of acknowledging history by addressing, integrating, and embracing “the painful past and the necessary shared future as a means of dealing with the present.”

Reconciliation for Recovery: The Complexities of Healing and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

by Andrea Finkelman

Andrea Finkelman's paper discusses the importance of reconciliation and healing at multiple levels, describes conditions for recovery from great personal suffering, and illustrates different instances when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa was and wasn't able to reconcile perpetrator and victim. Her paper, excerpted here, was written for the course, "The Rupture of Silence: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa," taught by Dr. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela.

...On a deeper level the promotion of recovery is really a therapeutic promotion of healing severed relationships. When dehumanized by a traumatic experience, the victim loses the ability to relate to him or herself as well as to others. Thus, reconciliation involves the reintegration of those lost connections at multiple levels: personal reconciliation with one's own identity and memories, reconciliation with the source of the trauma, including the perpetrator, and national reconciliation between severed sections of society. However, in all three levels of recovery, healing must take place at a human, personal level in order to counterbalance the initial dehumanization and estrangement of the trauma. One must be able to understand and personally identify with the lost relation as a subjective individual, rather than as an objective symbol, in order to coexist at a comprehensible and functional level...

An example in which the victim and perpetrator regrettably did not genuinely listen to one another, is the case of a Durban bar bombing by an ANC member, Robert McBride, in 1985. At his amnesty hearing, the interviewer began with the question, "What persuaded you to start with the movement?"¹ McBride quickly retorted, "Sir, I think that all of us in this place know what persuaded us to fight against oppression. One does not have to be a rocket scientist. I was an oppressed person, and that is why I wanted to help the movement." McBride went on to explain, "I'd like to speak to the family. I am truly sorry in a quest for my freedom that I brought about deaths. For this I am sorry...But no one has apologized to me yet for either oppressing me directly or indirectly happily benefiting from my oppression." McBride's statement is disconcerting, because at first one is taken aback by his disdain. He certainly was not humbling himself before the victim or genuinely trying to reach them as individuals. His apology was brief and followed immediately by a self-centered

¹ Footage from the documentary *A Long Night's Journey into Day*

return to his own pain rather than the victims'. Additionally, he was firmly reinforcing the black vs. white divisions in society by choosing to speak in terms of me vs. those who benefited from me.

However, his statement does raise an essential point concerning public acknowledgement. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was based in part on the idea that public acknowledgement of the victim's suffering would confirm the legitimacy of their pain and society's empathy with their experience. Commendably, the pain of those who were directly victimized by apartheid was publicly acknowledged. However, what has not been symbolically recognized is the fact that an entire segment of the population benefited from the black South Africans for not resisting apartheid. Until the white population acknowledges their own guilt and connection to apartheid, it will be difficult for the black and white populations to communicate openly without reservations.

This fact is blatantly clear upon examining the statements of McBride's white victims. Sharon Welgmoed's sister was killed in the bombing. She began her statements by admitting her family's careless ignorance of the black South African oppression as she commented, "We never felt any sort of fear living in this country. We lived in a cocoon. Everything was supposedly alright and the whole world went by and nobody took any notice of it...[After the bombing] people were suddenly confronted with what other people faced for some time, but now as a reality. It was an eye opener for some people." It is possible, though troubling, that she lived her daily routine and did not really understand (or want to understand) what like was like in the township down the road. Not until the violence became personal, did it feel real...

LIVING AND LEARNING COEXISTENCE

Throughout the year, students have worked on various coexistence projects. This section provides an insight into Brandeis students' thoughts about their work in the field of coexistence – domestically, internationally, and on the Brandeis campus itself.

“I am having trouble, since my recent trip to Israel, reconciling my commitment to peace with the surprising love I felt for the Golan and lake Kineret. When I am thinking rationally, I understand that the land is no more “ours” by right than “theirs,” and that the need for peace is worth giving up much more. But if I can feel that much love and attachment after having spent less than a day in the Golan, how much more must those who live there feel—both Israelis and Syrians. It is really seeming to me that our current system where a piece of land can only belong to one people, and not another, is going to continually be a real impediment to peace.”

