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MASTER'S THESIS
**THE EXPERIENCE OF A DUAL NARRATIVE TOUR
– A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH**

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AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IIPT	International Institute for Peace through Tourism
MEDJI	MEJDI Tours
n. d.	No date
TED	Technology, Entertainment, Design
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
US/USA	United States of America
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council

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INTRODUCTION

I don't feel like any part of me wants to keep this quiet. You know it's almost like you're a witness now. [...] it's almost like being party to a crime, if you're going and you see something that you think is wrong, and you say nothing, then you are part of that, you are part of the responsible party [...] if you see something that is not right, then it's no longer on someone you read about, then it's on you (Participant 111).

This quote sums up the sentiment expressed by the participants regarding some of the emotions they felt during the trip on which this research is based. This thesis attempts to uncover the meaning that the participants placed on their experience of this dual narrative tour by applying a phenomenological approach.

Tourism is often considered as a means to promote peace by reducing tensions between countries (Becken & Carmignani, 2016; D'Amore, 1988; Kim & Crompton, 1990). However, this notion is debated by scholars (see chapter 1.1). Fostering peace becomes increasingly important in today's globalized world as more and more people with different backgrounds interact with one another and mass media often offer a one-sided view of current events (Farmaki, 2017; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). More trips signify more frequent possibilities of interaction and therefore of possible conflict. In order to combat this, there is the need for alternative forms of tourism. One of them is mass tourism as it reduces friction by diminishing contact (Bechmann Pedersen, 2017). However, this would not offer a long-term solution as negative emotions might build up between the host community and the guests, as it can be seen in the recent debate about overtourism (Buck & Ruetz, 2017). Instead, forms of tourism that lead to understanding and foster respect among the involved parties are required. The role the media is playing in this relationship is significant as they generate an image of the destination and have the potential to influence the choice of destination through the image they create of the potential host community. This image is oftentimes not questioned by tourists but rather simply accepted as the situation on-site does not affect them personally and thus seems distant to them. It is important to consider more than one perspective in order to gain an understanding of a destination due to the diversity of narratives that one place can hold.

The tourism industry displays a high economic significance for many countries around the world. It is continuously changing and expanding. Customers are increasingly looking for unique and extraordinary experiences, causing the need for new, authentic tourism products (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016; MacCannell, 1973; Abraham Pizam, 2010). For planning and managing tourism experiences effectively, it is crucial to understand what the experience means to the tourists who co-construct it and live it. An experience is formed through the tourists' interaction with their environment (Feldman, 2000), this ultimately renders the tourist in charge of the experience instead of a tourism manager, making it more important to offer a valuable frame in which this experience can take place.

This study is looking into a novel aspect of the tourism experience: Dual narrative tours. A dual narrative tour is a tour in a conflict zone, where two guides from the opposing sides are engaged in delivering their view of the situation to the visitors. Tour groups do not only visit sights, but interact with the local population and listen to their unique stories. The case used in this research is the one of MEJDI Tours, a tour company with a mission to “change the face of tourism through a socially responsible business model that honors both clients and communities” (MEJDI Tours, 2017a). In order to achieve this, they offer a unique opportunity for the tourists: to experience the diversity of a contested place as told from multiple perspectives. MEJDI recognizes the importance of telling more than one of the stories that a place can hold and acknowledges the value the locals place on being given the opportunity to tell their unique perspectives. Therefore, the company developed the dual narrative tour. They did that by employing two tour guides from the conflicting parties, for them to offer their insights and views about the visited places (MEJDI Tours, 2017c). This is considered a valuable approach to promote an alternative form of tourism which fosters intercultural understanding and the reduction of stereotypes similar to other forms of alternative tourism.

Against the backdrop of 2017 being the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Year of sustainable tourism, it is ever more important to incorporate sustainability in tourism. MEJDI is placing a focus on creating a more just world with their tours by attempting to offer a different perspective and an unbiased view of a conflict; while still acknowledging their social responsibility to the locals (MEJDI Tours, 2017a). MEJDI is one of several companies to offer alternative tours in Israel/Palestine but the only one which incorporate a dual narrative approach to the whole length of the tour. Most tour guides in Israel are Jewish, which causes many of the tours to be one sided (Gelfond Feldinger, 2012). As a result, MEJDI felt the need to portray the bigger picture of the current situation in the country and discuss its complexity. By conducting these tours, the company initiates conversations between the conflicting parties and exposes both sides to each other’s narratives. The intention is to make them understand that the difference among them is not as significant as they perceive it and that other side is not to be considered a threat (Gelfond Feldinger, 2012). By this, they are highlighting the interconnectedness of the world and open people’s minds to the diversity that one place can hold. However, the goal of their project is not to present the tourists with a solution to the conflict or to influence their decision into one direction. Instead, they aim to give room to more perspectives and offer a balanced view on the events so that the visitors are able to form their own opinion.

With MEJDI Tours currently being the only tour operator offering this particular type of tours, the experience of being part of one has not yet been researched. Therefore, this study intends to offer valuable, novel insights on what it means for customers to take part in this tour, and displays the experience from their perspective. These insights, although not generalizable outside the scope of this study, can be used, for example, in marketing or to portray possible advantages of being part of a tour of this sort. Moreover, the results might

lead further tour operators to offer similar experiences, or more destinations to seek this form of tourism since the findings indicate what the tourists value most. In addition, this research allowed the participants to reflect on their experience by making them a co-researcher and helped them process what they heard and saw at a different level.

There is an increasing number of phenomenological studies in tourism. For example Uriely, Yonay, & Simchai (2002) looked into the types of Israeli backpackers; Hayllar & Griffin (2005) determined the nature of the precinct tourism experience in Australia; and Li (2000) examined the influence of geographical consciousness on the tourists' experiences. Applying phenomenology in this case allows for the discovery of what the experience really is like from an insider perspective instead of solely from an onlooker one (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016; Gadamer, 1975). Phenomenology offers a better way to depict the experiences of tourists than for example a positivist approach. The tourist experience is a very complex phenomenon that cannot be accurately portrayed through a different approach (Andriotis, 2009). The insights from this thesis can be considered as a basis for further research on dual narrative tours, especially on its effect on the relationship between tourism and peace.

The aim of this study is to determine what the experience of taking part in a tour with a dual narrative means for the tourists. In order to determine this, the main attributes of the experience are extracted by making the participants co-researchers of this study. Involving them in in-depth interviews allows for a joint analysis of their experience. Against the backdrop of the subjective nature of tourism experiences, the meaning ascribed to this experience as well as the main attributes are compared to the intentions of MEJDI Tours. They have a strong mission with a focus on sustainability (MEJDI Tours, 2017a). This comparison allows for a conclusion concerning the effectiveness of this trip in regard to fulfilling their mission. To achieve this, the research is guided by a set of research questions that are attempted to be answered by applying a phenomenological methodology. One main research question was formed, along with two sub-questions. The main research question is:

What does it mean for the customers to experience a dual narrative tour?

In addition, this research seeks to answer the following sub-questions:

- *What are the general attributes of this experience?*
- *Is the meaning attributed to the experience in line with the mission of MEJDI Tours?*

This paper is structured into seven chapters, starting with an introduction where the purpose, scope and outline of the research are presented. It then continues with a brief review of the present literature on the tourism and peace nexus as well as the tourism experience by introducing related concepts and keywords in the second chapter. The reader is then familiarized with the case in which this research is set. This includes the tour company, MEJDI Tours, a brief introduction to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and general information about the specific trip during which this research was conducted.

Following this, the methodology applied in this research is described in detail in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter focusses on highlighting the role of the researcher and contains the bracketing measures taken by the researcher to assure an unbiased presentation of the results. In the sixth chapter, the findings of this research are displayed and discussed by considering the relevant literature as well as the participant's accounts of their experience. As common in phenomenological studies, the results and discussion are introduced together under the relevant headings. The experience reveals patterns of meaning that can be described by the presented themes, which provide a holistic understanding of the experience and the meaning associated with it.

The last chapter offers a summary of the most important findings and their implications for both the participants and tour companies in general. In addition, the limitations of this study are reflected upon and suggestions for further research are offered. Throughout the whole paper, the researcher upheld a phenomenological stance, guiding all processes and reflections.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Tourism and Peace

This chapter attempts to give a short overview over the discussion concerning the relationship between tourism and peace. It also aims to provide a common basis of understanding on which concepts and definitions this thesis is built on.

The literature depicts an ongoing debate among scholars and professionals on the nature of the relationship between tourism and peace (Moufakkir & Kelly, 2010). One side argues that tourism creates peace (Askjellerud, 2003; Becken & Carmignani, 2016; D'Amore, 1988; Kim & Crompton, 1990; UNWTO, 1980; Var, Schlüter, Ankomah, & Lee, 1989) and others claim that tourism is simply a beneficiary of peace (Anastasopoulos, 1992; Hall, Timothy, & Duval, 2004; Litvin, 1998; Pizam, Jafari, & Milman, 1991; Pratt & Liu, 2015; Salazar, 2006). Most of the studies conducted on this topic are based on case studies or descriptive rather than evidence-based research (Pratt & Liu, 2015; WTTC, 2016). Trying to define the relationship produced varying results, also largely depending on the scholar's definition of peace. World peace, as an intangible attribute, is difficult to quantify (Ap & Var, 1990) which underlines the complexity of this issue. Therefore, the results of the various studies on this topic need to be reviewed with caution.

Tourism is defined by the World Tourism Organization as a "social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes" (UNWTO, 2016). There is no uniform definition of peace. It might even include conflict (when managed non-violently; Askjellerud, 2003). However, for this thesis the following definition of peace is

applied: Peace can be defined either as negative peace (absence of war) or as a more active phenomenon of positive peace (social justice) as described by Galtung (1996). He compares peace to health, which is not only the absence of illness but also incorporates the physical and mental preconditions necessary to avoid illness/violence. There are different perceptions of peace worldwide that would need to be brought together so as to achieve global peace (Askjellerud, 2006), however, this is highly unlikely (Galtung, 1996).

Empirical evidence that tourism flourishes with the absence of violence has been discovered (Litvin, 1998). It is also widely acknowledged that the demand for a place decreases in times of conflict, causing the tourism in that area to drop (Edgell Sr, DelMastro Allen, Smith, & Swanson, 2008; Farmaki, 2017). This can be seen in the reduction of tourism arrivals during times of conflict (Becken & Carmignani, 2016) since tourists prioritize safety and security when choosing their holiday destination (Edgell Sr et al., 2008). This makes tourism a highly volatile industry with strong fluctuations depending on the situation in the host countries. However, tourism usually regenerates once the violence is over (Litvin, 1998). This can be seen in several examples, like in Northern Ireland, where cease-fire agreements in the late 1990s resulted in increased visitation (Pratt & Liu, 2015). Even though it is certain that tourism benefits from peace, the question whether tourism “create[s] peace” (Litvin, 1998, p. 63) remains.

The idea of the positive influence of tourism on world peace reaches back to the 1960s when it was mentioned by president J.F. Kennedy (Salazar, 2006). Furthermore, the UNWTO recognized the role of tourism in creating peace in the Manila Declaration (1980, p. 1), stating that “world tourism can be a vital force for world peace and can provide the moral and intellectual basis for international understanding and interdependence”. The proposition received global attention with the foundation of the International Institute for Peace Through Tourism (IIPT) in 1986 (Kelly, 2005), resulting in the first global conference on tourism and peace which was held in 1988 in Vancouver, Canada (Jafari, 1989). Perhaps the first advocate for this topic is Louis D’Amore with his 1988 article titled: “Tourism: The World’s Peace Industry”.

Several studies relate to contact theory to support the notion that tourism creates peace. It claims that “contact between different groups will improve intercultural attitudes and reduce tension” (Kelly, 2006b, p. 9), ultimately breaking down pre-existing stereotypes. By allowing for an opportunity for both groups to communicate, a new understanding for the other party’s point of view and situation can be established (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In order to be successful certain preconditions, such as common goals and voluntary contact, are crucial (Etter, 2007). Several studies on tourism and peace adopted this theory and discovered that tourism is able to encourage cross-cultural exchange as well as intensify cultural understanding (e.g. Kim, Prideaux, & Prideaux, 2007; Pratt & Liu, 2015; Var & Ap, 1999; WTTC, 2016). Yet, the encounters often do not lead to change due to the barriers of the contacts (e.g. limited time, frequency, cultural and language barriers, isolation of the visitors and status disparity; Tomljenovic & Faulkner, 2000). This is particularly valid when

looking at mass tourism (Krippendorf, 1989), where one of the success factors is the avoidance of contact between visitors and the host community in order to diminish friction (Bechmann Pedersen, 2017). In addition, the portion of the population that is not travelling to that area or is not involved in tourism is not taken into consideration when using contact theory (Khalilzadeh, 2018). Due to this reason the potential to alter stereotypes needs to be looked at with caution. In order for contact theory to be applicable, contact actually needs to take place. People with a negative preconception of a place are not likely to travel there, therefore circumventing the positive influence a visit might have (Bechmann Pedersen, 2017). However, travelers are nonetheless becoming ambassadors, spreading the stories of the people they met at home (Wohlmuther & Wintersteiner, 2014). Still, this does not have the same potential as an actual trip in regard to the potential reduction of prejudices.

Apart from the possible benefits of contact brought about by tourism, it does not create an “absence of war” itself (Shin, 2008). Tourism might be a way to change the attitude of individuals and bring by a positive economic benefit (Ap & Var, 1990), but fails to influence on a macro level and thus cannot be considered a cause of peace (Hall et al., 2004; Litvin, 1998; Pratt & Liu, 2015). Litvin argues that “tourism is clearly a beneficiary of peace, but as tourism is never successful in the absence of peace, it cannot, therefore, be a generator of peace” (Litvin, 1998, p. 64). This notion is supported for example by Hall et al. who state that “tourism is far more dependent on peace than peace is on tourism” (Hall et al., 2004). As tourism is highly sensitive to conflict situations (e.g. political or social unrest), it requires stability and security to thrive (Pizam & Mansfield, 1996; Shin, 2008) and “to stimulate the social, economic and cultural development of society” (Shin, 2008, p. 25). If there is a high amount of violence in a place, the number of people visiting will be very limited since security is a priority when choosing a travel destination (Edgell Sr et al., 2008). Without tourism taking place, it is unable to influence the creation of peace.

However, tourism has the potential to influence positive peace in several ways. It exposes tourists to other people and cultures, thus heightening their tolerance and knowledge about the host community (Fisher & Price, 1991). Furthermore, it might eliminate negative stereotypes (Pratt & Liu, 2015) by allowing tourists to experience the situation by themselves. In addition, by raising awareness about the conflict or the parties involved in it, governments might be compelled “to acknowledge the rights of local populations” (WTTC, 2016, p. 4) by cooperating with them to forward the development of a tourism sector. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), “countries with a stronger tourism sector tend to be more peaceful” (WTTC, 2016, p. 1). This implies that a sustainable tourism sector is linked to a higher degree of positive peace and therefore reduces the level of violence and conflict in that area. Moreover, tourism shows to be “resilient to increases in violence and conflict” (WTTC, 2016, p. 3) in countries that are not (yet) affected by conflict. This means that there might be no empirical evidence that tourism brings by an absence of war, but it might nevertheless help with the prevention of future conflict. Further positive impacts of tourism that might ascertain peace are, for example, aiding the protection

of ecological and sociocultural environments, a rise in living standards of involved communities as well as encouraging positive relationships and attitudes between hosts and tourists (WTTC, 2016).

This positive influence is certainly only applicable if managed well as can be seen in the recent debate about over-tourism (Buck & Ruetz, 2017). In this case, tourism seems to provoke conflict rather than induce peace. Therefore, tourism also displays the potential of aggravating inequality, social tensions and conflict in general (Salazar, 2006; Timothy, 2013). Due to the contested nature of conflicts and conflict related-events, careful interpretation and a balanced account of the narrative are crucial. Here, the tour guides play a critical role in achieving a positive outcome since they choose which story they tell – and how. The choice of words can significantly alter the narrative and the feelings which are associated with the story (Gelfond Feldinger, 2012). Therefore, cultural training and profound sensitivity are highly significant for enabling intercultural understanding and learning in the context of tourism (Friedl, 2014).

Appropriate management of tourism is necessary to combat the potential negative effects on peace or the peace-building process. As confirmed by Kelly, “peace-related objectives will only be achieved by purposeful management of tourism directed to enhancing intercultural relations” (Kelly, 2006a, p. 10). With careful operations and a high degree of sensitivity, tourism has the “potential to positively affect host communities in their reconciliation process” (Becken & Carmignani, 2016), thus resulting in positive peace. However, this is only possible if supported by broader peace building initiatives (Moufakkir & Kelly, 2010; Smith, 2004). The tourism industry is encouraged to take an active role by introducing new tourism products that allow for meaningful contact and inspire people to travel to contested areas (Brown, 1989) as peace-building is a dynamic rather than a static process (Farmaki, 2017). In addition, Askjellerud (2003) invites the tourists themselves to take up responsibility for peace and adopt an attitude of peace, accepting the “other” as an opportunity for growth. This is also done by the IIPT with their “Credo of the Peaceful Traveler”, where they embolden tourists to be ambassadors for peaceful travelling with their “spirit, words and actions” (IIPT, n.d.).

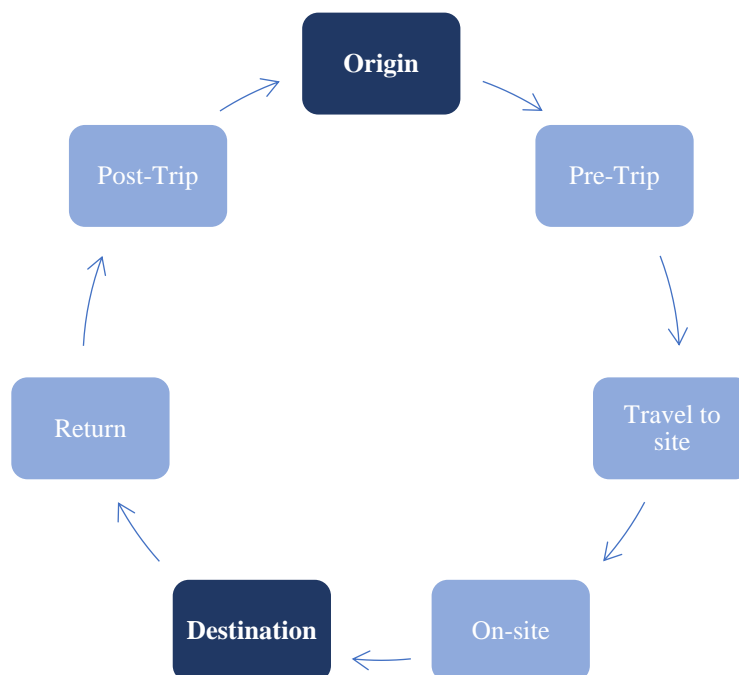
The interpretation of the relationship between tourism and peace changes significantly with the chosen definition of peace. Whereas there is no scientific evidence that tourism can create an absence of war, there is an abundance of studies pointing out its contributions towards positive (sustainable) peace (Kim et al., 2007; Nyaupane, Teye, & Paris, 2008; Pratt & Liu, 2015; Var et al., 1989). Because of this, tourism is very valuable in providing an opportunity for peaceful coexistence among people from different cultures and conflicting parties. It should not be underestimated despite its questionable role in generating peace (Pratt & Liu, 2015).

1.2 Tourism Experience

The tourism experience has received wide-ranging attention by tourism scholars in the past and its importance has been increasingly recognized (e.g. Cohen, 1979; Uriely, 2005). It is a highly complex, heterogeneous concept and can only be constructed in cooperation with the participant (Feldman, 2000). It is therefore highly subjective as several studies confirmed (e.g. Cohen, 1979; Ryan, 2002; Uriely et al., 2002).