-- Erica George. Introduction to Intercommunal Coexistence. Spring 2000.

“I’ve come to learn that multiple narratives must be held together in order to gain the true story...I have been able to revisit my Blackness, my Haitian nationality, my Caribbean origin, my African roots and my humanity.”

-- Gardy Guiteau. Harmonies and Tensions: Contemporary Issues in Black Jewish Relations in the United States. Spring 2000.

“I am frustrated. With myself and with other around me. I want to make change. But where does it begin? How can I reach out? Do I have to? Is it even my place?”

-- Amanda A. Mokowitz. Harmonies and Tensions: Contemporary Issues in Black Jewish Relations in the United States. Spring 2000.

Changing Environments, Changing Selves: Contributing to Coexistence on Campus

Andrew Slack and Danny Weinstein co-wrote a paper for Introduction to Intercommunal Coexistence entitled “Increasing the PULSE through the Orthodox community.” Through interviews and discussions they described the separation of the Orthodox community from the rest of the campus, and illustrated many practical ways to increase coexistence at Brandeis. Below are some extracts from this paper.

Our need to unite the campus through this avenue originated as a response to a recent PULSE forum in which dissension was raised in the relationship of the Brandeis community to the Brandeis Orthodox community. Members of this forum expressed feelings of exclusion and intimidation from the Orthodox community, highlighting a lack of communication and a fear of intermingling. Therefore, we hoped to interview people of both communities in the hopes of fostering understanding and communication between these distinct groups. A series of questions ensued for us, including: Is the Orthodox community really separated from the rest of the campus? If so, then why? Are there way of correcting this? Do people want a different relationship between these groups? How do people of non-Orthodox affiliation feel about the Orthodox community? From the other perspective, is there a sentiment among the Orthodox community of an inadequacy of Brandeis’ ambivalent Jewish identity?

We began to look at coexistence work as the ability to translate one’s language and values in order to preserve and share them.

The Orthodox community has countless personal and communal rituals, which enhances their sense of togetherness and meaning. These rituals are grounded on specific principles such as warmth, personal refinement, inclusiveness and purposefulness. These principals are applicable to people of any race or culture: non-orthodox Jews, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, atheists and all others. They are principles which can add a deep sense of community and meaning to the Brandeis campus. The non-Orthodox community does not need to lose its identity by learning and listening to the values and practices. Rather, they can learn and connect with Orthodox students, and be inspired and educated by their practices.

And for both Danny, an orthodox Jewish first-year student, and Andrew, a non-Orthodox Jewish second-year student, researching and writing this paper proved to be an important and emotional experience.

After completing the paper Danny wrote:

“Writing the paper was like a journey for me – it took so many turns and developments. It was a growth process in itself. Andrew and I talked for four days about it, and we were both deeply affected by the topics since both of us, essentially, represented a separate side. He is now motivated to take a highly active role with a focus on responding to the Orthodox issue, and I am motivated to take a more active role in the Brandeis Orthodox Organization to emphasize warmth, outreach and stronger participation. This is a big deal.”

And Andrew wrote:

“For me, being Jewish is very important on the cultural level, but I saw Judaism and other organized religions as narrow minded. I didn’t like sitting next to a Christian friend and feeling we were different because our families belong to different religious institutions. Danny has really shown me that Judaism is something very spiritual. And although there are a lot of rules for an Orthodox Jew to follow, there are some beautiful values within those rules. I cannot explain how much I have come to appreciate and respect this. He has helped me understand the beauty and richness of this culture.”

Working for International Coexistence

Since 1998, the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life has offered Brandeis University sophomores and juniors summer fellowships to undertake fieldwork in troubled areas of the world to work on coexistence issues.

This following section illustrates various experiences and reflections from students as they live and learn coexistence all over the world. First is a sampling from email messages received from 1999 and 2000 student fellows from their internship sites. The section concludes with two lengthy excerpts, one from Lauren Elson's ('00) coreography journal, and one from a paper written by Brahmly Poologosingham ('00) about her experiences in South Africa.

“ I didn't speak a word of English for six days. We were about three hundred people, accompanied by a band playing Latin marching rhythms with African influence...motivating music and fitting to the environment as we marched holding photos of the disappeared and signs demanding justice, alongside never ending sugar fields with mountains on all sides. I definitely realized the power that peaceful demonstration, the value of sharing a common cause, demanding justice, and having others share your cause and personal grief.”

-- Wendi Adelson. On her experiences as a 1999 summer intern with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

“ I went with Anti-Housing Demolition Group to a Palestinian house inside the borders of Jerusalem. We went to help rebuild a house in protest. Last week we worked on the floor and tomorrow we will be working on the roof. The best part is the teamwork. Everyone stands in an assembly line bringing dirt and rocks to the next person. It was also funny that the assembly was a tower of Babel. I heard Hebrew, Arabic, English and German, warning that the next pail was coming. We are all from different backgrounds but the common bond of our concern for human rights brings us together.”

-- Tamara Beliak. On her experiences as a 1999 summer intern at Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy (MEND) in Bat Shalom, Israel.

“Efforts for reconciliation proper don't exist. From reading and talking to people I noticed that they prefer not talking about the war. They claim that life is back to normal and this is the important thing. In one conversation, a journalist said that these efforts of reconciliation are better for dinner table conversations. The goal is to create a normal society. “In the end, everybody wants the small things, you know. They want to have a drink with their friends; they want to have time to be with their wife or mistress. They want to know that their children can go to school, have a decent education so they'll have something in the future. We just want to create NORMAL society.” These experiences left me wondering: is it really back to normal?

--Keren Ghitis, on her experiences as a media intern in Sarajevo, Bosnia.

“I've been doing a lot of thinking regarding the meaning of development...despite the fact that some of the children I've visited live in small, run-down wooden houses, they are surrounded by such rich, beautiful trees and nature that “poor” just doesn't seem like the right word. There is such a richness to the rainforests that surrounds them. Though change is

definitely needed in the economic situation of the island, I question whether installing cable everywhere is really an example of ‘advancement.’ People here have diverse views regarding the concept of development. I am struggling to understand what development is ‘positive’ and what simply turns the area into a replica of many Northern countries.”

-- *Karen Hovav. On her experiences as a 1999 summer intern with the educational NGO, GRENED, in the Caribbean island of Grenada.*

“I am learning that there are very many approaches to peace, equality, and change, and each has its significance. UNIFEM is working on ways that both the UN and the All China Women’s Federation can collaborate on efforts to fight gender-based violence. The two most prevalent in China are domestic violence and trafficking of women and girls. For me, coexistence continues at many levels. The first and most important one is that every day I am reminded that I am an outsider. Many times I come across a foreigner and a huge wave of relief comes over me. I am not alone! How strange – a total stranger, as distant to me as all the other people around me, can make me feel safe. Surely this is an important lesson to learn.”

-- *Devika Mahadevan. On her experiences as a 1999 summer intern at the United Nations Development Fund for Women, Beijing, China.*

“I’ve come to realize that my status as an American or as Black here isn’t as important as my being both Black and American. Black South Africans first recognize me as a Black person like them, who also happens to be American. For white South Africans, it is different...they connect with me as an American who also happens to be Black. I like the first one better, because this is one of the few times in my life where I feel this comfortable in my Black skin. However, I can’t deny the privileges that my American status awards me – a nice oceanfront apartment, a certain financial security, not to mention a more tolerant attitude among white people when they hear my accent. Funny, I’m always talking about things like privilege as something that is so removed from my life, but now I must face the fact that simply because of my citizenship, I am ahead of most Black people living here. I am not sure how I feel about this.”

-- *Nakisha Evans. On her experiences as a 2000 summer intern in Cape Town, South Africa.*

“Last week I accompanied a 11-14 year old group on a trip to the local army base. I had mixed feelings from the beginning – was it right or fair or even responsible to militarize children so young? But, if they are already exposed to violence on a daily basis, wasn’t it better to demystify the army? How would the Catholic students react to an army that many believed oppress and terrorize their community? Was I giving my seal of approval of violence just by my presence there? Was this really going to be a further romanticization of helicopters and big guns? One of the kids actually held a pistol to the back of the youth leader’s head. As the kid mimicked pulling the trigger, the youth leader jumped and I could tell he was really upset. And earlier he had been all for bringing the kids to the base and thought that seeing the guns, planes and bomb defusers “would be a really good crack!”