Various scholars attempted to define the tourism experience. Otto & Ritchie (1996) stated that it is the subjective state of mind that the participants are feeling during a service encounter. This is especially important since tourists co-create their experience and take an active role in it (Normann, 1991). In Cohen's (1979) definition, not only the tourist itself, but its relationship towards the people and destination, as well as their preconceptions about it, play a significant role in shaping the tourism experience. The definition by Tung & Ritchie takes the stages of the tourism experience into account. According to them, it is an "individual's subjective evaluation and undergoing (i.e., affective, cognitive, and behavioural) of events related to his/her tourist activities which begins before (i.e., planning and preparation), during (i.e., at the destination), and after the trip (i.e., recollection)" (Tung & Ritchie, 2011, p. 1369). However, is difficult to state that there is a singular "tourism experience", given the heterogeneous nature of the product (Ryan, 2002). The travel experience is a "holistic experience" (Park & Santos, 2017) which consists of anticipation (pre-trip), travel to site, on-site experience, return and recollection phases (post-trip; Clawson & Ketch, 1971; Iso-Ahola, 1980; see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Stages of the Tourism Experience



Source: Own presentation after Clawson & Ketch (1971).

Cohen stated that there is not *the* tourist but that “different kinds of people may desire different modes of tourist experiences” (Cohen, 1979, p. 180). He proposed a typology of five different types of experiences, ranging from the search for meaning to simple pleasure (Cohen, 1979):

1. *Recreational Mode*: Tourism is seen as a form of entertainment which is interesting but not personally relevant and the authenticity of the experience is not questioned.
2. *Divisionary Mode*: Tourism is simply seen as a way to escape the boredom of a meaningless life and routine.
3. *Experiential Mode*: Tourism is a search for new meaning and authenticity outside the usual environment.
4. *Experimental Mode*: Tourism is a means to try out other authentic ways of life without completely committing to them.
5. *Existential Mode*: Tourism is a way to completely escape from the usual environment and completely submit to a new way of life.

In his analysis, Cohen focused on religious tourists, however, these modes can also be applied to other forms of tourism.

The tourism experience stands out from everyday life experiences and has the potential to create unique memories (Cohen, 1972, 1979; Smith, 1989; Turner & Ash, 1975; Uriely, 2005). According to Cohen, tourism can be viewed as a “temporary reversal of everyday activities” (Cohen, 1979, p. 181). Through this separation of everyday life and the tourism experience, the tourists are able to think about and view their own lives from a different perspective while travelling (Turner & Ash, 1975). However, experience is not only lived, and the participant actually needs to process and reflect on it in some ways. This can only be achieved once the experience is completed, i.e. the participant returned home, adding layers of complexity to it (van Manen, 1990). In addition, the tourism experience is highly dependent on prior knowledge as well as on the communication the participant received before and after the trip (Braun-LaTour, Grinley, & Loftus, 2006). Due to this reason, even participants of the same trip interpret the experience differently (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormicks, 2012; Ooi, 2006). Their prior knowledge or experience shaped their background and set expectations (Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra, 2013). These are mainly influenced by the media (e.g. Dunn, 2006; Rittichainuwat, 2005; Santos, 2004, 2006). The media coverage of certain topics, and thus the image of the destination created by it, varies to a large degree based on the country of origin of the participant. In the past, this factor was only relevant in the pre-trip-stage. Recently, in times of new technologies and constant connectedness, the media have an extended influence on shaping the destination image in the tourist’s mind, and thus influences the entire experience (Park & Santos, 2017).

Crompton defines the image of a destination as “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination” (Crompton, 1979, p. 18). This image has a significant impact on the tourists behavior, including the choice of destination (Lee, Lee, &

Lee, 2005). However, the opposite is also true, the on-site experience equally influences the image of the destination that the tourist holds. Their perception might be altered after the completion of the trip (Beerli & Martín, 2004; K. Kim, Hallab, & Kim, 2012). Apart from the media, tourism experiences and destination image are affected by social interactions during the trip. This does not only refer to the locals but also to the interaction with the travel companions or a group in case of non-solo-travelling (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003; Murphy, 2000).

Tourists are increasingly looking for extraordinary and memorable experiences. Pizam went as far as stating that “creating memorable experiences is the essence and the *raison d’être* of the hospitality industry” (Pizam, 2010, p. 343). Many tourists are in the “search for authenticity of experiences” (MacCannell, 1973, p. 589) and do not simply look for ordinary events. For some of them a tourism experience is “an inner journey of personal growth and self-development” (Kim, 2014, p. 37) instead of an opportunity for sightseeing. The perceived authenticity depends largely on personal feelings and associations (Wang, 1999). Experiencing the local culture can be seen as a significant factor influencing the travel motivation and Tung & Ritchie (2011) concluded that interacting with the local population and intellectual development as another factor, both increase the memorability of the trip. Furthermore, tourists are more likely to remember experiences that are relevant and meaningful to them (Kim, 2014).

1.3 Alternative Tourism

There are many definitions and forms of alternative tourism to be found in the literature. For the purpose of this thesis, the following definition by Holden is used: “Alternative tourism is a just form of travel between members of different communities. It seeks to achieve mutual understanding, solidarity and equality amongst participants” (Holden, 1984, p. 15). Whether all types of alternative tourism truly are just is a different question, however, they do have the intention of being it.

According to Triarchi & Karamanis (2017) there are three main forms of alternative tourism: Ecotourism, cultural tourism and creative tourism. However, these different forms of tourism are not always distinct and one trip might consist of several ones (Rinschede, 1992). In addition, each of the main forms consist of multiple subgroups, so a clear distinction is difficult.

Tourists using alternative tourism products are looking for something out of the ordinary, such as less visited destinations or new ways of engaging with the host community or nature. Experiencing something new or different might be prioritized to simply having a nice time (Chaitin, 2011; Petroman et al., 2013).

One form of alternative tourism that could be clustered under cultural tourism, is travelling to contested areas. Several studies have been carried out about these trips and how

they influence the conflict/peace building (see chapter 1.1 for the relationship between tourism and peace). Areas where these studies have taken place are, for example, Northern Ireland (Anson, 1999), Israel/Egypt (Milman, Reichel, Pizam, & Arie, 1990) or North and South Korea (Timothy, Prideaux, & Kim, 2004). These trips attempt to challenge stereotypes and facilitate contact between tourists and locals through a reduction of cultural and psychological gaps (Khamouna & Zeiger, 1995; Salazar, 2006). They have the potential for creating understanding among hosts and guests (Fisher & Price, 1991), which is an important prerequisite for the creation of positive peace (Askjellerud, 2003; Nyaupane et al., 2008). Through the interaction, the other party becomes more “human”, instead of being a fact in a book or displayed in the media. The current situation in the world, regarding the fear of terrorism as well as political instability in some areas, makes ways to challenge or diminish stereotypes ever so relevant (Farmaki, 2017).

However, a positive effect can only be accomplished if managed well (Kelly, 2006a). Tour operators need to carefully facilitate the contact and leave room for reflection and processing (Friedl, 2014). To do this, an environment for honest and open dialogue needs to be created (Chaitin, 2011). It is crucial to break down any kind of “us vs. them”-thinking during this form of tourism in order for it to be successful (Waller, 2002). Important prerequisites for this are mutual respect, positive interactions, equal status as well as common goals (Askjellerud, 2003; Nyaupane et al., 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

2 PRESENTATION OF CASE

2.1 The Tour Company - MEJDI Tours

MEJDI Tours is a tour operator that is based both in the US and in Israel. It was founded in 2009 by a Palestinian tourism professional (Aziz Abu Sarah) and a Jewish social entrepreneur (Scott Cooper) who had the vision to “connect the world through travel” (MEJDI Tours, 2017a). Their tours offer a multiple perspective approach to tourism by allowing the customers to engage with the local population, learn about different viewpoints and visit unique places. They offer trips to a variety of destinations, yet the Israel-Palestine experience is predominant. Other destinations include Ireland, Bosnia/Croatia or Cuba and are constantly evolving (MEJDI Tours, 2017b). The main target audience is the USA, but other markets such as Canada, Australia and Europe are gaining significance (Cooper, 2016).

MEJDI Tours currently operates two offices, one in Florida, USA and one in Jerusalem, Israel with about 10 employees in total. In addition, they have around 15 tour guides that they regularly work with in Israel and Palestine as well as several others in different destinations depending on the workload. All of these guides receive special training by the company in order to conduct tours with MEJDI (Cooper, 2016). MEJDI is dedicated to a high degree of social responsibility by paying fair wages and trying to employ only locals as this adds to the benefit of the region. Doing this can aid in alleviating poverty and discontent,

all reasons which regularly lead to outbreaks of violence in conflict zones (The World Bank, 2017; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012).

The company won several awards, like the First Intercultural Innovation Award (United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, 2012), and was featured in large media outlets (e.g. Forbes (Rodgers, 2012) and National Geographic (MEJDI Tours, 2017d)) in the last few years. In addition, Aziz Abu Sarah was invited to give a TED Talk (Technology, Entertainment, Design) in 2014 about how tourism can lead to more peace in conflict regions. The video has been viewed more than 1,3 million times on the TED Website (Abu Sarah, 2014), giving the company a chance to present their vision to the world and generate interest for their extraordinary tours.

The dual narrative tour's special feature is that two different guides from conflicted parties (e.g. one Israeli and one Palestinian) accompany the group on their journey through the region and share their view on its history, sites and current events. Moreover, each group meets with stakeholders who share their (contrasting) narratives and allow the tourists to form their own opinion. Due to this special design of the tours, the personal contact with the people living in the area encourages a dialogue between the locals and the tourists, but also among the locals when they prepare for the visit (Gelfond Feldinger, 2012). Moreover, it gives them a sense of importance as they are able to tell their narrative and welcome a group of people that is intrinsically wanting to listen to them. MEJDI facilitates meetings which would not be possible on a regular trip as they possess well-established connections in the destinations. On other tours, tourists do not usually get the opportunity for staying with a host family, sharing meals with local families, listening to small groups of activists or religious leaders. By applying this in a region of conflict, MEJDI attempts to deconstruct stereotypes and preconceptions asserted by the media, creating new levels of understanding and reflection (Wildman, 2012).

2.2 The Conflict – Israel and Palestine

This chapter seeks to offer a short introduction about the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, it is in no way a complete description nor does it display the wide array of perspectives that play a role in the conflict up to today.

The roots of the conflict lay even further back in the past, but aggressions became more widespread with the British Mandate on Palestine coming to an end in 1948. The UN decided on a partition plan in 1947, splitting up historical Palestine and allocating territory to a Jewish as well as a Muslim state and putting Jerusalem under international law (see Figure 2). On the day the British Mandate ended (14 May 1948), a Jewish state was proclaimed. This led to the outbreak of the First Arab-Israeli war which lasted, with short interruptions, until an armistice was established between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon as well as Israel and Syria in July 1949. Israel was able to conquer large parts of the territory that was allocated to a Muslim state by the UN partition plan, thus resulting in more than 750.000

Palestinian refugees (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2003). This is often referred to as the Nakba (catastrophe) from the Palestinian or Arab narrative and is still commemorated today (Al Jazeera, 2017).

Figure 2: The UN Partition Plan Borders



Source: Hertz (2006).

The region experienced an unstable peace with outbursts of violence in the following years, but the next significant conflict was the 1967 Six-Day War, when Israel was able to conquer all of historical Palestine (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2003). Following a resolution from the Security Council, Israel withdrew from parts of the occupied territory to form the borders also known as the Green Line. This was particularly significant for the Israeli narrative since their forces were able to seize control over the whole of Jerusalem for the first time (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2003). The Arab states did not accept this outcome and refused to recognize Israel and the newly established boundaries (see Figure 3). Therefore, another war between Egypt and Israel, and Syria and Israel followed in 1973 (also referred to as Yom Kippur War after the Jewish holiday that was celebrated on the day of the outbreak (also referred to as Yom Kippur War

after the Jewish holiday that was celebrated on the day of the outbreak; Council on Foreign Relations, 2017)) in an attempt to regain some of the occupied territory (Heller, 2010).

Figure 3: Map of Israel and the Palestinian Territories according to the 1967 Border



Source: Praetorius (2012).

In 1987, the First Palestinian Intifada began, an uprising against the Israeli occupation, and a large number of civilians, predominantly on the Palestinian side, were killed during this time (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2003). It was officially ended by the Oslo Accords in 1993, which marked the first attempt of a peace process by establishing a Palestinian Authority and offered guidelines for the relationship between them and the Israeli government (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017).

In the light of the failure of the Oslo Accords to reintroduce a Palestinian state, the Second Intifada broke out in 2000 and was calmed in 2005 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017). In order to reduce the number of attacks on Israelis, the construction of a barrier in and around the West Bank was approved in 2002 (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory, 2017). As a result of this uprising, Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005. However, they retain control over the land and sea borders as well as the airspace, leaving Gaza in a stage of siege or blockade (Salem, 2017), creating harsh conditions for the approximately two million people still living there (United Nations News Service, 2016).

Up to this date, the conflict resulted in clashes between the two parties, often through attacks against Israeli security personnel. People fear the outbreak of a third Intifada (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017). Many of the Palestinians, who uprooted in 1948, still live in camps and the right to return to their original land remains a crucial reason for dispute, especially fueled by the Israeli settlement policy, as they continue to allow settlements in the West Bank against international law (BBC News, 2017). The Palestinian territory is not only physically divided into West Bank and Gaza (see Figure 4), but also experiences a difficult internal situation with a conflict between the parties Fatah (now governing the West Bank) and Hamas (governing Gaza). Both display different visions for the future of their people and varying dispositions to violence. However, recently there have been advances for compromises and rapprochement of these two. Still the success of this is yet to be determined (Alsaafin & Tahhan, 2017).

Figure 4: Current Breakdown of Authority in the Israel/Palestine Region



Source: Praetorius (2012).

Possible solutions being discussed are a “two-state solution” where Israel and Palestine exist as two sovereign nations alongside each other and a “one-state solution” where both form one nation, most likely under Israeli governance (Liebermann, Dewan, & Said-Moorhouse, 2017). Both hold certain obstacles that halted the peace process so far.

In the last years, a “two-state solution” has been favored by international leaders and was the base of the peace process. However, the conflict roots deep and especially the issue of border lines and the feeling of injustice has hindered the progress. In addition, there is no homogeneous standpoint within Israel and Palestine. Rather all groupings have different ideas of what the peace should entail and under what circumstances it can be achieved. Due to these reasons, until now, there is no peace in the region and the conflict is likely to continue (Liebermann et al., 2017).

2.3 The Trip

The trip, that this study is based on, is a 15-day tour, which took place between June 13 and June 27, 2017. It was organized by the tour operator MEJDI Tours, which is described in chapter 2.1. This trip was prepared in cooperation with professors from two US universities, who did a similar trip in the summer of 2016. The participants came from those

two universities and were mostly in their twenties. Altogether the group was comprised of three professors, one photographer, two guests, five undergraduate and ten graduate students. In total, 22 people participated in this trip, including the researcher.

The schedule of this trip can be seen in Table 1 including the number and types of tour guides for each day. It was designed to include sightseeing as well as meetings with various stakeholders in the area in order to display the wide array of different perspectives that can be found among the population. To ensure a balanced display, people from all kinds of backgrounds were invited to meet the group. A focus was placed on Human Rights and Security as most of the students had some degree of interest in this topic (personal or due to their study programs). For four days, an Israeli and a Palestinian guide accompanied the group and gave their opinion and viewpoints. On the remaining days either an Israeli or a Palestinian guide led the group and shared their stories. The first two thirds of the trip were more knowledge- and meeting-focused whereas the last third also included leisure activities, like floating in the Dead Sea.

Not all trips with MEJDI Tours to Israel and Palestine follow the same itinerary; they are adjusted to the needs and wishes of each participating group. Church groups might have different activities and meet other representatives than students, depending on physical abilities and participants' interests. Therefore, not one trip is like another and cannot necessarily be compared to one another.

Table 1: Schedule of the Trip

Schedule of the Trip			
Day	Place	Main Activity	Guides
1	Jerusalem	Arrival	Israeli
2	Jerusalem	Visit to the Old City of Jerusalem, meetings with Imam and Rabbi	Israeli + Palestinian
3	Jerusalem	Meetings with former Israeli military and Christian Palestinian priest, visit to Mt Hertzal (military cemetery) and Supreme Court	Israeli
4	Jerusalem	Visit to Yad Vashem (Holocaust Museum), market, Israeli neighborhoods, Sabbath dinner with Jewish family	Israeli
5	Jerusalem	Visit of Mt of Olives, Orthodox Jewish neighborhood, Israel Museum	Palestinian
6	Jerusalem	Meeting with B'tselem (human rights organization), mixed student group, an Israeli professor and Iftaar dinner with a Muslim family	Israeli
7	Bethlehem	Walled-off Hotel, separation wall, Church of the Nativity, stay at host families	Israeli + Palestinian
8	Bethlehem/ West Bank	Aida refugee camp, Jewish settlement + meeting with a Rabbi, Tent of Nations, Parents Circle, stay at host families	Israeli + Palestinian
9	Samaria + Ramallah	Winery tour + meeting with Jewish settlers, tour of Ramallah, incl. Mahmmud Darvish Museum + meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Israeli + Palestinian
10	Dead Sea	Hike to Masada, swim in the Dead Sea, Jordan river, meeting with Friends of the Earth, Middle East about water problems, night in Kibbutz in Tiberius	Israeli
11	Nazareth/ Sea of Galilee	Church of the Annunciation + tour of Nazareth (Synagogue church, White Mosque, Souk), meeting with Israeli Arab peace activist, boat ride on the Sea of Galilee, night in Kibbutz in Tiberius	Palestinian
12	Golan Heights	Capernachoum, Mount of Beatitudes, Mt. Bental bunkers, meeting with Druze in the Shouting Hills, night in Kibbutz in Tiberius	Palestinian
13	Akko	Tour of Akko, visit to the Templar's Tunnels, visit to a Kibbutz, dinner at Druze home, night in Haifa	Israeli
14	Haifa/Tel Aviv	Short visit to Baha'i Gardens, drive to Tel Aviv and meeting for debriefing in a bomb shelter, meeting in a bilingual kindergarten	Israeli
15	Tel Aviv	Free day for shopping/beach, departure of the group	no guide

Source: own work.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Paradigm

This research is qualitative in nature and applies an eidetic phenomenological approach with an interpretive paradigm, thus, assuming an ontology which acknowledges multiple constructions of realities. However, objectivity is aimed to be achieved in regard to the description of the experience, as there are “features to any lived experience that are common to all persons who have the experience” (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015, p. 94). Epistemologically, the researcher strives to achieve transcendental subjectivity (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015; Ritchie, Burns, & Palmer, 2005).

Attempting to discover how people attribute meaning to the experience of a dual narrative tour, this is an exploratory study of a single case as there has been no previous research conducted on this topic. There are no predisposed hypotheses made, but it is rather an effort to uncover an underlying theory or structure that is true for the investigated phenomenon. However, it might only be generalized in similar settings and contexts, if at all, as an experience per se is subjective in nature (Cohen, 1979; Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015; Ryan, 2002; Szarycz, 2009; Uriely, 2005).

Since the study pursues to uncover the essence of the experience of taking part in a dual narrative tour, this research process is intrinsic and value-laden. The researcher acknowledges her own biases and values and ensures that they do not conceal the objective through constant reflection (see chapter 4). Phenomenology can be defined as “particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives” (Lester, 1999) and therefore is appropriate for tourism research in general as well as this research setting (Casmir, 1983). The focus lies on revealing meaning rather than developing theory by applying inductive reasoning (Floods, 2010; Husserl & Findlay, 1970). Furthermore, phenomenology results in information that has the purpose of making our lives richer (van Manen, 1997) and revealing meaning of the lived experience rather than generalizing statistical data (Valle & Halling, 1989). In doing so, phenomenology places a focus on understanding *how* the participants or humans in general experience their world (Sokolowski, 2000; Starks & Trinidad, 2007); the so-called lived experience (van Manen, 1990).

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Data Collection Methods and Procedure

For the data collection, an 18-day field research was performed. The researcher joined a dual narrative tour from June 13 to June 27, 2017 to Israel and Palestine (for details on the trip and the schedule, see chapter 2.3) and thus assumed an emic perspective by joining all

the activities along with the regular participants. The trip was carried out by the company relevant to this case, MEJDI Tours (see chapter 2.1).

In addition to diaries handed out to the travelers, participant observation including in-depth interviews has been carried out to gain a full picture of the experience (see Appendix A for a complete list of interviews and details of the interviewees). All observations have been collected by the researcher in a notebook and were then added to a reflective diary throughout the trip (see Appendix H).

The research was introduced to the participants by e-mail before the departure (see Appendix B) and again in person on the first day of the trip. Every participant was handed a notebook and encouraged to keep a diary and to collect everything that seemed meaningful to them (thoughts, feelings, images, sensations, memories, etc.). Along with the diary, the researcher distributed a set of questions to be answered in the notebook (see Appendix E) as well as an information sheet and a consent form (see Appendix C). This was included in order to ensure the written consent of the participants.

Through joining all activities during the trip, participant observation could be constantly carried out, which is especially useful when “little is known about the phenomenon” (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 12) under study. Informal conversations were performed, e.g. on the tour bus. In addition, the researcher joined social activities with the participants (such as spending time together after the official tour program) throughout the course of the trip. This allowed for the informal observation of common activities in order to gain a better understanding of the experience and to collect statements outside of the formal interaction (i.e. the interviews; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). All observations were collected in field notes and included in the empirical data analyzed in chapter 5. As recommended by Jorgensen (1989), special attention was paid to the role of the researcher (see chapter 4) as well as ethical issues concerning the participants (see chapter 3.4). Formal interviews between the researcher and the participants were carried out with the intention of supplementing the data collection (Ritchie et al., 2005).

An interview guide based on exploring the experience had been developed before the trip. It included semi-structured, open-ended questions designed to ensure a direction of the interview that would allow to answer the research questions. During the in-depth interviews, the researcher followed the guidelines for qualitative interviewing mentioned in Ritchie et al. (2005, p. 135). As qualitative research is an iterative process, it requires constant adaptation. Thus, the interview questions have been adjusted during the course of the data collection to ensure high quality and reliability of the responses. However, the predeveloped guide was generally followed during the interview process, with the exception of a change in the order of the questions in some occasions and the addition of probe questions to ask for clarifications or to collect further information.

Every interview was recorded, transcribed and conducted one-on-one while attempting to create a conversation-like atmosphere. The interviews were considered reflective (Munhall & Boyd, 1993) as the interviewee became a co-researcher by talking and reflecting about their own experience, making the participants personal experience the main context of the study (Seamon, 1979). Therefore, the results are a co-creation of researcher and participant instead of solely an interpretation by the researcher (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000).

The interview process started in the middle of the trip in order to ensure a certain degree of familiarity with the group and the area for the participants. One to three interviews were carried out each day over the course of seven days (see Table 2). The interviews lasted between 18 and 82 minutes, with an average length of about 45 minutes and were held at various times during the day and in different locations. A certain degree of privacy for the interviewees was intended; however, the allocation of time for interviews has revealed to be a challenge due to the limited availability of free time throughout the journey. Due to this reason, four of the interviews had to be conducted while driving on the tour bus. Nevertheless, a more secluded location on the bus was chosen to allow the participants to speak as freely as possible. Participants agreed to the interview location in advance and were presented with the option to choose another time and location.

Table 2: Schedule of Interviews

Schedule of Interviews					
Day	Date	Number of Interviews	Interviewees		
7	Monday, 19th	1	111		
8	Tuesday, 20th	1	123		
9	Wednesday, 21st	3	112	115	128
10	Thursday, 22nd	3	119	124	126
11	Friday, 23rd	3	113	116	121
12	Saturday, 24th	3	117	120	127
13	Sunday, 25th	3	114	118	125
14	Monday, 26th	0	-		
15	Tuesday, 27th	0	-		
Total		17			

Source: own work.

Due to the limited size of the group, the researcher was able to gain a certain degree of familiarity with the participants before conducting the interviews. This established trust between the parties and enabled the researcher to gain more personal information, which the interviewee might otherwise not have chosen to reveal. Therefore, it was extremely important not to break this trust by ensuring the integrity of the research (see chapter 3.4 for ethical considerations).

3.2.2 Study Population

The sample was selected based on the fact that the participants lived through the phenomenon under study (Laverty, 2003) through non-random convenience sampling as the researcher did not influence the decision about whom would be on the trip.

In total, the sample consisted of 17 people. This number was not purposively selected but rather comprises all travelers on the trip that agreed to participate in this study. Due to the nature of the trip and the limited time frame for the data collection, the otherwise preferred process of collecting data for phenomenology (until saturation occurs) could not be applied, as it could not be determined while on the trip (Laverty, 2003). Therefore, all available tourists have been included in the study.

Within this group, there were two professors who led the trip, two guests and the others were students (five undergraduate and eight graduate students). The sample comprised six male and eleven female travelers and the majority of the participants was between 21 and 30 years old, whereas four students were between 18 and 20 years old and one between 31 and 40. The oldest participant was between 71 and 80 years old. Everyone except two participants were from the US, however, all of them were currently living there. One participant was from China and another one from a Muslim majority country (see Table 3).

Table 3: Study Population

Number	Gender	Age Range	Country of Origin
111	Female	18-20	U.S.
112	Female	18-20	U.S.
113	Female	21-30	China
114	Male	61-70	U.S.
115	Male	21-30	Muslim majority country
116	Male	71-80	U.S.
117	Male	51-60	U.S.
118	Female	31-40	U.S.
119	Female	21-30	U.S.
120	Male	18-20	U.S.
121	Female	21-30	U.S.
122*			
123	Male	21-30	U.S.
124	Female	18-20	U.S.
125	Female	21-30	U.S.
126	Female	21-30	U.S.
127	Female	21-30	U.S.
128	Female	21-30	U.S.

*did not agree to join after initial confirmation

Source: own work.

3.3 Data Analysis

After transcribing all interviews with a word processing software as closely as possible to the participant's own words (true verbatim transcription) and collecting all field notes, all empirical material was uploaded to the software NVivo. It was used as a technological support, since this software aids in the interpretation of rich empirical material and helps to maintain an overview over multiple empirical data sources (Jennings, 2001).

All material was then read once in its entirety to ensure a high degree of familiarity with the data. Then, it was read again several times while annotating it and generating emerging themes. The material has been reviewed without any "a priori" theory or categories in mind and the researcher was focusing on what the empirical material revealed (Jennings, 2001). In fact, themes could not be defined before the study since the experience of a dual narrative tour is a new concept which had not been researched before.

The coding was carried out following Miles & Huberman's (1994) method. First, descriptive codes were formed which summarized a passage with one or a few words. As a second step, interpretive codes were constructed, allowing for deeper levels of interpretation of the available data. Moreover, pattern codes were established to identify the relationship between data, themes, and processes within the empirical material.

After the coding process, the emergent themes were tested and the categories were summarized in order to form main themes (Fox, 2004). Collective and individual themes that are characteristic of the experience have been identified by taking recurring topics from the answers of the participants and testing them to check whether anything could be subtracted or needed to be added in order to uncover the essence of this experience.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account by applying a deontological approach during the whole course of this research (Jennings, 2001). All participants were informed about the presence of a researcher along with details about the study and the possibility to contact the researcher before the trip. The participation in this research was completely voluntary and the advantages outweighed the disadvantages for the participants. Given the information-laden nature of the tour, being part of this research gave them an incentive for further reflectivity about their experience and an opportunity to process what they learned during the trip. All participants were asked to sign consent forms on the first day of the trip and had the right to withdraw at any time, as well as not to answer the questions. Moreover, they were aware that the interviews were recorded and consented to it by signing the consent form before as well as verbally in the first seconds of the recording. All data produced during the trip has been anonymized and all interviews were recorded and transcribed (see example in Appendix G). All participants were given the option to access the transcript of their interview, however, only one person asked for it.

The researcher was able to join the trip with a reduced price, but it remained a non-conditional research as no constraints or limits (topic, deliverables, time frame, etc.) were placed on the researcher by the tour operator or any other party involved in the trip.

4 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

Being the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data, the researcher holds a vital role in qualitative research (Merriam, 1997; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Furthermore, the researcher's biases, personal views, and background often influence the research process (e.g. choice of topic, research questions, analysis; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2013). This bias can be classified as a potential issue regarding the validity of the study (Johnson, 1997). Trustworthiness of the study can be achieved through bracketing procedures undertaken by the researcher (Ahern, 1999). All preexisting thoughts, beliefs and the researcher's perceptive are presented in this chapter as well as in the reflective diary which has been kept during the trip to differentiate the researcher's own experience from the analysis of the experience of the studied participants (see Appendix H). Bracketing is a self-reflective process which allows the researcher to recognize and set-aside her pre-existing knowledge and assumptions in order to be able to analyze the participants' responses adequately (Sokolowski, 2000; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; van Manen, 1990). In addition,

during the analysis the researcher wrote memos in order to be able to document how the interpretation evolved and how it was changed by different accounts (Cutcliffe, 2003; Finlay, 2002).

As a participant of the trip, the researcher attended all activities alongside with the subjects of the study. It was the researcher's first time in Israel/Palestine and experiencing a double-narrative tour in a contested area. Therefore, no previous experience could be compared to this, allowing for clearer distinction of this trip from previous ones of different natures. The researcher is not involved in any way with the tour operator nor the universities the participants are from except for measures and information related to this study.

Some factors influencing the researcher were her subjective understandings based on the fact that she is a 25-year-old female German tourism management student and professional, who grew up in a working middle class family in a suburban area in Germany. Raised in a sheltered environment with a Christian background, she has only theoretical knowledge about other religions that are of high importance in this case like Islam and Judaism.

Due to the fact that the researcher was a tourism professional, certain preconceptions towards the organization of a "good" trip were present. These include being on time, having a plan, and sticking to that plan without large iterations, informing the participants about meetings and speakers ahead in time as well as provide some background information, plus having a high standard of accommodation, food and meetings that is appropriate for the needs of the group.

However, the researcher also acknowledges cultural differences and idiosyncrasies. Not all cultures have the same values and travelling to another country means that these assumptions are challenged and might not be met or have a different focus there (Hofstede, 2003). Being from Germany, the researcher is used to firm structures and a certain degree of devotion to rules that are followed by the large majority of the population, while still feeling that everyone is able to exert power and have a say in current proceedings.

Moreover, the researcher is well travelled and has been to a variety of places before which were different from her home country in a variety of aspects. Having lived in four different countries for at least four months each has led the researcher to a high degree of adaptability and allowed for encounters with people from various cultures and with divergent beliefs or values. This might cause the researcher to be more at ease with travelling to contested places, as travelling in general and being away from familiar structures and places has been experienced before.

Albeit a very thorough knowledge, English is only the second language of the researcher but the first for almost all participants. Language is a very important factor in this analysis, since only the description of the experience can be analyzed. As a result, the same understanding needs to be ensured (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). This was done by asking probing questions whenever something was uncertain.

5 ANALYSIS

5.1 The Experience of a Dual Narrative Tour

5.1.1 Social Interaction

5.1.1.1 Seeing the Humans

“[A]lso the people I’ve met. Not only my group members, but our tour guides, and you know, some of our speakers, I’ll remember them. Because they leave a lasting impression.” (Participant 119). As can be seen through this quote, the interaction with other people was one major part of the experience of a dual narrative tour. Participants stated that for them, this was the most meaningful part of the trip. This can be seen for example in the nomination of the top three most meaningful moments of the trip. The dinners at a Jewish and a Muslim family as well as the stay with the Palestinian host families were most frequently mentioned by the participants (e.g. Participant 112, 116, 117, 121, 123, 126, 128). Other repeatedly mentioned experiences included the meetings with the various speakers, the visit to Yad Vashem as an essential part of the Israeli narrative, hearing the civil war in Syria in the Golan Heights and hiking Masada/floating in the Dead Sea.

The participants value getting a glimpse of a different lifestyle and culture: “I have never experienced the Muslim culture and [the dinner at Aziz's parents’ house] was such a great way to be a part of it” (Participant 112). Being with local families gave the participants a feeling of belonging: “not many people get to experience [a homestay with Palestinian family], it felt very individualized and gave us the opportunity to connect with a family and hear their stories in a more intimate setting” (Participant 128). The participants perceived these encounters as authentic and not staged, even though they partially were; especially the Sabbath dinner, since the family was part of an organization that regularly invites (paying) tourists to join these dinners. This confirms the notion that perceived authenticity depends on personal associations and feelings (Wang, 1999).

Sabbath dinner was another meaningful moment because the family welcomed us into their home and gave of us a taste of everyday life for Israelis. This is something that most people would not get to experience genuinely when travelling to the region if they did not have family there. It felt very comfortable, fun and I deeply appreciated seeing the family’s routine and experiencing something so special to them. Iftaar dinner with Aziz’s parents: very similar reasons as Sabbath, this night was so special with music and dinner, it felt very inclusive and I loved the feeling of celebration. (Participant 128)

It made them feel exceptional and included in the families to be invited to join their daily lives.

Moreover, it was special for the participants to receive first-hand information about the conflict and how the involved parties felt about it or what they dealt with on a daily basis: “getting an explanation from people who are oppressed daily and living with them is amazing” (Participant 112). They tried to pro-actively find out more about the conflict by questioning the host families: “I tried to poke and pry my host father, like ‘Do you like living here? Do you enjoy being in Bethlehem?’ And he just kind of looked at me and shrugged and smiled and he said: ‘It’s home.’” (Participant 125).

The homestay with an Arab Christian family was very impactful. I often forget that this conflict is not relegated to Muslims and Jews. I also had the opportunity to meet several of the extended family. They gave me some insight on how Palestinian view resistance differently in different cities based on factors such as economic opportunity. (Participant 123)

This caused them to realize that in contrast to their own perception, the current situation is normal for the locals.

I loved going and staying in the host family’s places in the West Bank. I think that was really beautiful and enriching in a way to really get to see what real people think and not spokespeople, you know. Cause as much as I love hearing from different groups and stuff, it’s not necessarily what the people think. So, that was really cool! [...] It helped gain a base level of understanding of how they actually live their lives. So, I really, really, really enjoyed the homestay! (Participant 121)

The homestay was one of the aspects the participants think they will remember after they return, indicating that the interaction with locals might indeed lead to memorable tourism experiences as discussed by Tung & Ritchie (2011). For instance, participant 112 stated: “I think I will remember the people that I met. Especially our guides, because they, they were just amazing and the host family too.” (Participant 112). Others confirmed this sentiment and mentioned the host families as their favorite moments (e.g. participant 113 and 128).

Joining this trip allowed the participants to see a human side to this conflict. By interacting with locals and experiencing authentic lifestyle, the experience got more tangible, causing the breakdown of mental walls build of prejudices (Pratt & Liu, 2015):

[A]lso, just a really good way to see their humanity and see you know that they live just the way that a lot of us live and it’s not, it just helped to break the barrier, thinking of them as “*the other*” or as a topic of study. (Participant 121)

They were now able to see the similarities and feel connected to others. For 118, participating in this trip was “definitely an expansion of the mind and just expanding your entire view on the middle east and looking at them as people and not whatever the media has projected onto you” (Participant 118). This statement showed that the participant reflected on what they went through and where their previous knowledge stemmed from.

Being in Israel/Palestine and meeting with all the speaker and other locals created a lasting relationship between the participants and the region. Participant 112, 118, 119 and 128 expressed their delight about being connected to locals via social media: “You know my host family, we’re friends on Facebook now. Which is really cool to me! I never thought in a million years that’d be me. That’s not something that would ever cross my mind.” (Participant 119). It was special for them because it was unforeseen. Unexpected events or situations are more likely to be remembered by the tourists (MacCannell, 1973). This relationship changed their lens when hearing about the conflict in the future. Knowing someone that might be affected by tragedy, changes the way they will think about breaking news.

5.1.1.2 Profiting from the Others

The interaction with the local population or the speakers were not the only aspects that were perceived as beneficial by the participants. The group itself, with all its manifold members, played a valuable part in shaping this experience (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003; Murphy, 2000). For example, the various group members added their own perspectives and conversations among them stimulated reflection on the experience. Participant 121 stated that talking to individual people or smaller groups helped to “get more out of the talks. Because other people would latch on certain things that that person said” (Participant 121), highlighting different points and bringing a varied perspective which can be attributed to the diverse backgrounds of the group members.

[J]ust like within this group! Like there [are] so many different values and ways and like this and that. But like we all work together and we’re all able to have this amazing experience together and I think you can look at all the different walks of life and all the different opinions [...] Like it’s kind of like, we’re all making it work, we all have respect for each other and I think a very important, broad picture. (Participant 124)

This is confirmed by several other participants, who also mention the positive atmosphere within the group: “But as far as the group goes, I’d have to say we’re a pretty stellar group! You know. We all get along fairly well, I’d say” (Participant 119).

Um, I think what I liked the most has been interaction within our group. The speakers have often worn me out. [...] with that, what has been most fresh for all of us, has been interaction with the students. The direct one-on-ones. Not the interaction with the speaker. Not the places. We’d seen all the places. I enjoy seeing the places, I love seeing the places, but connecting with the students was the biggest. (Participant 114)

Some participants even expressed the wish to keep in contact after the trip:

I hope that we are all able to stay in touch and still be connected because, like, I feel like the connections and relationships that I have made in, like, a week and a half are some

of the most pure connections that I've made. [...] I mean it's really been incredible, each person has brought something wonderful and refreshing to this entire group. And I don't think I could've asked for a better group of people to have been with. (Participant 125)

As participant 124 mentioned, not everyone in the group had the same experience and had the same takeaways from this trip (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016; J.-H. Kim et al., 2012; Ooi, 2006), confirming the heterogeneity and subjectivity of the tourism experience (Ryan, 2002). The participants further acknowledge that this experience would have been different if the group would have consisted of other people.

5.1.2 Learning

5.1.2.1 *Not a Usual Vacation*

For the majority of the participants it was the first time to visit Israel/Palestine and only four people already joined a trip to a contested area before. There are strong variations in regard to their frequency and extend of previous travel experience. For some participants it was the first time ever to travel outside the US: "I mean it's my first time travelling internationally, [...] I'm just blown away by how different things are" (Participant 118). Others have travelled frequently, but have not yet joined a trip to this area or with this setup: "I've never been on a trip like this before. Even though I've travelled, both domestically and internationally a lot, I've never been to this region of the world before" (Participant 126). Due to this reason, the participants display a varied degree of familiarity with travelling as well as with experiencing different cultures and countries. Several participants lived through a mild form of culture shock, but due to the brevity of the trip, they mostly remained in the honeymoon stage (Furnham & Bochner, 1986), where everything is still "new and super exciting" (Participant 128).

Due to the fact that the group travelling was composed of university students, the wish for expanding their knowledge on the region or on the conflict was one of the main reasons for joining this trip. "Wanting to understand the conflict from all sides" (Participant 121) or "Wanting to know more about the region" (Participant 113) have been listed as their motivation. Some even said that this was the sole reason for joining the trip and pointed out that this is what made this trip so different: "Oh, the learning experience! The whole reason I came!" (Participant 118). Apart from the learning experience, the participants listed several other reasons to go on this trip. These include for example the general setup of the trip with the dual narrative part. Others expressed the desire to view the touristic and religious sites in this area. Moreover, a general or more specific interest in the region or the conflict triggered them to join. Some described it as a unique or "once in a lifetime opportunity" (Participant 115 and 124) as they would not have been able or would not have wanted to come to this area on their own (e.g. Participant 112 and 115). This characterizes the novelty of the experience that the participants felt by joining this trip.