-- *Sarah-Bess Dworin. On her experiences as a 2000 summer intern at Ballynaveigh Community House in Belfast, Northern Ireland.*

“I was very moved by one couple’s story. They lost a son in October 1983. He was a member of the army, but they were never able to contact him, and only heard from him when he contacted them. When events became turbulent, they tried to find him, but couldn’t. And a while later they gave up hope. They never heard what happened to him, they never saw his body, and they didn’t even know when he had been killed. And they have lived with all these questions for seventeen years! Every October, they have a mass said for him. The quiet strength and evident kindness of this couple was very moving. I became so angry on their behalf – at the army, at the Americans who invaded, and at everyone else who had kept information from this poor couple. And I think I began to understand better the value of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission – I see how significant knowing the truth is.”

-- *Tova Nuegut. On her experiences working with Prof. Dessima Williams on reconciliation in Grenada. Summer 2000.*

“ I have been spending most of my days at a homeless shelter where there are refugees from Angola, Sudan, Kenya, Congo and elsewhere in Africa. Some people here are doing an oral history project, and I sat in on one of the sessions. The head of the shelter talked about the first day care center she had run. In the day, she would move all the furniture out of her house into the yard to make space, and then, at night, when the kids left, she’d move it all back in. Once she promised to start another shelter in a church, but the church withdrew at the last minute. So she sat up until four in the morning wondering what she was going to do; so many people were counting on her. So, at four in the morning, she went to her next door neighbor’s house, and told her there was no choice. The shelter would have to be at her neighbor’s house. I like this ethic – even though the arrangement is far from perfect, if it needs to happen, it happens.”

-- *Zach Sherwin. On his experiences as a 2000 summer intern in Cape Town, South Africa.*

“There is a saying around here, which I first heard at a non-traditional worship that is held here twice a day – It’s better to light a small candle than to curse the darkness. I am overwhelmed, inspired and filled with gratitude for these people who light their candles in the darkest of nights. I am sure they deal with fear, anger, doubt, frustration and sadness that seems to have no end. But they use all those feelings to work towards wholeness – in themselves, their community, their country and their world. A South African priest here talked to us about how when tragedy occurs, first, we are victims. But we can use that victimhood to become survivors, and then, ultimately, victors. This is something I wish to do in my own life.”

-- *Andrew Slack. On his experiences as a 2000 summer intern in Corrymeela, Northern Ireland.*

Choreography Journal

By Lauren Elson, '00

Lauren Elson was a 1999 Ethics and Coexistence Student Fellow and spent her summer interning at the Cotton Tree Heritage Theatre in the Gambia in the effort to explore how dance could be used as a form of communication while working on issues of coexistence. When she returned, she choreographed a dance for the Brandeis community that outlined her experiences as a foreigner and as a coexistence worker. This excerpt describes and explains her dance; a videotape of her performance can be borrowed from the Ethics Center.

Throughout the project, to demonstrate my effort to fit in, I used the image of the head piece from the traditional women's dress. I borrowed my first African outfit on the third day that I was there. I enjoyed people's shocked reactions to seeing me, a white person, wearing "their" clothes. I felt that it demonstrated that I was not there to take advantage of them (as many seemed to think), but to learn how they lived and integrate myself into that community. The headpiece is a fashion statement and women spend a large amount of time sculpting the fabric into unique shapes. Whenever I wore the headpiece, everyone asked me who had tied it for me (inevitably, it had been my host family's maid), since no one, myself included, thought that I could do it. Hence whenever it "fell" off during the performance- I was still conforming to what was expected of the "toubob." At the finale of the piece, I am able to tie the fabric myself so that it stays on. I really have learned the ways of the culture and have not only proved it to others, but to myself as well. The two different types of cloth that I used were also significant: The black one was part of the outfit that I bought at the craft market for my mother the day before I left (it represents the "tourist"). The other was from the ashobe wedding to which I was invited.