Despite claiming that the learning experience was the most important factor for coming on this trip, some participants were surprised that this was “not a vacation” (Participant 117, 120): “I mean this is a good trip by, like, all standards it’s a good trip, but I wouldn’t say... it’s not at all like a vacation” (Participant 111). Participant 117 stated that this is “not a Caribbean vacation on a Norwegian cruise ship” and that “it’s tough” despite having “nice accommodation” (Participant 117). On the other side, participant 121 talked about the day at Masada and the Dead Sea and how enjoyable that was but claimed that this “has nothing to do with what the trip is about” (Participant 121). The participant explains that this was “a fun thing” and they were supposed to “learn about multiple narratives” (Participant 121) instead. In contrast to this, some participants expressed their wish for more down time in order to reflect on the experience (e.g. Participant 113).

When considering Cohen’s modes of experiences, it becomes apparent that this experience was not recreational (i.e. mere entertainment) but rather experiential for the participants (Cohen, 1979). They were looking for an authentic experience in the life of others but stayed aware of their otherness while immersing themselves in the local culture. In this mode, the tourists might be deceived by staged experiences which they are unable to differentiate from true authenticity (MacCannell, 1973). This was also the case during this trip, as mentioned before (see chapter 5.1.1.1). The group was only able to see and experience the parts of the life and conflict that the tour operator, the locals or the speakers chose to reveal. Undoubtedly, this type of trip does offer a diverse range of perspectives and insights, however, it is impossible to present a genuinely authentic experience on a 15-day group trip. There will always be elements that are staged and full immersion is beyond the bounds of possibility. This realization did not hinder the participants from *feeling* immersed into the local culture after interacting with locals and spending a week in Jerusalem. The participant’s feeling of not really being a tourist was adding to the sentiment that this was not a usual vacation (e.g. Participant 111 and 128). Despite the questionable authenticity, this sensation proved very valuable to the participants, because they were able to gain a better understanding of the underlying notions by interacting with the local population (see chapter 5.1.1.1). This shows the potential of tourism to improve intercultural attitudes (Kelly, 2006b).

Meeting with the different speakers and hearing their first-hand accounts and specific standpoints was very valuable for the participants. They acknowledge that listening to the various narratives and personal stories made the conflict more relatable as well as memorable for them as it generated understanding for the others’ perspective (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

The thing I appreciate the most from the trip organizers perspective was that we got to talk to [the speakers] ... have a casual conversation instead of something that is really political, lecturing, in a professional way. But we were doing this very casually and we learned a lot from simple conversations. They were saying it in a very simple way, but we kind of have a clearer grasp of the hardship that the local Palestinian people were experiencing. (Participant 113)

The participant appreciated the simple language and conversations-like atmosphere when communicating with the speakers in comparison to usual lectures.

I've seen it in pictures, but I've never seen it in person. When you see something in a picture, it's just like 'yeah, ok, whatever'. It's a picture. But when you see it in person, it's a completely different story. 'Cause it hits you harder. (Participant 119)

Furthermore, they stated that being there in person changed how they viewed and are affected by the topics.

Both undergraduate and graduate students were part of this group and all participants had varied degrees of familiarity with the region and the topic in general. The graduate students took an introductory class to the conflict including some language lessons before coming on the trip to prepare themselves. The undergraduate students did not have a class and as a result, they displayed a mixed level of knowledge depending on their field of study. Several participants voiced that they would have liked to have a more profound knowledge about the subject beforehand:

I think it definitely would've helped just so I have, you know, if I had a class. On Israel/Palestine, because I would, you know, know more about what's going on. Just like the background. It's too complex to know everything. But like just to have that. (Participant 124)

Others claimed that knowing less would have been beneficial. In their opinion, not knowing any details about the conflict or the region would lead to a less prejudiced opinion and to an open mind regarding the speakers or events on-site (Participant 115). However, when looking at which group made which statement, it becomes apparent that those who already had an extensive background wished for less knowledge and the ones who did not exhibit any prior knowledge felt disadvantaged during the conversations with the speakers. They admitted feeling uneasy about the knowledge-gap and were hesitant to ask more basic questions:

A lot of times I found myself, there was no way I could have formulated the question some people just asked. You know like because and I can't even think of what, because I don't even know what we were talking... [...] 'Cause it's all new to me, which sometimes I feel like, I should have, there should have been a prep class. (Participant 124)

Therefore, this cannot give any indication on what would ultimately be more beneficial for the participants. Still, the comments by the undergraduate students imply that a similar background for all participants would add to the well-being of the participants with less knowledge on the topic.

Nonetheless, they admitted that this experience allowed them to learn a lot more than they would have ever learnt during a normal class in university: “You study [conflicts] in school and then you go and then you’re like well, that’s not what I read! [...] That reveals the complexity of actual lived reality. Which you don’t get in the ivory tower of academia.” (Participant 127). Participant 111 highlighted the difference of being on-site and receiving first-hand information as compared to a classroom: “It’s a very different understanding from like the classroom kind of learning, to physically be there and almost like feel the tension of all of it with some people.” (Participant 111).

This conflict, this land... like I said, you can learn about it in your class, but once you get here and you’re like what? This in an actual giant wall! When you see it and then you see that, what these certain people have to go through or what they’ve been through. I mean that’s like... it’s incredible! (Participant 125)

Having the opportunity to experience this style of learning is highly appreciated by the participants.

5.1.2.2 Seeing the Bias

Facilitating the contact between locals and tourists encouraged cross-cultural exchange and promoted cultural understanding (Kim et al., 2007; Pratt & Liu, 2015; Var & Ap, 1999; WTTC, 2016). Having this experience caused the participants to reflect on themselves, making them aware of the differences between their home countries and Israel/Palestine but also highlighting the similarities. This brought the conflict “closer to home” (Participant 117), thus letting them connect to the place at another level while being able to contemplate on their own life from a different perspective (Turner & Ash, 1975):

[J]ust from like... seeing people, how normal they are despite how... what their situation is, going to Jerusalem and seeing kids play. But then, just walking around in Jerusalem, walking around in settlements, despite the danger that they’re in, the threat, how normal everything just seems to them and their kids are playing in the streets and everyone is shopping and talking and smiling. It is, I think, everyone can have that kind of experience ... but just how normal everything looks. Even the meeting with the Druze men... He looked like someone who would stop by where I work and talk to me. He looked like a farmer from where I’m from! So just, yeah, I guess that’s what really got me. (Participant 124)

The normality of these situations surprised the participants as they did not expect to encounter so many similarities. It also allowed them to draw parallels to conflicts they witness in their home countries. Participant 118 talks about how there are basically the same struggles in the US as there are in Israel/Palestine:

[A] lot of the times I find myself thinking about where I live and just America in general and even though they are entirely different worlds, I don't see too much of a difference in the actions that are taken. I see acts of violence against children, acts of violence against women, men trying to control women... [...] I don't see this conflict being much different comparing to the one in our own backyards. (Participant 118)

This demonstrates how this trip exposed the interconnectivity of both worlds to the participants and encouraged them to reflect on what they experienced and heard.

Apart from learning about the conflict and the area, the participants were also able to learn something about themselves, their values and biases by accepting the perceived differences as an opportunity for growth (Askjellerud, 2003). Participant 111, for example, declares to have personally grown achieving things they did not think possible before, eventually leaving them empowered:

I feel that I have really grown as a person. Before this trip I actually broke down and was really scared to go. [...] I feel more empowered. I did so much on this trip that I had never really expected to do. (Participant 111)

However, the self-analysis did not only render positive results as the participants were made aware of their privileges and biases (see chapter 5.1.2.2). They recognized the difficulty of keeping an open mind in light of their prejudices:

You know, people are gonna say things you don't like, people are gonna do things that you don't like and you don't agree with. But you just kind of have to have a backbone to an extent and not get offended. You know, not take it personally. (Participant 119)

So, I think that's also a process for me, trying to really figure out like what I agree with and what I don't agree with. That's a valuable lesson in life too. You do not always have to agree with the person you're talking to. Cause not everyone's gonna agree. (Participant 124)

The participants reflected on their take-aways and on how they will be able to use this experience in the future.

In addition, they voiced their struggle about not wanting to act upon their own biases despite being confronted with opposing viewpoints:

I think that kind of comes back to not judging before you actually really experience something. Which is a very hard thing to do because you read things and you hear things and you think you have an idea, which obviously that's what you're gonna do. You not just gonna come in blindly in this situation. And you can't just not have opinions about certain things but also be open mind to change. Because a lot of times when you learn other things, your beliefs change and I think that's kind of hard to do. (Participant 124)

Apart from these struggles, the participants acknowledged that their individual backgrounds influenced the experience they were having by redirecting their focus when looking at different subjects and moments. For example, participant 118 and 119 talked about their Christian perspective and how important the religious sites were to them personally. They admit that they might have placed higher value to the “Holy Land” aspect of the tour, compared to other, less religious participants (e.g. participant 118, 119, 125). Moreover, others, like participant 113, recognized how their subject of study influenced the questions they asked during the sessions with the speakers and how everyone else in the group placed their focus on other topics instead because they study something other than they do:

I think, probably because of this background, I’m more focused on the economy and the financial side of things when I’m here, participating in this trip. I know it’s not very much talked about. Not very much covered by speakers or sites visits, but I did ask some of the speakers some questions in this regard. (Participant 113)

The participant also mentions that they paid attention to the environment around them, recognizing things the others would not notice, like banks, who were relevant for their economic focus but do not usually receive attention (Participant 113).

Not only the religious or academic background of the participants shaped this experience, but also their previous ones as well as the information received before the trip (Braun-LaTour et al., 2006). Having been in a similar situation before triggered memories and created a connection to the situation, like in the case of participant 119:

I guess my opinion could be biased in that too because, you know, my mother and father in law, they lost their son, my fiancé. So, when it comes to that, I have a bleeding heart for [the two fathers from the Parents Circle]. Because it’s like, I don’t know what it’s like, but in my day-to-day life, I experience it though them. (Participant 119)

Or participant 117:

[...] since I’m the father of an almost 19-year-old girl, when I hear a father talking about his daughter being killed, it just undoes me. [...] that’s really tough. You know, when you have the conflict brought right up close to you. (Participant 117)

Both report being reminded of situations in their past or people in their current life. This lets them relate to the locals and relive the previous experience.

By interacting with the locals, the participants had to face their own biases and the preconceptions that they had about the area and the conflict as well as different religions and cultures in general. In their daily lives, they choose who to talk to; this was not possible during this trip. They had to leave their own comfort zone in order to face the various narratives on-site. Some of them resonated with their beliefs, others did not and were

consequently challenged by the social interaction. One participant stated that the lack of influence on the choice of speakers has been beneficial for them:

I am usually a person to travel by myself. And I meet people and talk to them, you know, in similar ways as this, but it's not usually facilitated and I'm not... So, ... I have a lot of control of who I talk to. So, it is very possible that I, like, self-select who I wanna talk to and kind of what I'll hear or what I wanna hear. And I don't have the opportunity to do this here – which is a good thing. (Participant 123)

By mentioning this, the participant showed a large degree of reflection on how their bias guided their actions in the past. The participants are able to relate to the conflicting parties by realizing that admitting being wrong, even just to oneself is a difficult thing to do:

Um, it's been frustrating hearing people's questions sometimes. Not because I think they're dumb questions, but I just, ... I am starting to see my own biases. When I, ... with the reactions that I am having to people's questions... Not even just the response or the things that the presenters say. Um, and I think it's making me more self-aware. So, I can't put a price tag on that. That's been very beneficial. Um, because as much as I think that, like, people involved in this conflict have not been open-minded. It also reminds me that I'm not completely open-minded or unbiased either. (Participant 123)

They were able to identify personal shortcomings and see how this posed a challenge to the locals as they personally experienced the struggle of not judging others while their prejudices play out in front of them. Therefore, provoking the participants to reflect on their own biases was a very important part of this trip. It can be considered as a strategy to create a better world since attitudes can only be changed if there is awareness about it in people's mind (Askjellerud, 2003; Nyaupane et al., 2008). As participant 118 described, only understanding can eventually lead to peace:

I enjoyed [listening to the speakers] because it expands my learning and understanding of who thinks this way, why. 'Cause that's how barriers are gonna be broken, that's how bridges are gonna be mended, eventually, someday... Is understanding the other side from the extreme to the extreme, left and right. That's how it's really solved, that's how any conflict is solved. Is understanding. Even with just you and I, if we had a problem, we would have to talk it out and I would have to understand how you, why you did what you did or said what you said or whatever and vice versa. We'd have to, like, understand each other in order to forgive, in order to make peace. (Participant 118)

This trip allowed for insights that the participants were trying to generalize to the whole area. They discovered that understanding can be seen as the key to this conflict as well as conflicts in general. Moreover, they realized that all stories and perspectives need to be heard in order to comprehend a conflict.

5.1.2.3 *Spreading the Knowledge*

When asked about which parts of the experience they consider worth sharing, the most common answer was “everything” (e.g. participant 111, 119, 120, 121). Nonetheless, this experience also led to the insight that some things have to be experienced to be understood and cannot simply be retold:

I mean it’s kind of like describing a roller coaster ride. Either you’re on a roller coaster and you experience being on a roller coaster or you’re not. And all you can say is you go in a car, you go up really high and then you come down really fast. But you can’t really explain what that is, you sort of have to do it. (Participant 117)

After this realization, they expressed the wish that more people get to experience the same kind of trip (e.g. participant 113, 118, 125):

[T]he most important thing is changing perspectives. And encouraging people to take trips. Encouraging people to go see for themselves. Don’t take my word for it. I wouldn’t want to be only told that you take someone’s word for it. I would want this exact experience. So, go get that. ‘Cause you need it. You need to understand how this is really going down. You need to understand [...] other nations and how they live and how they either coexist or having a conflict and how they’re going about it. (Participant 118)

This statement underlines the desire to have others experience exactly this in order to understand the situation on-site.

And that was one of the motives of me even thinking about this trip was I would love to get a first-hand experience and hear something or hope that oh this is a reliable – THE most reliable source. I’m walking right in the trenches. Right near the minefields, right where these people are, talking to them directly, understanding what they’re going through. Living with them. Living amongst them and understanding it. (Participant 118)

This argument is further strengthened by participant 118, claiming to be “the most reliable self” for oneself.

Wanting to make others aware of the diversity of the place and that it does not only consist of the conflict was another commonly mentioned sentiment: “I think I... there’s more to this than... honestly, it’s almost... any sane person can understand there is so much to this” (Participant 125). However, they voiced their concern about being able to actually get others to listen or understand what they experienced. Despite *wanting* to share the complete experience, people at home might only “[want] to hear one sentence” (Participant 127). Relatives and friends might be oblivious to the conflict in general and therefore unable to understand the complexity of it:

A lot of my friends are not in the same field [of study] as me, so I don't think they would realize first of all that there is any conflict in the region, let alone how complex and ongoing it is right now. (Participant 121)

This is intensified by the fact that knowledge oftentimes equals power but it is also a burden for the receiver that they might not be willing or able to handle: "it's difficult. I think everything is worth sharing, I just, I know that I'll go home and I'll deal with certain people, there're just some things that they're not ready to hear about" (Participant 123).

Your uncle at thanksgiving just wants to hear one sentence of your experience. Like doesn't really care to know more. Cause it's challenging. It's challenging to know more and it's a burden to know more. A burden a lot of people don't want to carry. (Participant 127)

Knowing more details and gaining deeper insights about a certain event or conflict turns the spectator into a "witness" of it (Participant 111). This sense of responsibility left the participants feeling guilty about not being able to do something:

If you're going and you see something that you think is wrong, and you say nothing, then you are part of that, you are part of the responsible party [...] if you see something that is not right, then it's no longer on someone you read about, then it's on you! (Participant 111)

Due to these barriers, the participants were hesitant about how they can use the knowledge they gained during this trip in the future. Several participants (e.g. 111, 118, 123) even declared that they would purposively keep some information from their peers. Not only because the others might not understand or want to hear about it, as mentioned above, but also to keep them from being worried and to avoid (emotionally) disturbing them: "As far as my kids go, I won't tell them about the two incidents that involve violence. [...] And only because I don't want them to worry about me. I wanna shelter them from the situation" (Participant 118). This highlights the complexity of the situation and this experience in general and points out the difficulty the participants perceived when trying to handle it.

5.1.3 Confusion

Confusion is a very central and reoccurring theme of the experience and can be classified as one of the main attributes of a dual narrative tour. Primarily, the participants describe a general sense of confusion concerning the conflict. They have a varied amount of base knowledge and listening to the stories either allowed them to add more perspectives to their understanding or even to just gain a basic idea of what the conflict is about. This led to different levels of confusion, but it did rattle all of them. During the interviews, the participants voiced their concern about not being able to determine which side is right after hearing both narratives: "I feel a lot more confused. Originally, I really only knew/supported

the Palestinians. Now, I don't know even how I feel. Let alone an opinion on how to solve the conflict. I feel less scared though.” (Participant 111). Therefore, it becomes apparent that the trip did not present the participants with a predefined solution to the conflict but rather raised more questions instead.

The participants mention that listening to one speaker and their personal story caused their sympathies to shift towards that respective party - and back to the other when hearing their narrative in return:

[E]verything is so pleasant, everything is so nice and everyone is like... it's just like back home. And you just think, how, you know, how could... you want these people to... you want something better of these people. They're all so friendly and nice. And then you go to the refugee camp and you see well, they didn't want this, they didn't deserve to be stuck here because their grandparents wanted their land back. Doesn't seem fair. But then you go to, you know, a settlement, [...] and you see the kids running around and you know, they're all having fun and it looks just like home again! And how could anyone ask these people to leave? They're so happy and so here, so, seeing these things for real just makes it even more complicated! (Participant 120)

Being exposed to several parties involved in the conflict made the participants aware that everyone concerned actually is a human with similar needs and wishes as them. Having a firm opinion on who is “right” became more difficult as everything got “a little hazier, a little greyer in terms of the sides and the conflict” (Participant 120).

For them, this trip allowed for a balanced view of the both sides and also added other perspectives to the whole construct that they had not previously considered (Participant 113). This caused it to become “multi narrative” instead of just “dual”. As expressed by participant 127: “not everyone experiences being Palestinian the same way. Palestinian does not equate Muslim, does not equate religious, Israeli does not equate Jewish, does not equate religious.” (Participant 127). Therefore, the conflict cannot only be seen as Israel vs. Palestine, instead all the other points of view have to be additionally contemplated on (Participant 117). This realization altered the way some of the participants view the world.

Another source of confusion for the participants is their image of the destination, as their expectations or assumptions are often not being met. These prejudices are frequently induced by the media in their home countries (Park & Santos, 2017). How the media displayed the conflict or the area is what they expect to find on-site (Dunn, 2006; Rittichainuwat, 2005; Santos, 2004, 2006). Participant 119 expressed not knowing anything about the region

[e]xcept for what you see on the media, which is just like terrorists and all this other stuff that's negative. You have a very negative view of Israel. And so now my view of Israel, it's a beautiful place, it's peaceful, the people are kind and welcoming. (Participant 119)

This statement uncovers their change of perception regarding Israel from only negative associations to a positive and pro-active attitude. Later in the interview the participant mentioned that they would “move here” (Participant 119), underlining the profoundness of the change.

Apart from the media, the social environment at home influences the image that the participants hold of the destination. For example, participant 111 and 112 mentioned being discouraged from joining this trip by their families because they considered it too dangerous. Others even almost let their prejudices prevent them from joining and had to realize that their fear was unsubstantiated and that instead of becoming “a less positive and hopeful person” after witnessing violence and hate, the participant felt “more empowered” (Participant 111).

The group did get a glimpse of the violence and ferocity that this conflict entails when they heard bombs being dropped on the other side of the border in the Syrian Civil War and when a police officer as well as two Palestinians were killed just a few streets away from the hotel where the group was staying.

To be able to hear a civil war going on... you read about, you see on the television or on the internet. You... it's a news item and when you hear the explosions, you realize oh my god! That's the war right there. So, that's something I'll definitely remember! (Participant 117)

This quote highlights the emotions felt by the participant after having heard the Civil War in Syria. Nonetheless, this did not have a negative impact on the experience. From the interviews as well as from observing the participants, they did not (openly) reflect this part of the experience as much as they did for example the homestay. This signifies that there is a need for more facilitated reflection in order to allow them to process negative parts of the experience that they would otherwise like to repress.

Considering the confusion about their image of the destination, the participants described the experience as “thought-provoking” (Participant 119) because they were able to see the authentic life of locals and witness some of the hardships they are facing every day in person (see chapter 5.1.1.1). Participant 111 gives an account of their emotions related to listening to the locals that has been mirrored by other participants:

The stuff we're seeing is kind of like hard to grasp and hard to understand at times. So, at the end of the day you can come back and you're like really wiped because it's just... the reality that these people live in, I can't even, ... you know imagine 24/7, like we're only here for you know a certain period of time, and it's this people's reality. Like not having access to a city that's like 20 minutes away, not having water, electricity and it just... it impacts the trip in a very special way. Because personally I'm ok. Like inside, body intact, not sick, but I think mentally, sometimes it's hard because of everything you are seeing. But I'm glad that I am seeing it. Like really, really glad because I feel like it's

something you'll never forget which is different from like an average vacation.
(Participant 111)

In spite of it being difficult to listen to the stories, they appreciated getting to hear them since this was a unique opportunity.

To be able to combat the confusion induced by this trip, the participants would have liked the experience to include more facilitated, reflective conversations among the group members. This could be used to exchange personal perspectives on the presented narratives and help the individuals to process the information and impressions they gained. Eventually leading to a more profound experience as reflection and processing are needed in order to have a positive recollection of the experience (Friedl, 2014).

So far, I feel like the way to explain it would be to say it's pretty profound because there's been a lot to, like, kind of, if you are a dry sponge and you go into a big heaping pile of water; to absorb it all in one sitting is, like, impossible. So, you're digesting all of it and trying to fully understand what's going on from all these different perspectives and narratives. It's really intense but at the same time it's very thought provoking.
(Participant 119)

Processing all the different perspectives requires time and cannot be achieved immediately (van Manen, 1990). Some of the participants, like participant 112, were already aware of this and stated that "this is one of these experiences in trips that will continue to be digested and thought about for years" (Participant 112). The majority, however, solely pointed out that they would have liked some more time and opportunities of reflection during the trip in order to fully comprehend the experience.

I've definitely learned a lot and it will take me a while to figure out how much, like what I've learned and how to process it. Because I don't necessarily feel like I've had a lot of time to process. It's one of those things where I feel like I knew enough to understand what people are saying but I don't know enough to understand what isn't being said.
(Participant 126)

I find myself having a lot of things going around in my head because I haven't had that background. Obviously, it's important to know about all that, but that's not where my focus was, so sometimes I feel like we should have been prepared, maybe more. Like there should have been requirements before you could come on the trip like I don't know.
(Participant 124)

This participant introduced the idea of having to fulfill certain requirements to be allowed to join this trip in order to ensure being able to process and get the most out of it.

The confusion experienced during this trip led to diverse emotions for the participants; they mention being angry, frustrated, overwhelmed, confused and much more (e.g. 111, 117,

124). However, they also expressed feeling hopeful after hearing some stories that they consider as “beautiful resistance” (Participant 115 and 121). Moreover, several participants indicate being thankful: Thankful for the religious experience and for feeling more connected to god (Participant 125); thankful for the guidance of the professors on this trip (Participant 127); thankful for being on this trip and what they learned about themselves through this (Participant 115).

Adding to the confusion are the physical hardships of this trip. Being in Israel/Palestine was challenging due to the hot weather on the one hand and the setup of the trip on the other. Trying to fit as many narratives as possible in one day was tiring for the participants. Some mentioned a feeling of exhaustion (e.g. Participant 111, 114, 117 and 128) and being overwhelmed by all the impressions they gained from the speakers (Participant 112, 124). In addition, this trip was emotionally challenging for the participants. Listening to the locals caused them to get emotional, especially when the stories provoked personal memories (see e.g. participant 117). Being able to relate to the stories that were told created a stronger connection and sense of resemblance.

5.2 Differences in the Experiences

This research revealed some attributes that are common in all of the participants’ accounts. These can be considered as the essence of this experience since they are at its core and nothing can be deducted from it without altering the experience. All of them valued the social interaction with the locals and the groups, and everyone gained knowledge about the group, the conflict and the area (see chapter 5.1.2). In addition, they all learned something about themselves, even though they displayed varying degrees of reflectivity in the interviews. Furthermore, each participant expressed that they were confused about their perception of the destination, the conflict and their personal preferences.

However, the overall experiences of the participants still varied, sometimes even significantly. This can be attributed to the fact that all of the participants have their very own backgrounds that affect how they perceive the same situation. Alternative past experiences and differences in their political, religious or social background (e.g. different home countries or states) all influenced their overall experience (Braun-LaTour et al., 2006). This can be seen as a confirmation of the heterogeneity of the experience as described by Ryan (2002).

From the interviews, four subgroups of experiences were classified. One of them was the professors who mentioned the responsibility they had as one of the major influences that shaped their experiences. Moreover, they had the most knowledge and previous experience about the area and the conflict. Due to this reason, the intensity with which they experienced the events on-site varied significantly from that of the other participants. Instead of learning about the conflict, the professors focused on the learning process and well-being of the students. However, they still expressed the same emotions and valued the encounters with

the locals in the same way the students did, just to a different degree (Participant 114 and 117). Thereby validating the essence of the experience.

Another noticeable difference in the experiences stems from variations in their religious backgrounds. The religious affiliation of the members of this group consisted of Christians, Jewish, Muslim, and Atheist. For the more religious participants, travelling to the “Holy Land” constituted a unique opportunity and they derived meaning from it in another way as the less religious tourists did. They valued visits to the sights higher than others and placed less focus on learning about the conflict than to follow their religious roots. Nonetheless, they still learned about the area and themselves. Discovering that the religious sites are “more of a spectacle” (Participant 119) than anything else was disappointing and unexpected (Participant 119).

As mentioned in chapter 5.1.2, there was a difference in the background knowledge that the students exhibited. The graduate students mostly studied subjects related to conflicts: Human Rights or Security. In addition, they all visited a class preparing them for this trip which included information on the conflict, the current situation, culture and language (Participant 127). The undergraduate students, however, all had different academic backgrounds, only a few with subjects related to this area or conflicts in general. Moreover, they did not have any preparatory class before joining this trip. These two are the remaining subgroups. Whereas the graduate students were able to use this trip in order to gain deeper knowledge on the topic, the undergraduates had to acquire a basic level of knowledge first. In contrast to the graduate students who were able to ask advanced questions, they often did not dare to ask anything in fear of sounding unintelligent (Participant 124).

When looking at these subgroups, it becomes apparent that factors such as the participants’ background play a significant role in shaping the tourism experience. This is confirmed when looking at the literature. As an experience does not only consist of the lived experience on-site, but also comprises the time before and after (see the stages of the tourism experience, Figure 1; Clawson & Knetch, 1971). Therefore, it is not surprising to find that the experiences vary according to the participants’ background and depend on the information they received beforehand (Braun-LaTour et al., 2006).

5.3 Comparison with MEJDI’s Mission

Looking at the distilled essence of this experience it can be said that it is in line with the mission of the company. The social interaction during this trip created a personal connection between the participants and the locals as well as the area (see chapter 5.1.1.1). Staying in host families and getting to experience their daily life was found to be very meaningful for the participants. They highly appreciated this unique opportunity as it made the conflict become a reality instead of just a fictional story from a book or the news. Creating this kind of connection is one of the main goals of MEJDI as described on their website (MEJDI Tours, 2017a). Furthermore, this trip achieved the aim of “expanding [the] minds” (MEJDI

Tours, 2017a) of the tourists. They did not only learn about the various narratives that are present in Israel/Palestine, but were also able to reflect upon their own actions and biases (see chapter 5.1.2.2; Turner & Ash, 1975).

One of the founders described MEJDI's ability to highlight the interconnectedness in the world as one major advantage of the company:

When you choose MEJDI, you're choosing to see more than sites, you're choosing to tap into one of the world's best kept secrets: that we are all connected by shared values that cross cultures, languages, religions, nationalities, and ethnicities-and that there is far more that unites us than separates us. (Cooper, n.d.)

Participants of the trip realized that, despite what they heard in the media or from their peers, Israel/Palestine is actually less different compared to their home countries. This caused them to realize this aforementioned interconnectedness and unity of the world. Participant 120, for example, stated that one of the Druze speakers "looked like a farmer from where I'm from!" (Participant 120). Their reaction showed the surprise and excitement that this similarity in an unexpected place caused. The following quote by participant 118 displayed a great deal of reflection on the subject:

So. Um. That's just a reoccurring though I've been having: This isn't that much different to home. It really isn't. And we think these people are almost alien-like to how they act when it's not that way at all. [...] definitely an expansion of the mind and just expanding your entire view on the middle east and looking at them as people and not whatever the media has projected onto you. (Participant 118)

The participants realized that they have to take caution and reflect on what the media projects about a destination in the future. This is also one of MEJDI's goals as they wish to portray an accurate image of the destination.

On the first day of the trip, the guide told the group that he intended to make things more complicated for them, that his goal was to confuse them. He declared that if they believe to know everything in the end, he would have failed. The objective of this trip is to cause confusion, since this cannot be considered an easy problem (Appendix H). By looking at the participants accounts, this is clearly the case. All of them stated that they came out of the trip with less determination on what they are supposed to believe because both sides presented valid arguments:

I think obviously it is very important to hear all the different narratives, but sometimes it can be very confusing. [...] At times it was just very confusing to hear their side and their beliefs and they're so passionate and they think they're right, they believe they're right, that's how they live their life. And it's like how can there be two completely different sides. Because there's – I don't even know whether there is a right or wrong because it's so complex. But how can both of these people think they are right? (Participant 124)

I can't say it changed my opinion. I still am more in the Palestinian corner than I am in the Israeli corner, but I am...I guess it makes you feel a little bit more, ... it's a little bit more difficult to account of yourself. You know, I'm not saying it's impossible, and I don't know if I'll ever have the chance to help change things. But it just seems, it makes everything a little more complicated. But again, that's the whole point our guide was trying to get at. But, I guess that's what I would say. Everything is a little hazier, a little greyer in terms of the sides and the conflict. (Participant 120)

From these quotes, the confusion of the participants becomes apparent. However, being able to make statements like the ones above signifies that they already were able to reflect on what they experienced and draw their own conclusions from it, even if that conclusion is that they are confused. This large degree of reflectivity on the subject, as can also be seen in the following statement by participant 111: "I have no idea how to solve the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. And that's okay. It's all about learning, growth and awareness" (Participant 111). Which shows that they were looking beyond the apparent experiences and were trying to gain deeper insights from this trip.

When considering the compiled essence of the experience of a dual narrative tour, there is no theme that is not compatible with the mission of MEJDI Tours. Not all parts are explicitly mentioned by the company, but they are not contrary to the mission. For example, the fact that the participants struggled with the question of how to use the knowledge they gained during this trip (see chapter 5.1.2.3), showed that the participants were analyzing this experience and did not simply drift through it. There is more to this experience than what MEJDI promotes, since the participants do not only learn about the conflict and the destination in general but also about themselves.

6 ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Essence of the Experience

This trip constituted a special experience for the participants as it was intrinsically different compared to their previous travel experiences and also different from what they expected it to be (see chapter 5.1.2.1). The experience of a dual narrative tour is composed of several essential factors without which it would not have been the same experience. These seven aspects could be found in the descriptions made by all participants. The findings revealed three larger themes that were crucial for this experience: Social Interaction, Learning and Confusion. Within the social interaction theme, two subthemes (Seeing the Humans and Profiting from the Others) could be identified and learning could be divided into three further subthemes (Not a Usual Vacation, Seeing the Bias and Spreading the Knowledge).

By taking part in this alternative tourism program, the participants were able to connect with the destination on a deeper level compared to the way a recreational tourist would and their quest to find authenticity elsewhere places it in an experiential mode (Cohen, 1979). MEJDI's unique multi perspective setup of the trip allowed for the interaction as well as the establishment of a connection between the local population and the tourists. Being able to see the human side of the conflict was an essential part of this experience. These interactions led the participants to relate to the different parties involved in the conflict by witnessing their daily life and hardships. Seeing how "normal" these situations were for the local population, the participants realized that the locals' needs and desires were not much different from their own situation at home (e.g. participant 120, 118, 125; see chapter 5.1.1.1). This gave the participants a more real and more human aspect to the conflict which made it harder for them to ignore the overall problem and to act like it was not of concern to them, as they could identify more easily with the locals.

Moreover, the participants discovered that being part of a group was beneficial to their experience as it helped them to process what they lived through (see chapter 5.1.1.2). All this was not perceived as a usual vacation by the participants. It was not purely recreational but did still hold some diversionary elements, especially towards the end of the trip (see Table 1). Nonetheless, the learning experience was at the forefront of this experience. This was a novel and unique experience for the participants (e.g. participant 113, 117, 121).

Concerning the learning aspect of the experience, it becomes apparent that the participants who already had a high level of knowledge would have preferred to know less in order to diminish the effect this previous knowledge had on their experience. In contrast to this, participants with only very little background knowledge would have preferred to know more in order to not appear clueless compared to other group members. This shows that being part of a group offers an opportunity for comparison, it can be beneficial, for example, when it aids in processing difficult or complex situations by being able to hear how others perceived it. However, it also has a negative aspect when one's experience is perceived as being less meaningful than the experience of others. In that case, it is the organizers responsibility to highlight the heterogeneity of experiences and the fact that each one of them is unique as well as perceived differently by every individual but nonetheless identically valid and meaningful (Ryan, 2002).

Not only the background related to the knowledge about the conflict, was relevant in shaping the participants experience; tourist experiences always have to be considered in the context of the participant's life and beliefs in general. Therefore the participants' field of study, religious affiliation, social background and previous experiences equally had an impact on how they derived meaning from this dual narrative tour (Willson et al., 2013).

By being a part of this trip, the participants did not only learn about the area and the conflict but were actually able to reflect on their own understandings. They became aware of their own biases by being confronted to opposing points of view and their own reaction

to them. This caused the participants to realize that they have not been completely open-minded and draw parallels to the conflict and how the locals are not open to other perspectives either. All participants expressed the desire to share this experience but did not know how, especially since they uncovered that experiences like this would need to be lived through in person in order to have a chance to understand it (see chapter 5.1.2.3). According to them, further barriers of understanding for their social groups at home would be the general lack of interest and the inability to allow for other, divergent perspectives.

This trip did not present the participants with a solution to the conflict since this was never MEJDI's intention. Instead the goal was to confuse them by highlighting different perspectives and demonstrating the interconnectedness of the world (MEJDI Tours, 2017a). Listening to the wide range of perspectives presented during the trip caused some participants to change their perception of the area and alter their opinion about the conflict. Others hold on to their point of view but claim that everything got "a little greyer" (Participant 120). This research is unable to determine which change is permanent; further studies would be necessary to investigate this. Whether this experience really results in attitude changes in the participants remains questionable and could only be determined by conducting a follow-up research after the trip.

In spite of being confused, the participants discovered that their media induced image of the destination might not be accurate; for example, being Palestinian does not equate being a terrorist (Participant 111, 115, 119 and 121). Now they have a personal connection to the area and whenever something will be presented in the media in the future, they might compare it to what they have experienced during this trip, question the narrative and uncover what might not be presented (e.g. participant 113, 118, 127 and 128). Moreover, from now on, in the participants' minds, Israel/Palestine is not only a distant place of conflict but a home to real people with whom they shared a meal and the warmth of a house. By joining this trip, they became a part of the story, "a witness" (Participant 111), compelling them to take action.

When considering the above mentioned factors, it can be concluded that the meaning attributed to this experience is in line with MEJDI's mission of "connecting the world through travel" (MEJDI Tours, 2017a). All the attributes are compatible with the objectives of the company and can be utilized in advancing the product that MEJDI offers to their clients. Despite the discovered similarities of this experience, there are also important differences that show that the insights generated in the study are not generalizable beyond this group as they depend on the people that are part of the trip. A different group would signify a different experience as the interactions would not be the same. The backgrounds highly influence how situations are perceived and at which magnitude (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormicks, 2012; Ooi, 2006). If the experience resonates with the participants previous experiences and thus reminds them of something, it might be more profound than for others (Willson et al., 2013).

Though not taking the reflection phase into consideration, the essence of the experience of a dual narrative tour exhibits important attributes of a memorable tourism experience and will most likely remain in the consciousness of the participants for a long term (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). As confirmed by Zhang, Wu, & Buhalis (2017) memorable tourism experiences also result in a higher revisit intention and ameliorate the image of the destination. This might positively influence the overall image of the destination as all tourists taking part in this experience become some kind of ambassador of their own experiences (Wohlmuth & Wintersteiner, 2014). As stated during the interviews, most participants are planning on sharing everything they experienced, creating a new form of coverage on this conflict and the destination for their community.

Despite being unable to bring by an absence of war through these trips, MEJDI's approach of dual narrative tours has the potential to create a more peaceful world by initiating change on a small scale. It contributes to the formation of positive peace at the destination, for example, by offering the locals an opportunity to share their stories as well as be confronted to the opposing views and the questions of the audience. Through this, they might become more open to different perspectives, even those that are very much in contrast with their own beliefs. However, this is only the case when managed well and with enough care (Becken & Carmignani, 2016). In addition to this, the trips generate an economic benefit for the region (Ap & Var, 1990) which might ameliorate their personal situation and increase their satisfaction with their lives. Moreover, the "ambassadors" (i.e. previous tour participants) help to spread the knowledge about the real situation at the destination, correcting the image that the world might hold of it and raising awareness about the struggles. The participants themselves return home with the consciousness of similarities that can be found throughout the world as well as being more self-aware. From this trip, they learned that they need to question the perception they have of an area and groups of people, as it might not be valid. The findings highlight the need for fostering understanding and respect as well as reflecting on one's personal biases to be more open and receiving to the stories of others, since everyone has to "understand each other in order to forgive, in order to make peace" (Participant 118). This alternative form of tourism holds less barriers of contact than other types of tourism (Tomljenovic & Faulkner, 2000), thus allowing for the creation of understanding through contact. Comprehending the meaning of the provided tourism experience can potentially contribute to the sustainability of a destination by enabling visitors to become ambassadors as well as return visitors.

In the beginning of the trip, the guides admitted their own bias and encouraged the participants to do the same and always question the perspective of the speakers. Furthermore, the guides confessed to act out some of the conversations within the dual narrative dialogue among them. This was due to the fact that they were more liberal in reality but wanted to display the conflict from a mainstream point of view. The participants did not mind this as barely anyone mentioned this point in the interviews. Instead, they praised the authenticity of the experience that they were able to witness. Still, the question that remains is how

authentic acting out one perspective can be, as this presentation would be influenced by the stereotypes that the guide uses to illustrate his point. However, when considering the circumstances, this seemed to be a legitimate way for doing this and it did provide the tourists with sufficient insights for them to acquire a basic understanding of the genuine situation at the destination, in comparison to the image projected by the media.

All in all, this experience was very meaningful for the participants; and they claim that it will not be easily forgotten (e.g. Participant 111, 123, 124). To answer the question “What does this experience mean for the participants?”, the following must be mentioned: This experience allows for personal connections and a large degree of self-reflection and awareness brought by the interaction within the group and with the locals. It challenged the participants’ perception of Israel/Palestine and opened their mind towards others, making them realize the interconnectedness of the world by seeing that this is not that different compared to the situation in their home countries (e.g. Participant 118, 120). The main attributes of this experience are social connection and interaction, learning and knowledge, as well as confusion as a central element. It can further be concluded that these attributes are in line with MEJDI’s mission (see chapter 5.3).