The sound clips that I used in the initial section of the presentation each had a special significance. The first clip is from a rehearsal of "Batuu Askan Wi" at the youth center in

Banjul, the capital. The cacophonous mix of sounds represents the routine assembly of the group: As the members of the troupe arrived, the drummers started practicing the rhythms, and the dancers, the steps. Neighborhood children would also assemble to watch the rehearsal. Upon careful listening to the recording, it is possible to discern the children's calls of "toubob." This is one of the first labels that I encountered and I never was sure what to make of it. I did not like being singled out, yet I do not know if it was derogatory.

The foundation of movement that I performed in this section set the physical and metaphorical tone for the rest of the piece. The sharp reach followed by the elevated direction change was meant to elucidate the contrast between the acceptance that I was striving for and the lack of integration that I felt. I clearly knew what I wanted, but in trying to achieve it, I was left completely vulnerable. I thought that I had entered the situation without expectations, when in fact, I had expected to be accepted. The African movements that followed these steps provided a reality check as to what I encountered on a daily basis. The African dancing that I participated in with the groups was sometimes the only activity that brought me comfort (it was the only time that I felt accepted).

The next sound clip was that of the frogs that I recorded in Nema Kuno, the village that I lived in for a week. The time I spent there had a subduing effect on me. The only way that I can describe it is that I felt like it was the "pure" life. There was nothing to worry about - in fact there was nothing to think about. One of the things that I enjoyed the most about my stay there was the lack of electricity. The moon and stars easily provided enough light to maneuver around the compounds- and the view of the sky was incredible! One of my most vivid memories from there is the illumination of the rooms by candle light. In fact, I frequently used candle light to write in my journal throughout my stay in the

Gambia since the electricity was never consistent. I would get distracted by the shadows on the walls and would inevitably start dancing. Either I would practice what I had been attempting to learn that day, or I would make up new steps in my constant attempt feel comfortable enough to improvise. The movements that I did in this section of the dance were inspired by the plumes of smoke and the shapes of the flames that repeatedly tore me away from my writing and forced me to dance.

The final sound clip in this section is from a rehearsal at Cotton Tree Heritage Theater. It seemed to capture the characteristics of Gambian life: The intellectual discussion of the dance steps, the intermittent pounding of the drums as new members learned the rhythms of the repertoire, the type-writer clicking in the background (in an attempt to send out correspondence to potential supporters), and the clucking of the chickens running through the living area/ rehearsal room/ office. Every morning when I arrived, I encountered the women from the various other families that rented rooms in the compound as they were doing the daily laundry. The act of doing laundry had a special significance during my stay. At first, I was appalled that the maid of my host family would do my laundry. Not only am I uncomfortable with being waited on, but I also felt as if it was forcing me into a racial role that I did not want to accept. Although I know that this was not the circumstance, I insisted on doing my own laundry. My host mother always teased me and said that she was unaware that Americans knew how to wash clothes. My host sister decided that my attempt to do laundry was a lost cause, and I frequently saw her re-washing or even ironing (who does that anymore???) my clothes when I had finished with them. The one thing that she frequently emphasized was that I did not know how to properly wring my clothes. No matter how long or hard I tried, she was always able to squeeze an extra several cups of water out of

everything that I had already wrung. This became our long standing joke- and now that I have learned how to “wring” clothes, I do it for everyone in my suite here since they do not know how to properly do it. I felt closer to my host sister than to anyone else- and this memory/ wringing motion is one of the few representations I have to signify acceptance.

South Africa:
A Life Experience in Hope, Peace and Reconciliation

By Brahmy Poologosingham, '00

Brahmy Poologasingham was a 1998 Ethics and Coexistence Fellow and spent that summer working at three different non-government organizations in various parts of South Africa. On her return, she wrote an extensive description of her experiences and feelings throughout her journey. This excerpt discusses one of her internships. Her full paper is also published by the Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence, in a separate booklet.