This thesis fills a gap in the literature by investigating the experience of a dual narrative tour. A better understanding of this experience can be used to improve the tours that are offered, as they highlight which elements are necessary in a dual narrative tour aimed at changing the image that people hold of a destination. Moreover, the themes might provide inspiration for further marketing activities since this research allows for a better understanding of the tourists and what their experience is composed of. This is not limited to MEJDI selling these trips, but also includes groups that might use these insights in order to receive funding for joining one of these trips.

Two suggestions for further improving this experience became apparent from the analysis: First, giving more time for reflection and facilitating it during the trip to allow the participants to process what they heard and saw as this is a prerequisite of having a positive experience (van Manen, 1990). This also includes a better preparation before the trip in order to ensure that the whole group has the same level of basic understanding. It adds to the degree of understanding that the participants are able to reach after the trip. They can only be an ambassador whenever they feel to have understood the issue to a certain degree; even if that understanding implies that they are confused.

Second, the tour operator should outline possibilities for further engagement after the trip, thereby encouraging the participants to spread some of their insights to persons who are not able to experience it on-site. This can be achieved by giving the participants some kind of frame or guidelines on how they could spread the benefit and knowledge generated through this experience when sharing it at home. The participants voiced an inability to share what they went through because the people at home were “not ready to hear” (Participant 123) or would not be interested in listening (Participant 127). Therefore, the experience

could be further improved by giving the participants ideas on what could be done in the future. This holds the potential to diminish some of the confusion and helplessness that some participants felt.

6.2 Reflection on Limitations

Some of the limitations of this research include the restricted time and budget allocated to its completion, as well as limitations in accessing the necessary data. In addition, there are certain limitations in connection with the chosen methodology. This approach is non-representative and the findings are only applicable to this study-group since every trip and group are different. Therefore, the results are not generalizable for a greater public or applicable to similar trips (Jennings, 2001).

Further limitations include the choice of a convenience sample, since all participants of this study were not specifically selected. Also, the relative homogeneity of the group can be counted as a limitation. In fact, since tourism experiences are highly subjective and personality traits exhibit a strong correlation with the social class of the participants (Bearden, Teel, & Crockett, 1980), the outcome of this research might differ to a large degree for a sample with different socio-demographics. However, using a rather homogeneous sample allows for a certain control of the research setting, eliminating these outside influences. Cultural differences among the participants of the group have not been considered in this study.

In addition, the circumstances for the interviews have not been ideal. This is due to the fact that the interviews were done throughout the trip (see Appendix Table 1). Thus, the interviewees were basing their testimony on what they experienced up to the time of their interview. Therefore, only snapshots of the experience at the moments when the interviews were conducted or the questions answered could be captured. Moreover, due to logistical reasons, the interviews often took place late at night or on the bus. These two factors might have led to varying accounts of the trip, especially since the participants often referred to examples of the day the interview was conducted when asked to specify certain emotions.

Not everyone who joined the trip agreed to participate in the study. Furthermore, some of those who agreed did not take all the actions this research asked for. Even though everyone participated in an interview with the researcher, only two participants returned some form of journal about the trip and only twelve handed in the answers to the questions they were asked to answer in their notebooks. This leaves an unbalanced amount of data and a better view of the experience could have been gained with the full results. However, the participation was completely voluntary, therefore, no action could be taken to enforce the adherence to the outline of the study.

In addition, this study does not look into all stages of the experience (Park & Santos, 2017). There is no data regarding the time before or after the trip and how this influenced

the actual experience or the meaning attributed to it by the participant. With continued reflection, the experience could have been valued differently after returning home.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

The tourists remember particular moments of the trip (Szarycz, 2008; Tung & Ritchie, 2011) that are shaped by previous stages of the experience, not only the one on-site (Dann, 1996; Noy, 2004). Therefore, it would be necessary to investigate the meaning attributed to the experience throughout all stages in order to gain a complete picture of the experience. Relevant future research could also be looking at the long term effects of this experience by tracking which of the experiences that were most meaningful during the trip actually turned into memorable experiences after the recollection phase and how the answers would have changed (Park & Santos, 2017).

Moreover, the findings should be verified through further groups with different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds in order to have a more representative sample. In addition, the findings of this research could be used as a basis for a quantitative study to validate the implications that were detected.

To gain a better understanding of dual narrative tours and to analyze the difference between this kind of trip and other tours to the area, an experiment could be carried out, allowing for a direct comparison between ascribed meanings. Apart from the meaning attributed to the experience, the change both in attitudes and perceptions would also be an interesting topic for further research regarding dual narrative tours.

In regard to the tourism and peace nexus, further research should investigate the speakers' or locals' perspective on the dual narrative tours and how they are affected by it. This can be used to determine whether these tours have a beneficial impact towards the establishment of positive peace.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: List of Interviews

Appendix Table 1: List of Interviews

Number	Date of Interview	Day of the Trip	Gender	Age Range	Country of Origin
111	Monday, 19th June	7	Female	18-20	U.S.
112	Wednesday, 21st June	9	Female	18-20	U.S.
113	Friday, 23rd June	11	Female	21-30	China
114	Sunday, 25th June	13	Male	61-70	U.S.
115	Wednesday, 21st June	9	Male	21-30	Muslim majority country
116	Friday, 23rd June	11	Male	71-80	U.S.
117	Saturday, 24th June	12	Male	51-60	U.S.
118	Sunday, 25th June	13	Female	31-40	U.S.
119	Thursday, 22nd June	10	Female	21-30	U.S.
120	Saturday, 24th June	12	Male	18-20	U.S.
121	Friday, 23rd June	11	Female	21-30	U.S.
122*					
123	Tuesday, 20th June	8	Male	21-30	U.S.
124	Thursday, 22nd June	10	Female	18-20	U.S.
125	Sunday, 25th June	13	Female	21-30	U.S.
126	Thursday, 22nd June	10	Female	21-30	U.S.
127	Saturday, 24th June	12	Female	21-30	U.S.
128	Wednesday, 21st June	9	Female	21-30	U.S.

*did not agree to join after initial confirmation

Source: own work.

Appendix B: Letter to Participants Informing Them About the Research Before the Trip

Dear participants of the “The Israel-Palestine Experience, 2017”,

Hopefully you all are already excited about your upcoming trip with MEJDI Tours! My name is Jana Augustin and as you might have heard, I will be joining this exciting trip as a researcher. I am currently enrolled as a master degree student in a program called Erasmus Mundus European Master in Tourism Management which is a joint program of the University of Southern Denmark; University of Ljubljana, Slovenia and Universitat de Girona, Spain. It is a very international and also intercultural program. So, when I heard about MEJDI’s approach to tourism, I was fascinated by it and just had to make it the subject of my thesis!

Once we all meet, I will explain everything in detail but for now I just wanted to introduce myself and give you a short overview about my study.

I believe that MEJDI's multiple narrative approach is unique as well as fascinating. In particular, I am interested in finding out what it means for you, the traveler, to participate in a tour like this. The main focus of this research will be about uncovering the meaning of the experience of a dual narrative tour.

For this, I will have an interview with every one of you that is willing to participate. Furthermore, I will bring small notebooks for you to write down/draw anything you like about the experience, like in a diary.

You will have the opportunity to ask questions about my study once we are in Jerusalem, but if you would like to get in contact before, please feel free to send me an email: janaaugustin@gmx.de

I am looking forward to meeting you all very soon!

Best regards

Jana

Appendix C: Sample Information Sheet and Consent Form

Information Sheet about the Research Project:

Master Thesis on “The Experience of a Dual Narrative Tour”

As a participant of “The Israel-Palestine Experience, 2017” I would like to invite you to participate in the research for my master thesis and share your perspective on the tourism experience of this trip. The participation in this research project is completely voluntary and can be ended at any time. The aim is to understand the meaning of your lived experience during this trip. You will be considered a co-researcher in discovering your own experience by describing the various events and situations that have taken place and interpreting these together with me.

A dual narrative tour in contested areas is a new concept and has not yet been studied, but it is important to discover the meaning of this experience for you, the participants, in order to uncover further areas of study in the future. The research methodology of this study is phenomenology, which means that your experience will be described and given meaning through interpretation and reflection.

What will you get out of it?

By participating in this project, you have the opportunity to reflect on the experience you are having beyond the usual. By talking to me, you will have the possibility to share your view on the events. This will help you to create a lasting memory of this trip as well as a better understanding of your personal experience.

What is expected from you?

In order to participate in this study, I would like to have a chat (interview) with you during which you tell me about your experience. It will take place at some point towards the end of our trip. This interview will be recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

Furthermore, you receive a small notebook that you can use to take notes of anything that seems meaningful to you (thoughts, feelings, images, sensations, memories, etc.) in any way you like (words, drawings etc.). It would be good, if you could write something every day when the memory is still vivid.

The notes you take in the notebooks will help me to analyze your experience in conjunction with your interview. I will collect them at the end of the trip. Moreover, I will be taking part in all activities and observe the behavior of the group during the different parts of the trip to gain a better understanding of the complete experience. During the whole study, appropriate measures to ensure your confidentiality will be taken.

Thank you for your collaboration!

Interview Consent Form

Research project title: Master Thesis on “The Experience of a Dual Narrative Tour”

Research investigator: Jana Augustin

Research participants name: _____

The interview will take about 30-60 minutes. We don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project.

This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation.

Would you therefore please read the accompanying information sheet and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- • the interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced
- • the transcript of the interview will be analyzed by Jana Augustin as research investigator
- • access to the interview transcript will be limited to Jana Augustin and academic colleagues and researchers with whom she might collaborate as part of the research process
- • any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed
- • the actual recording will be kept until the end of the research project
- • any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval

By signing this form, I agree that;

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain (direct) quotations by me;

4. I have read the Information sheet;
5. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
6. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
7. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Printed Name

Date, Participants Signature

Date, Researchers Signature

Contact Information

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Appendix D: Interview Guide

1. How do you like the trip so far?
2. Did you take a specific class in order to prepare for the trip to Israel/Palestine? If yes, what kind of class?
3. Can you please describe your experience during this trip so far?

What did you like most?

What was not so good?

4. What will you remember after you return? Which experiences do you think are worth sharing with friends?
5. To what extent and how has this trip changed your perceptions of Israel and Palestine?
6. Do you think this travel experience is different compared to your previous travel experiences? If yes, what sets it apart from other experiences?
7. How do you think your background has influenced the experience you are having?

Appendix E: Questions in Notebook

Dear participant of the “The Israel-Palestine Experience, 2017”,

below you find several questions about you and your previous knowledge (Question 1-7). It would be important for me to know the answers in order to better place your experience during the trip into context. Experiences are always very subjective and highly depend on the people living through them and their backgrounds.

Moreover, you can find three questions that I would like you to answer towards the end of the trip. They serve as a summary of how you experienced this trip and will be a very valuable addition to our interview.

Thank you in advance!

Beginning of trip

1. Where are you from?
2. How often do you travel per year for leisure purposes? (Only overnight stays)
3. How many times did you travel out of your country for leisure purposes in the last 3 years? (Only overnight stays)
4. Is this your first time in Israel/Palestine?
5. Have you ever taken a guided trip to a contested/conflict area before?
6. What made you join “The Israel-Palestine Experience, 2017”?
7. How relevant was the dual narrative approach in your decision making on a scale from 1 (not relevant at all) to 10 (the main reason)?

End of trip

8. Please name the three most meaningful moments during this trip for you personally and state reasons why they have been so special. (Can be both, positive or negative).
9. How did your attitude towards Israel and Palestine change after the trip?
10. How did your attitude towards the Israel/Palestine conflict change after the trip?

Appendix F: Sample Response to Notebook Questions

Beginning of trip

1. Where are you from? [...] USA
2. *How often do you travel per year for leisure purposes? (Only overnight stays)* 20-30 days
3. *How many times did you travel out of your country for leisure purposes in the last 3 years? (Only overnight stays)* Three trips
4. *Is this your first time in Israel/Palestine?* Yes
5. *Have you ever taken a guided trip to a contested/conflict area before?* No
6. *What made you join “The Israel-Palestine Experience, 2017”?* The unique opportunity to meet with various individuals and organizations, rather than just seeing a few of the tourist sites.
7. *How relevant was the dual narrative approach in your decision making on a scale from 1 (not relevant at all) to 10 (the main reason)?* 8-9

End of trip

9. *Please name the three most meaningful moments during this trip for you personally and state reasons why they have been so special. (Can be both, positive or negative).*

The homestay with Palestinian family: not many people get to experience this, it felt very individualized and gave us the opportunity to connect with a family and hear their stories in a more intimate setting.

Sabbath dinner was another meaningful moment because the family welcomed us into their home and gave of us a taste of everyday life for Israelis. This is something that most people would not get to experience genuinely when travelling to the region if they did not have family there. It felt very comfortable, fun and I deeply appreciated seeing the family's routine and experiencing something so special to them.

Iftaar dinner with Aziz's parents: very similar reasons as Sabbath, this night was so special with music and dinner, it felt very inclusive and I loved the feeling of celebration. Once again, most people travelling to the country would never have this opportunity available to them, or even take advantage of it if they could.

10. *How did your attitude towards Israel and Palestine change after the trip?*

The trip gave me a great sense of the inequalities, disparities and injustices that exist between Israelis and Palestinians. It showed us the rich cultures of many peoples: Palestinians, Israelis, Druze, religious groups, settlers, etc. Most guided trips are not offered that.

11. *How did your attitude towards the Israel/Palestine conflict change after the trip?*

I realized the true complexity that persists in the country. The trip gave me a glimpse of the various competing values, viewpoints and ideologies at play. It made me realize how important it is to immerse yourself in a culture and gain a diverse set of perspectives, especially in conflict areas.

Appendix G: Sample Interview Transcript

Participant 111; Day 7, Monday 19th June

R: I'm gonna record this. Is that ok for you?

P: Yeah.

R: Good. So how do you like the trip so far?

P: Ahm, I like it. I like the trip, I like the people. Um, I like that it's like a small group but not like obnoxiously small and also not like a ton of people. So, it seems kind of like it's a good group size where we can still get to places we're going. But not small enough so you feel like you know everyone too well. If that makes sense.

R: It does. So, before you came here, did you take a specific class to prepare for this trip?

P: um, not really. What I am is, I am a peace and justice studies major so I study anything from human rights to actually, what we call... Where I go to school is like conflict transformation, so it's like understanding conflict and the issues behind it and then ultimately, the word is sustainable peace, trying to build stuff like that. So, I took an intro course in peace and justice. It's just a basic intro class which was actually with professor 1. Was in my first semester and we kind of talked a little about the trip then and I started working at [a center for peace, justice and public understanding] and then it kind of became more serious, like oh, so I actually really wanna go on this? So, then I took, in second semester, a human rights and responsibilities course, which started to actually talk a little bit about the situation, like going into more details about it and then Azis Abu Sarah actually came to my school, so I became familiar with it then too. So, I wouldn't say that I prepared but I had a stronger background in it than not being prepared at all.

R: Ok. ... And can you describe your experience in this trip so far. Like...

P: Just my experience?

R: Yes, your experience.

P: The first couple of days, I was crazy and I was so scared because all that was in my head was like uh this is, you know, Israel and it is under dispute and there is gonna be like terrorists and it's gonna be so many people and overwhelming. I was afraid about sexism a lot. Just because that's something my family kept saying. Is like, they were more concerned I think because I was a girl. And I didn't feel offended like that. Like now I am a little bit offended but in the moment, it felt like a very real reality. And then my phone wasn't working when I got here and it just made me feel like really stressed about the whole thing but as I started to, to settle in and um, I don't know, sort of got more used to the city, 'cause we were in Jerusalem for like a lot of days. So, I started to become familiar with it. Then it kind of felt

a little bit easier even after we talked about the political side and um, what was really going on at the root. I didn't feel as scared. I just started to feel like, ... I mean this is a good trip by like all standards it's a good trip, but I wouldn't say, it's not at all like a vacation. It's not like, I am not happy. You know like, I am happy personally, but the stuff we're seeing is kind of like hard to grasp and hard to understand at times. So, at the end of the day you can come back and you're like really wiped because it's just... the reality that these people live in, I can't even, ... you know imagine 24/7, like we're only here for you know a certain period of time, and it's this people's reality. Like not having access to a city that's like 20 minutes away, not having water, electricity and it just... it impacts the trip in a very special way. Because personally I'm ok. Like inside, body intact, not sick, but I think mentally, sometimes it's hard because of everything you are seeing. But I'm glad that I am seeing it. Like really, really glad because I feel like it's something you'll never forget which is different from like an average vacation. Yeah, when you ask me, what did you do in Disney world when you were 10, like I have no idea. Even when we would've gone last year, and I probably wouldn't remember specifics and I feel like I could tell you still right now, like day 1. How I felt, what I saw, why I feel the way I feel. And that's really cool.

R: So, can you go a little more in detail about the specific experiences during the days?

P: Sure! Ok, I really like when we went to see different sights. Um, I don't know, day 1 we saw like it's kind of confusing, it was called the Temple Mount or you know the Dome of the Rock. And I really liked when we go and see places. And then hear the parallel stories. So, it's like you can physically see the Dome of the Rock and then you know, you can also see Jewish people who wanna build like a new temple. So, it's a very different understanding from like the classroom kind of learning, to physically be there and almost like feel the tension of all of it with some people. And I um, I like all the speakers that we have. Sometimes they are kind of boring, only because they are on the extremist of all sides. And I know why they do that, I get that you got to see it, but it's also at the point of ridiculous at points. Like when we were with one lady, you remember, she was like focused entirely on security and I wanted her to talk about other stuff, but it's hard to get people out of their frame of mind because they live here and that is their everyday experience.

Overall, it's just like visiting places is really nice, talking to people is like the best! Um, it's kind of it....

R: Ok. So, what did you like most? From what we did so far?

P: Like an event?

R: Yes, or yeah, in general.

P: [thinking] I think my favorite thing that we've done so far is when I walked the old city with the other [people from my university]. When we were like on the bus and [professor 2] was like 'Stop the bus, I'm getting off, who wants to come?'. It ended up being all the

[people from my university] which was fun, cause it's just us 5. And suddenly it didn't feel touristy. You know 'cause it was only 5 of us and [professor 2] speaks Arabic and you know, and Hebrew. And he was bargaining and we were getting really cool stuff and we were walking fast and we know where we are and I just... It was the first time I didn't feel like overwhelmed by everything. I could kind of just get a grasp on it and it made me realize how people live here and why people love it. Why people say, you know, why they argue over it, I guess. Um, ... but it was kind of the moment where I didn't feel like a tourist, that I liked best. ...

R: and, so what was not so... what didn't you like very much?

P: What didn't I like? Tha-, that night we went out late at night, very dumbly... At the first night, going out to the old city like super late at night and it's like no other tourists and all the shops are closed and there's creepy guys like explore, but explore with caution. You know. it was our first night, maybe we should have waited. But that was when I felt the most like uneasy because it's just like we kind of did it just randomly and maybe that's why in the future I'd always try to stick with you know a tour guide or a professor or like another student, another student that has been here before. NOW I know that but you know just like a couple of girls, 8 girls, no guy, late at night, felt like you know everything I was afraid of, like might happen. Otherwise during the day everything was fine.

R: So, when you said, 'everything you were afraid of' can you specify that?

P: It's just the cliché you know American fear, you know off like you know, terrorism, for women, sexism, rape, human trafficking. You know I did a, um, some research on that, this past semester for class. And I just, um, I started to feel like everything I heard about the Middle East was kind of true. Just a bunch of people who didn't want us around and didn't seem as friendly and kind of dirty streets, late at night, nearly no lights. I just felt like almost like I want to be home, because it felt safer, because it's what I knew. I realize now, it's like really judgmental to be afraid of those things but at the same point, like if you're out late at night and you don't know where you are going and you're just wandering, it's a dumb idea. It was. In retrospect. But better when you know things I guess.

R: You said, you liked it best when you were not a tourist. But walking around at night, isn't that also not being a tourist, kind of?

P: No, we stuck out as tourists, like sore thumbs, like you know what I mean? Like walking with [professor 2] and doing what we were doing that day, we didn't stick out like sore thumbs. We're just shopping, we were haggling, we knew what we were doing, got super great tapestries. But that night, we were just like... we probably looked like scared chipmunks. And that's not what I wanted! You know because then you have a big red x on your back, because you clearly don't know what's happening. So, that almost helps with the fear because not only do you not know where you are going but everyone else knows that you don't have a clue what's happening. So... in that way they are different in my mind. ...

R: So, what do you think, what will you remember after you return?

P: I'm being honest with you, I wouldn't say that to the group yet, but I still don't understand the Israeli side. Honest. Like I know they need a place. After world war two I get that and you know, I see their claim to the Holy Land and their need for security. But come on, they lost their homes, they lost their families, they lost everything and then they come to a land and do the exact same thing to a different group of people? Just because they're like a different race and in my head. And I've been trying this whole time, you know at the beginning of the tour they said you, if you come out thinking that you understand it all, we did this completely wrong. You should be confused. And I am confused. But only because I don't see how someone argues for the Israelis. I mean I get it, but they are also so aggressive and like these people, in Gaza they are completely, like fenced in. No wonder you have these extremist groups that wanna destroy Israel. They're like, their whole way of life, it is no way of life. It isn't. and it's ridiculous to me. But I also don't wanna like, I wish they could find a compromise but at the same point I think that the Israelis need to realize, that in the scheme on things, they're the bad guy. So, I think what I'm gonna end up taking away is that, while I am entitled to those thoughts, I need to know that like there is a time and place to say them. Especially like with the different speakers, that we have. There is a time to ask that question. And there is a time to ask your professor afterwards. Because it literally is so tense. And you don't wanna ask a question and get people upset. You don't wanna like tell some police officer where you are going or why you are here, because they're gonna be upset. I think it's like learning how to play the game. If that makes sense. But at the same point still trying to like know where I'm at. So, it's kind of bit of like self-discovery as well as ... just learning how people's lives are affected. And that's what I'll always remember is like the fact that there is a very human element that a lot of people are missing. And then when we have stuff come up in class which like happens all of the time, I feel like I'm gonna always have this thing in the back of my head. That remembers the speaker that were, you know, angry or remembers the people that were you know basically into prison for their whole lives it's gonna matter a lot more than a textbook. ...

R: And so, what you'll remember is like talking to the people and seeing the people?

P: Talking, seeing, experiencing. It just... Completely, how different life is here. And how it should affect the situation. I think a lot more than anything else. You know what I mean, a lot of people are like borders are really important. Well, yeah, borders are really important but borders are really important because there're people, you know, there're different religions behind here and all this stuff, but I think it's just the people and the way you handle knowledge and conversation. It is very different from everything I expected.

R: Ok. And what do you think, which experiences are worth sharing with friends?

P: All of it! I honestly don't think there is anything I wouldn't share with friends, the only part I might not share is like the telling my parents that we went out late at night. That one

might not go but I don't feel like any part of me wants to keep this quiet. You know it's almost like you're a witness now. And in law, which you know I am interested in, basically it's almost like being party to a crime, if you're going and you see something that you think is wrong, and you say nothing, then you're a part of that, you are part of the responsible party and I just don't want... A that guilt and then B, it's just not right. And then if you see something that is not right, then it's no longer on someone you read about, then it's on you.

R: Is there anything in particular that you would like to share with your friends? Or family, or whatever?

P: Um, probably just like the feel of the city is what I would talk about mostly with family. And friends be like oh it's really nice, the weather is awesome, you know and if they wanna go into detail, I'd probably talk about more like the political experience. But I think um, off the bet, people probably just don't have enough history for me to go into it. So, it'd probably be more along the lines of what I saw and what I bought and what I learned and what I liked and about the food and basic stuff. When all internally it's a lot more to process...

R: So, processing you mean...?

P: Understanding and realizing how hard things are and why it's so important that people are acting the way they are. I don't neurotically think that um, all that stuff here seems like so different from everything I've known, especially like, cause I'm from America, so there is supposed to be the separation between church and state and we could argue that but we don't have to. Point is, the government isn't supposed to be that affected by religion. Here it is like Oh my god. It's everything. It's how you dress, it's where you eat, purchase stuff, how you talk, it's where you work, it's where you live, it's where ... your fundamental rights are determined based on your religious beliefs and your parents, and their parents and their parents and...at some point it's like why can't why isn't it just the individual? And maybe that's a completely western way of looking at it. But to me that's like the internal conflict that I have. Just trying to even comprehend everything that goes on in people's lives. That I might never even really know. even after being here for a couple of weeks it's not gonna put it into scope. ...

R: That's true. So, to what extent and how do you think this trip has changed your perception of Israel and Palestine?

P: I'm still supportive of the Palestinian side from class and from learning. I think I definitely see why Israel has upped their security and why they do what they do, but um, I mean I see more of the Israeli side now but um, now I just, now I feel bad for both sides. Cause they everyday people you talk to aren't the extremists. There are people who are even, you know supportive of the two-state solution. And aren't really that affected by religion individually. So...

R: And um, do you think this experience was different compared to your previous travel experiences?

P: Um, previous travel, outside the US, I've only been to Austria and Germany. So yeah, really different! Um, I've never done anything political, I've never done anything in a conflict zone, never, you know... Super different. Is it better? At this point, I don't know. And maybe that just because I had an amazing trip the last time but at this point it feels like the one thing I don't like is how tired I am. Emotionally and physically at the end of the night. And I know that sounds stupid because you know you're only here for a couple of weeks and you should be getting the full experience but... it's also really hard, because it's so emotionally draining. And it's physically draining. And it's hot. And you're sweating, you're in a foreign country and you're taking in so much, that also why I think it makes to conflict so confusing. But yeah, it's nothing like my previous travels, in the US or out. It's kind of in a world of its own.

R: So, what do you think sets it apart from the previous experiences?

P: Israel and Palestine is its own experience. I mean like in the whole world, it has such unique people, and such unique you know things going on and it, I've never... Even in class learning about the complexity of it, I never thought it's gonna be nearly this complicated to understand. Um, it makes it different because it's in the middle east, it's a completely different area to go to. Two religion I was not really familiar with. I did not know that they still thought in Islam that Jesus was an important figure, he was just a prophet, he was not like THE prophet. So, it's all just like a learning curve I'd call it. Compared to other trips.

R: And from the setup of the trip?

P: I don't understand.

R: Like from the organization itself, not only from the content?

P: Oh, um, well, 'cause it actually got two tour guides and they actually mention political things. You know, lot of times I feel like tour guides are just meant to be people who like, for me, they please Americans, they are nice and they take you to all the places. They don't really give you their opinion. They are just nice and you pay them. It's just completely different. These tour guides are actually telling you their story and you know, they live here and it's their ... it's their community, it's their life. So, I think it's it super different with this respect.

R: And how do you feel with that being different?

P: Um, it's good for the setting. I think it would be good in other places of conflict. You know, other places that have tension or multiple stories or even a few go on to do stuff. But I think it wouldn't work in some situations of conflict. The ones that come to my mind is

like if someone wanted to do one on like the Holocaust. You bring in a Nazi tour guide and someone else. I mean like who would ... you know there is not even a framework of understanding. So, there is some extremist ones where like it doesn't matter that's conflict, because they're assholes on one side and good guys on the other, so what are you gonna do, you pick the good guy. Um... but I think for other conflicts around the world, it seems like a great way to even raise awareness, you know. Of course, Israel Palestine kind of sticks out, I think in the majority of people's minds. At least in the ones who are aware of world issues. But I don't know enough about even smaller conflicts, you know. but I am sure there are many, you could go and learn about. Um, but a lot of it's having to find these places like here, where there is a conflict and stuff's going on, but it's still safe to bring people. You know, you can't bring people to an active war zone. You could maybe do something after, and explain why it was so important, but this is a really unique situation, where it is still going on and it's dangerous, but not THAT dangerous.

R: Do you think your background of studying international justice or like justice and peace has affected your experience here?

P: Definitely, um, because I learned what it means to violate human rights and like my favourite thing in the whole world Eleanor Roosevelt, is like my life model, if I could be like anyone, I wanna be like her. So, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is almost for me, I am not a very religious person, but if anything is my bible, it's that. It's just treating people fairly and with dignity in certain roles and seeing how everyone here is kind of ... treated, is maybe kind of part of the reason I support the Palestinians more. Because I just don't know how you can violate something like that and still declare yourself a good guy. You know, I know people have their reasons, but like Hitler had his reasons. That's again a very big comparison. But you know, it's...it's valid. Just because you have your reasons doesn't make your reasons good reasons. And you know, the saying of... I mean of a means to an end, you have to be able to justify those means. Otherwise what are you but the person you were running from. ...

R: So, is there anything else you would like to add to, about this experience or that you would like to get rid of your mind?

P: Yeh... wait, what?

R: Is there anything you would like to get off your chest?

P: Um, Nah. No, I think you interviewed well.

R: Then thanks a lot!

Appendix H: Reflective Diary

Day -2 – Sunday, June 11, 2017

Already flying to Tel Aviv lets you experience some differences. Never before had my backpack, clothes and inside of my shoes need to be checked for explosives(?)... That was definitely a first.

I was able to get my first impression already in Hamburg when an elderly man sat next to me waiting at the gate (he had been in front of me at the check in) and started talking. Soon we discovered that we have the same destination (Tel Aviv). He shared his background (retired physics professor, divorced, his daughter lives in Hamburg) and offered to send me information about Israel and answer any question I have.

After having read about strict immigration laws and officers, I was a little worried about getting into the country... After all, trips to the West Bank are still looked upon with a frown. The officer was nice enough though and I was able to mumble enough information for him to let me in. “Why do you want to go to Jerusalem?” – “Because I heard it is pretty...” Not the best tourism management student answer, but fine.

In my guide book, I read that the military is omnipresent in Israel. So far, only being in Tel Aviv, this was not confirmed. There were many people in uniform, but no one was carrying a gun at least. Also, all public transport has been very efficient and easy to use.

The beach in Tel Aviv is very clean in some areas, but needs improvement in others. Same applies to all of the city I saw. There are a lot of contrasts seeing high-rise brand new next to half destroyed older buildings. This gives a very special charm to the city.

Being able to stay in a local's house and getting an exclusive tour, I was able to taste very good falafel and see some lesser known parts of the city. Moreover, I was able to ask any questions I was wondering about. Tel Aviv seems to be more of a lively, young and vibrant city (from what I was told, hard to judge in one day...)

Day -1 – Monday, June 12, 2017

A perfect start into the day and the trip was a morning swim in the sea. The waves are quite high from time to time and the lifeguard warned the swimmers about a strong current. Surfing seems to be popular.

Breakfast or rather brunch was a delicious combination of hummus, with hot tomato sauce in which eggs have been boiled. You scoop it up either with bread – or the less calorie version - with onions. An interesting but tasty experience!

I then walked to the independence hall, a museum dedicated to the signing of the declaration of independence of Israel. The next English tour was an hour away, so I strolled along the

streets first and came back later. So many people in Tel Aviv drive electric bikes! Also, it was very intriguing to see all the different fashion styles in the shops around. Pretty large variety. The Independence hall visit itself was guided and a one-sided representation of the history. It was displayed as one of the greatest days in Israeli history, after such a long time of struggle (understandable, but still relevant to acknowledge). They even played parts of the national anthem and asked everyone to stand up, which I thought was a little strange, since none of us was actually Israeli.

In the afternoon, I took the bus to get to Jerusalem, which was not too hard to find and the people were very nice to people like me who had no clue how things work... ;) It seems to be easy to get around Israel. Or at least between the 2 main cities. What is noticeable is that the luggage is checked every time you enter a public building, even small purses.

The hostel was easy to reach too and I quickly discovered that there were a couple more Germans in my room. After finalizing my interview questions, I asked the reception desk to print them for me and had dinner at the hostel, chatted with some of the guests and went to sleep.

Day 0 - Tuesday, June 13, 2017 - Israeli

Finally, the day to meet the group! After some confusion with the bus driver and the location of the pick-up spot, I was on my way to the airport. About halfway, we picked up one of the guides that will be with us most of the days. We had a nice chat and he asked me to send him my study. According to him, Mejdi's work is important and more and more companies realize that it is a good idea to involve both sides (Mejdi already realized this a few years ago). People do not like to be brainwashed by only hearing one side of the story. It is important that the Israeli guide acknowledges that it is crucial to listen to the Palestinian narrative and vice versa. The guests are supposed to make up their own mind and they do not have to believe/support either side.

At the airport, we had to wait quite a while until the group arrived. One of the participants has a Muslim name and a passport from a Muslim-majority country, so he was put aside for further questioning. Apparently, everything went smoothly, just took him a while longer. Racial profiling to its finest.

On the bus, the guide did a short introduction and encouraged a dialogue instead of a lecture. This is supposed to be a "geopolitical dual narrative tour". He acknowledges that his background influences what he says and asks us to question his stance and encourage him to share other perspectives too. He says his perspective is male, Jewish, Zionist, early 30s, religious person. His aim is not to make us learn numbers and years but to give us a bigger story. According to him, we will only go to safe places, even though other Israelis might tell you it isn't. This is not a normal vacation, no sun, sea, shopping – kind of trip. People are going to share their troubles with us and he plans to make things more complicated for us.

His goal is to confuse us. If in the end, we say that now we know everything, he failed. They want us to have a mess in our heads since this is not an easy problem.

On the way back to Jerusalem, we had lunch in a small village with home cooked food; everything very tasty. Everyone filled up to discover that those were only appetizers and that there was more to follow. It hurt to watch them throw a lot of the food away in the end.

The hotel is fine and everyone is in double rooms. I had a good chat with my roommate and then went out to discover the old town with another participant. We just wandered around and made it back without much confusion. Very interesting to see all those impressions and new sights! Very eager to learn more about them!

Went back to the hotel and met some others on the way and we ate together, food is pretty expensive if you go to a restaurant.

We then returned to the hotel, talked a little and wandered around the hotel. It was very valuable information by our Israeli guide to tell us that a canon shot will signal the end of the day, since it is Ramadan and Muslims are not supposed to eat or drink during the day. Even though we were expecting it, it was very scary to actually hear the shot! Talking with the Bachelor student girls showed that all of them were very interested in the conflict and eager to learn about both sides. They appreciated the fact that this tour is different and are looking forward to meeting the people and hear their stories. My roommate mentioned a quote: you cannot hate someone after you heard their story. (something along the line of that)

Later we went out to the old town again to see it illuminated. First it was fun, we took pictures and joked, but at some point, the mood changed and we got scared. I could sense that all of us were not comfortable anymore with being out. We were 5 girls and seemed to be the only tourists in that area. Other than us, we mostly met men or small children. People passing by were asking us whether we need help, but somehow, I wasn't sure whether that was an honest question or not. Assuming the best in people it probably was, but it still made us uncomfortable somehow as we were sticking out and so obviously not belonging to that place. One scene is still sticking out. A group of Israeli soldiers passed by us when we were heading out and a couple of small kids were following them, mimicking the soldiers posture and steps and carrying toy guns. They seemed to want to be like them or they made fun of them (Not sure, since it was a Muslim neighbourhood, so both is possible). We returned to the hotel and went to bed early, since all of them are jetlagged.

Day 1 - Wednesday, June 14, 2017, Israeli + Palestinian

The first day of an actual dual narrative! We woke up super early, had breakfast and headed to the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif. We were not allowed to bring any water or food due to Ramadan and were asked to cover up at the entrance: "This is a holy site!" ... We were not allowed to enter neither the Dome of the Rock nor the mosque, because they are afraid

that people intent to destroy it in order to build the third temple. Our Palestinian guide and the other Muslim student were able to enter the mosque through a regular entrance and visit the holy sites. Normally Jews are only allowed to enter with security and they are forbidden to pray on the ground of the mount since it is a mosque now. Ultraorthodox Jews often try to break this rule and cause violent struggles like this. We saw a group of them pass by and it was kind of scary to see that there were at least on equal number of visitors and soldiers, if not more security than visitors. I am not used to seeing people need that much protection in either direction (prevent them from breaking the current rules/destroying the temple + protect them from Arab hate related attacks).

Both of our guides explained their perspectives on the holy site and what it means for them. Very important to hear both sides on this, as it is often the focal point of all disputes as can be seen by the orthodox example. This sharing of the stories was very respectful, but each tried to insist on their point of view.

We then met the Imam of the mosque. For him, the USA play a significant role in the conflict and he blames them for everything. He shares about the Arab Israeli perspective and that Palestinian Muslims are not allowed to visit the holy site except in rare cases, like now in Ramadan. He also mentions the very hard economic situation for Palestinians. However, he also denies the Jewish heritage on the temple mount and claims that there is no evidence on this at all. The Israeli guide got involved, discussing the Jewish heritage and also the professors asked some questions. However, the Imam said that he is open for negotiations, but not willing to accept the view/claim of the other side, which already closes all negotiations. After the visit, we took some time to discuss what the Imam said and the guides added their own understandings/viewpoints and we could ask further questions.

We continued our visit through the old city, leaving the mosque and following the road of the cross, the way that Jesus allegedly walked on his way to his crucifixion, the “Via Dolorosa”. Along the way, we stopped in several spots “of the cross” where special things happened to Jesus while he walked. The Palestinian guide gave us very detailed info on all the spots. Lunch was at a place in the centre of the town. This a more doable amount of food though. The last spot was the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where you can find the Empty Tomb and some parts of the cross. It was pretty crowded and there was a long line to go inside the tomb, which we didn’t manage to get to the front of before they closed down for a service.

From one of the holiest spots for Christianity, we continued to the Jewish narrative, into the Jewish Quarter of the old town. It was a lot tidier and less crowded than the Muslim and Christian part. The Western Wall was the final destination before getting back to the bus. Here one could also see the difference between different types of Jews. At the original section of the Western Wall, there is a section for men and one for women, but they are not allowed to pray together. However, there has been an initiative to make another section available where more secular congregations could pray together. At the wall, you could feel

how much it means for the people to be there and they prayed intensely. Most of us also places a wish into the wall. It can never hurt.

Back in the hotel, we met a Rabbi (Daniel Roth) and surprisingly 20 out of 22 people in the group showed up, despite the day we had and the time of the meeting. The group was being very attentive, asking questions and taking notes. The Rabbi highly values the MEJDI approach and encourages us to become identity interpreters. He states that he is very open for reconciliation and dialogue.

Later that night, we explored the Kotel Tunnels, streets below the old Jewish quarter, that reach up to the Western Wall, just below the current ground. Here 17/22 made it to join in. We took some funny pictures afterwards.

Day 2 - Thursday, June 15, 2017, Israeli

A day full of meetings. We stayed in the hotel most of the time, first thing in the morning was a talk by Miri Eisin, a former military, teacher and now a political advisor of the government. Before starting her talk, she acknowledges her narrative and says that she is not objective at all. She enjoys talking to people who do not agree with her and thinks it is important to do so. People were taking notes and we took some time after her talk to reflect on what she said and how to place it.

The guides told us that they are more liberal, but for the sake of the tour, they assume more extreme sides in order to show the usual Palestinian or Jewish narrative “from the streets”. However, even liberals still have arguments and points that cannot be solved in the conflict. The professors were very engaged in the discussion.

After talking to Miri, we headed out for a visit to Mt. Hertzl, a military graveyard. It was devastating to see the pictures of all the people who got killed in small photos on their graves. Many of them were super young. Even younger than us... It hit me, that if I would have been born here, I would be a lot less protected from violence than I am now. Some of my friends or even my family would certainly have been killed in the line of duty. One more situation where I am shown how grateful I have to be to be growing up in Germany.

The next stop was a tour of the Supreme Court, a super new building, where we learned a little about the judicial system in Israel. We had a picnic in a park close by and picked mulberries directly from a tree. Super tasty.