....As I was arriving into eMbalenhle for the first time, I was mesmerized by the beautiful colors of the late evening: a deep orange from the setting sun overtook the sky and it was soon replaced by a misty, pink that seemed to drip from the heavens into the horizon. I commented to the volunteer who had driven me in about what a beautiful sight it was, and he told me, much to my dismay, that the main reason why the sky was hazy and turned those particular colors was because of the immense pollution in this area. I discovered that the smoke produced from the township had overtime polluted eMbalenhle and the surrounding areas, which was causing massive health and environmental problems.

When we finally arrived in the township it was getting dark, but I could clearly see the shacks lining the streets, each one closely nestled to the next. There was garbage strewn all over the ground, the ditches were filled with dirty stagnant water, and there were domesticated goats and some hens running loose on the side of the roads. Due to my experiences living and having witnessed the poverty that is prevalent in other third world and developing countries, including my hometown Sri Lanka, I wasn't shocked at the sight of poverty, as much as I was sad and heartbroken by it.

The only other experience with a township that I had had thus far, was a day visit to Soweto with a bus full of tourists. It was an interesting excursion in which we were taken to all the historical houses and sites that had been significant to the apartheid struggle, after which we strolled through the shanty town taking pictures and slapping high fives with the local kids. We ended the trip by going to a local shabeen (small shack turned into a bar) and having some Castle beer. I wrote in my journal that I felt oddly safe with the group of tourists as we would never have been able to visit the Sowetan townships on our own, and yet I had felt like I was disrespecting and invading these people's space. I did not like the fact that their poverty and living circumstances had been reduced to a show for tourists who wanted to see an example of a "shack" or a "shanty town." What made the whole situation so problematic for me was the internal conflict and the feeling that I had lost a bit of self-worth by playing this role of the eager tourist over the role of the student who was there to learn.

Being in eMbalenhle gave me the opportunity to work on a hands on project where I wasn't just someone passing through, only to take a snapshot in order to document the poverty and economic hardship of the township. It gave me a chance to contribute my skills and time towards a worthy project that strived to ameliorate the township's living conditions and bring about coexistence through social and environmental change. The NOVA project that I worked on had started a few years prior to my arrival and a lot of research and analysis had already been done, so they were now in the implementation phase. Essentially many townships like eMbalenhle, which consists of approximately two hundred thousand inhabitants, live in small corrugated tin shacks, and produce a lot of smoke, that comes out of the coal stoves they use for cooking, heat and light. Because the shacks have no electricity, due to the government's financial inability to provide this utility to the masses, coal stoves

are used widely both in the morning and extensively during the night (especially in the chilly winter months of May through August). The coal stoves also serve a societal function because they provide light and warmth around which families and communities gather to communicate and socialize. The last dilemma involved the coal merchants who sell the product and make quite a large profit, and thus would definitely feel threatened by the NOVA project.

The problem with coal that is used in most of these stoves is that it is highly toxic and emits carcinogens that pollute the air and cause many health problems such as asthma, lung disease and emphysema. This was evident in the studies that were done in eMbalenhle that showed how the older and especially the younger population had chronic health problems that were directly linked to the polluted air. Thus, in order to improve this situation NOVA launched a project that involved testing the air to see how much pollution was actually being transmitted, and then redesigning household technologies in the community in order to reduce this pollution.

I was lucky enough to take part in both of these mini projects for three weeks during which time I would spend the week in the township working on the project, and I would go back to Pretoria during the weekend. A team of NOVA workers and I went out the first week and spoke, using translators, to about fifty families who were willing to take part in the air tests that we had to run in the families' homes. The process involved dropping off a calibrator that was designed like the human lung to breath air in and out. These calibrators had a filter like a human lung's sacs that when taken apart showed us approximately how much of the pollution was being retained in the body. We would drop off these calibrators at 6:00 a.m., tell the families to make sure they were not moved or touched, and picked them up

later that night or the following day. What really stunned me was the amount of dirt that we found in the filters when we took them apart-in just one day there were a substantial amount of pollutants and one can only imagine the kind of damage that occurs to a person's, let alone a child's, health over weeks, months, and years!