In the bus, I talked to 115 and he did not like the discussion but would rather like to appoint more time to listening to the actual narrative instead of talking about it. A discussion could be done at home in the classroom.

Furthermore, I talked to 124 and she stated that she did not join because of the background she already has (Business Administration) on the topic but because she is interested in

learning more about the conflict and the area. She regrets that she can't contribute much to the discussions but thinks that they are very interesting. Out of what she hears, she is building her own opinion and beliefs it might be useful in the future. The dialogue/narrative was not the main reason for her joining but rather seeing everything. It is a unique opportunity for her to join a trip like this, as she would not come here on her own, due to her lack of experience in travelling and her parents worrying too much.

At night, we met with a Palestinian, Christian priest, Father Rahed from Notredame Monastery. 17/22 attended this session, of which none was a professor.

Day 3 - Friday, June 16, 2017, Israeli

The illusion of security burst tonight. After oversleeping, it all started with a pretty intense morning of going to the Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum. For me all the information was not that extraordinary as I already heard about most of it. It would have been great to have a little more time to actually listen to all the videos and read all the posts. But that would have been too much, also because the place has been packed with people. Sometimes it was hard to see and get around.

But as I mentioned, the actual content was not that special for me. However, afterwards we took some time for reflection and everyone shared their own impressions. This is when it actually hit me more than I would ever have imagined. It suddenly felt so much closer, especially hearing what the Jewish people in our group thought about it. But also, the perspective of having other minorities killed during that time was important, since they tend to be forgotten. Bree brought up the perspective that this also continues with other people and that at this time also other genocides had been carried out. So many things I just didn't connect time-wise in my head. Being the only German in the group I felt like I should say something, but on the other hand it felt like such a big responsibility since I did not want to say something wrong. But one of the professors asked me to share my perception, so I did. It just overwhelmed me a little since it got me thinking about losing part of my family. Probably everyone was just very busy with their own thoughts so it didn't matter that much what I said... Not sure. Many people shared very personal stories and the mood was quite low. To wrap it up, we wished peace to everyone else, like you would do in church.

Next stop was the Machane Yehuda market where we had delicious lunch and wandered around a little. Most went back to the hotel but a few of us (9/22) went on a short tour through one of the first neighbourhoods Mishkanot Shaananim and Nachalot that was established outside of the old city. We had time for a very quick shower and change before the bus picked us up for Sabbath dinner with a Jewish family. This was such a valuable experience and I am very grateful for the family to open up their house for us! We got a small introduction into the Sabbath traditions, sang the traditional songs, washed our hands and broke the bread. The food was really good and especially the dessert! <3 We had a lot of fun chatting with each other, their 5 kids and the parents. Truly a lovely evening!

It came to a sudden halt when reality got back to us. Friday being the Sunday of the Muslims, the holiest day of the week where thousands travel to the city to pray at al Aqsa mosque, was a busy day. Our hotel is located in East Jerusalem and in a Muslim neighborhood. Just outside Damascus gate, a police officer was stabbed to death by Palestinians who were in return shot. Some bystanders were injured. The police woman was apparently just outside the police station that is in the next street from ours and my roommate and others walked past her this afternoon. It is impossible to imagine what the families on both sides might feel right now! Within our group, this news immediately changed the mood. Just last night did we walk along that street with thousands of people celebrating Ramadan around us. It certainly still is the same reality as yesterday and the same risk. Nevertheless, this brings the conflict back to the top of our heads. The days before, we (or at least I) didn't really think about it much. There was a risk, but it seemed so far away, even though it was ever present in our conversations with the local people. Apparently, we do not need to worry, just be extra careful. I am just certain, that we will not walk around the old city at night again for sure. It just doesn't feel good with that many people around.

Day 4 - Saturday, June 17, 2017, Palestinian

Somehow things are quickly forgotten too. We talked about the stabbing a little more, but not very much. I think it was good of the professors to not only inform us last night but also to have a chat to process it and give some tips about how to behave. Also knowing that a policeman is with us was a comfort to some. In the morning, we finally made it to the Mount of Olives with a great view, overlooking the old city. We then toured the Ein Karem neighborhood and had some very good gelato, coffee or chocolate (or any mix of the aforementioned). Next stop was the Israel Museum where the Dead Sea Scrolls are kept. Far too big to see in the short time we had, plus people are getting tired. It seems to be time to move, just to get the adrenaline up. But very interesting exhibitions, I just didn't look at anything closely and instead had a chat with a few people. As mentioned, people are tired, so we did not go to the Wadi Samuel, because it was either all or none and the majority was against it. Some people really did not like this because it would have been important for them to go there (something with the founder of their school). They complained about the organization of the trip and also that the teachers disrupt the guides to often to share their own knowledge but should let the guides tell their story instead....

So, we went back to the hotel, some jumped out the bus to go shopping on the way. One of the professors was nice enough to offer to walk us to the church of the holy sepulcher, where some of us intended to attend mass. I just went because I thought that it would be a great opportunity to do this in the Holy city. However, we didn't really find where it was and instead just saw the grave. A little underwhelming if you ask me. But it was very touching when the priests (?) started singing! This night finally has been a quieter one. We discovered that Saturday nights, just before sunset is the worst time to intent to go shopping, since all Arab shops will close and the Jewish ones will not yet be open... On the way back, I noticed a group of Jewish kids, maybe 6 years max. who were on top of a roof, showing middle

fingers to a group of Arab kids down in the street (I couldn't see what the kids down were doing). It is concerning to see that kids this small already are displaying this kind of hostility towards each other. I don't know the background of their conflict; it might be totally unrelated from the fact that it was Arabs and Jews against each other. But it just reminded me very much of Aziz Abu Sarah's talk where he explained that he and his siblings always used to throw stones and were taught the Jews are the bad people. It makes me sad to see this kind of hostility that has been implanted into their brains from a very early age onwards.

So, we just had dinner in the hotel, chatted a while and went to rest.

Day 5 - Sunday, June 18, 2017, Israeli

Today was a little more relaxed than expected. We drove to Betzelem, a human rights organization this morning and had a chat with a lady from their office. Everyone is visibly more tired. We then drove back to the hotel to meet a girl from a student organization, "Whachah al Echad" (One on one), that is trying to bring Arab and Jewish students together and decrease the hostility and separation on campus. After this, we had lunch in a former train station (super expensive! I did not expect eating out to be this expensive in Israel!) They forgot my order so I only got it when everyone was already done, which sucked a little.

In the afternoon, we met David Krezmer who is writing books about Israel with one of the professors. He displayed a wide knowledge but also people seem to be a little exhausted.

Tonight, we will have an Iftaar (break fast) dinner cooked by Aziz Abu Sarahs mother! Very excited about this!

The dinner was actually a little underwhelming. Not because it wasn't good or because it wasn't delicious (it was both!) just after the Sabbath dinner, I expected a little more interaction with the family itself. It was more like a dinner, home cooked and in a local home. But since my expectations were a little different, I do feel a little disappointment. The food was amazing though! Maklube was so much better than the first day! And the dessert was heavenly! Plus, before the dinner, we had a local band play for us and almost everyone danced along!

Day 6 - Monday, June 19, 2017, Israeli + Palestinian

Today went a little different from what was initially planned but not too much. We left a little late and did a stop in between because one of the participants got scratched by a cat and wanted to get a rabies shot. So, one of the professors stayed with her and joined us later in Bethlehem. There we went to see the Walled off hotel at the separation wall which was set up by Banksy. We visited the gallery and museum that was set up in the hotel and also had the opportunity to walk along the wall for a bit. It is really a little controversial. The graffiti art really is very pretty but the international attention towards the art might in reality deflect the attention from the conflict to the art and Banksy himself... (We had a discussion about

that at lunch...) I don't really know how I feel about this. I like the art, but I agree, that the objects should not just be picturesque but that it is important to understand the meaning behind them and try to understand the perspective of the people actually living under these conditions.

Afterwards we went to the Church of the Nativity, then to a woman's collective who sold hand-embroidered fabrics and had lunch in between. Finally, we made it to a souvenir shop that everyone kept telling us to buy our souvenirs at and everyone bought a lot of stuff. Naturally, everyone took forever, so we didn't make it to the Sheppard's Field, where the Sheppard's allegedly were announced the birth of a new king. At 4 we got picked up by our host families for the night. I am staying with my previous roommate and two male Master's students in a family's house that is more like a small hostel. There are 3 other guests tonight who also sleep here and they have space for about 12 or so people! O.O But they are very nice, took us for a walk after dinner and showed us around a little. Plus, super delicious food! At night, I was able to do my first interview with my roommate.

Day 7 - Tuesday, June 20, 2017, Israeli + Palestinian

Today we started with a delicious homemade breakfast including very good hummus! The bus then took us to the AIDA refugee camp where we met a guy that tries to create peace from within through art and collaboration. The refugee issue is still big as they want to return to their own land in the future and do not give up fighting for this. They might assimilate into the society and build permanent homes but rather decide not to in order to prevent normalization of the occupation. Still, the graffiti on the wall was impressive. But that should not be the point but rather the situation of the Palestinians itself. The camp was not really a camp but actually houses and people lived there since losing their houses in 1948.

In general, our Israeli guide is not allowed to be in the West Bank. He has a guiding license for Bethlehem, but there also only for special areas, like the Church of Nativity. For this he had to sign a waiver that the state is not responsible for him in case anything happens... He asked us to not treat him like a guide, especially if we get checked and pretend he is just another participant.

The next stop was a Jewish settlement (Kfar Etzion) and talking to a Rabbi (Allen Haber). He was very convinced about his right to be in Israel and in this settlement. "Peaceful coexistence" was his idea for a solution. But for him this still implied being in charge and using the appropriate security measures to keep Jewish people safe and apart from all Arabs.

Seeing the direct contrast, it becomes more evident that there will not be an easy solution. Everyone is very convinced about their own narrative and has a hard time recognizing the other perspective. Having both the Israeli and the Palestinian narrative did help a little because they are able to balance the things we learned a little. I was just missing the time to process and discuss what has been said this time.

At lunch, we went to the tent of nations – thank you very much for not telling us that we will hike through the dust of an unpaved road to get there! – but the place itself is really cool. Too bad we did not have much time to explore and learn more! They do have all necessary documents but still get eviction or demolition notes all the time. This just makes you feel very hopeless.

Then we continued to the Parents Circle, a group of bereaved families from both sides, which decided not to seek revenge but end the killing through friendships and bonds instead. We heard 2 powerful stories of two men (one Israeli, one Palestinian) who each lost a daughter and joined the association. With their work, they are trying to prevent more families from having the same fate. They encouraged us to: Don't be pro-Israeli, don't be pro-Palestinian, be pro-peace! This serves more as an inspiration and is very helpful to see that despite all the pain and suffering, or even exactly because of it, reconciliation is possible.

We finished surprisingly early after being rushed all day, so that we had some time to relax at our host families and get another round of home-cooked dinner there. We did have an interesting conversation with our host-dad though. According to him the whole conflict is mostly a conspiracy between the Israeli and Palestinian governments. Interesting thoughts. I can just hope very strongly that this is not true. Otherwise our world really is lost.

Most people had very different experiences in their host families, but for the majority it has been good. Some had language problems, which made communication really hard and some of the houses were very – basic....

Day 8 - Wednesday, June 21, 2017, Israeli

Today we picked up our guides in Jerusalem on our way a little to the North. We stopped at a winery (Psagot Boutique Winery) and got a little tour, explanation and wine tasting. Moreover, we got to listen to 2 very interesting perspectives of Jewish “settlers”. One is in charge of the security for his region and his opinion was very thought-provoking in a way that he made you challenge your own motives. But he's certainly is a skilled talker, easily manipulating your responses to his questions. He told us that the media is manipulating, the itinerary of the tour is manipulating how we perceive the conflict/situation. This was a little off-putting for many people, including me. War is not a solution for him but he asked us to clean our backyards first before coming here and trying to impose our belief system on the area. The US is not the same as Israel. Our ideals might not be the ideals of others, why should we import them? He made us feel guilty in a way.

After him, we heard a woman talk about her work. She lives in the same area and is in the council. I couldn't listen to too much of what she was saying since I was still distracted by reflecting the other guys talk... but she told us not to believe anything until you see it yourself.

We then continued to the Mahmud Darwish Museum for a short tour there. He was a Palestinian poet and many of his books have been translated in other languages. We then had lunch in Ramallah. Due to Ramadan, however, Muslims are prohibited to sell food during the day. So, we had some trouble finding a Christian restaurant that would serve us. We ended up having pretty good food in the end though.

Surprisingly we then went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There we met a politician and she told us about the current situation and her view on the conflict and we are able to ask questions. According to her, Israel only has to accept the 2-state-solution with the 1967 borders and withdraw from Palestine and everything will be good. But she is also critical about this actually happening...

After this day of very opposing views the professors decided to take a short break after this in order to reflect about what we learned during the day in particular but also during the trip in general. We took some time for everyone to talk, without the guides or anyone joining in. I heard from others and I agree, that this should have happened more frequently. They claim that this is too late into the trip and should have taken place before. Also, only now a proper introduction of the photographer took place. Due to the setup of the group (some masters, some bachelor students), there was some struggle due to the difference in knowledge between the 2 different parts. The Bachelor students felt like they don't know anything and did not dare to ask questions during the meetings because they don't want to seem dumb/take up time with questions that the others would already know the answers of. There is just so much in everyone's head, that it is important to take some time to sort it out. Not to find a solution, but just to clarify and maybe discuss.

Our hotel for tonight is very upscale but due to Ramadan for example the pool is closed and also the restaurant was fully booked, so that some people had trouble getting food. Since we didn't get back too late, I was able to do 2 more interviews... I really need to keep up the pace to be able to finish on time!

Day 9 – Thursday, June 22, 2017, Israeli

Finally, the day to float! We started the day very early with a ride to the Dead Sea. Unfortunately, not early enough to see the sunset. Partially also because we had to go back to get a charger someone left plus had to pick up people at a checkpoint. It was crazy to see the line people had to wait in in order to cross the border with Israel! Far too long for a usual commute to work! So, most people hiked up Masada in the heat but eventually all made it up. Others took the cable car. From there we had a great overview of the whole area and could grasp the size of the Dead Sea! On the bus before reaching Masada, the Israeli guide and one of the professors had a little dispute about the historic facts of this place. There is a legend and it is very important for Jews still nowadays, but there is no proof it actually happened.

We had lunch at Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls had been found. After that, we finally had the opportunity to swim, or rather float on the water. It really is very salty and tastes disgusting! Everyone enjoyed a quick dip in the water though.

In the late afternoon, we went to the place of Jesus baptism at Jordan river. Still very hot and sunny outside, but Jordan is really just a jump away! We had a short visit by Friends of the Earths, Middle East who told us about the problem with water that they have.

And then a longer bus drive up north, where we got checked by military as we entered Israeli Territory from the West Bank. They asked us where we are coming from, where we are going and demanded to see a few passports, but not all. Dinner at the hotel and then a few more interviews.

Day 10 - Friday, June 23, 2017, Palestinian

I am not sure about the new guide. He did not do a proper introduction and yes, we are starting to be crazy and he is not in an easy situation, coming into an already formed group, but still. He would have had a chance to grab the mic on the bus...

After last night's decision to meet at 9 instead of 8.30, we started late, as so often, drove for about an hour to Nazareth, got into a traffic jam, I had the chance to do one interview, met the guide, got off the bus and walked to the Church of the Annunciation. The Basilica was much larger than any of the ones we saw before, well maybe not than the Holy Sepulcher, but this one had a very modern standard and was quite abstract. Not sure I liked the design, but there were many mosaics honoring Mary donated by different countries, which have been impressive!

We then continued to the Souk (market) where a few people got a lot of stuff. I don't really need to shop that much, so I didn't get anything there. A couple of people really took their time and made everyone wait for a long time... We barely made it into the synagogue church and then missed the mosque before the next round of prayers... Instead we had lunch first, which was ok but nothing special. Then a (Palestinian) peace activist talked to us about the life of Arab Israelis and the discrimination/hardships they are facing.

On the way back, we stopped at the white mosque, took a quick look and then headed back to the bus to drive to Mount Precipitous. Unfortunately, the road was closed so we couldn't get there.... Traffic in Nazareth seems to be a pain, as a side-note.

We drove to Tiberias and got on a boat to drive on the Sea of Galilee, it was a little short and we did not learn anything, but took a couple of nice pictures and danced a bit.

Before and after dinner I did 2 more interviews and then sat by a couple of people who were still outside. They then decided that it would be a good idea to go swimming at night in the

Sea of Galilee. From right now's perspective, it was! We laughed a lot and even saw a shooting star! A special moment to bond!

Day 11 – Saturday, June 24, 2017, Palestinian

Since we were not very prepared (we were told that we can dress as we want), we had to improvise with scarfs in order to enter the holy site of Capernachoum where the House of Petrus is located and an old synagogue. Not super interesting for me somehow. But nice view over the Sea of Galilee, allegedly the spot where Jesus walked over the water.

We continued to the Mount of Beatitudes, where Jesus did his famous speech of “Blessed be...”. It offered a great overview and a cool ceiling in the church. I learned that Honeysuckers are edible plants and taste super sweet!

Next stop was the Mt. Bental Bunkers which are in the Golan Heights, but not in use currently. The only military stationed there are UN Observers, watching the proceedings in Syria. In the distance, we could see bombs going off in Syria. The border was a very clear line of green vs. desert-like land. On the other side of the hill, we could observe the border with Israel and Lebanon.

For lunch, we stopped in a Druze village and met a local family that told us about their live there and under Israeli occupation (Golan Heights were conquered in the 6-Day-War in 1967). They were super hospitable and offered a lot of food for us (even though we just ate). He also showed us the Shouting Hills, directly at the border with Syria. Here we could hear thunder. Just that it wasn't thunder but the blasts of bombs going off in the Civil War in Syria. The village we were at was merely 50 km away from Damascus... We asked the guy whether they are afraid of the bombs, but he said that they are not. It's normal. And only one time a bomb went stray and blew up in their village so far. So, nothing to worry about.

It definitely was very intense for me. Especially because we went back on the bus afterwards, turned up the music and a lot of people danced. We returned to the hotel along the border, had dinner there and went to swim and have a beer at the beach. Later we sat outside and chatted and I had the chance to do more interviews.

Later we learned that actually on that exact day, some stray bombs exploded in the Israeli side of the Golan Heights and Israel launched a retaliation strike bombing a couple of military locations in Syria. In reality, we might not have seen the Civil War bombs in the morning, but the Israeli bombing instead...

Day 12 – Sunday, June 25, 2017, Israeli

In the morning, we went to discover Akko, where the Templars have been super active before. We went into a kind of museum und passed below the town in some tunnels, leading up to the port. Lunch together (on the other side of town, getting lost a little in the narrow

streets...) There we met the Palestinian guide we had for 2 days with his daughter. The streets were super busy as Ramadan just ended and everyone was preparing a big parade and 3 days of party.

We continued to a Kibbutz, where we were served homegrown watermelon (super delicious!). The live under an interesting concept of harmony and equality which seems to be very idyllic but somewhat detached from reality.

From there we went to Haifa and checked into our next hotel. Our room had an amazing view over the port of Haifa! Dinner was at Mt. Carmel in a Druse home, where one guy told us a little more about their religion. The professors told us that it is going to be a feast, but it was just normal. Apparently, they were a little disappointed, but at least for me, it was still more than enough food! Our drive back was rewarded with a magnificent sunset! Back in the hotel, some of us played a little table tennis and had some wine. Moreover, I was able to do the last 2 interviews this night. Done!

Day 13 – Monday, June 26, 2017, Israeli

We started in Haifa and did a short stop at the Baha'i gardens. Such a pretty place! I never really heard about this religion, so I think it was great getting a general idea of what it is about. We then headed back to Tel Aviv, where we had a debriefing in a shelter, where people are supposed to go whenever the sirens go off. Now I know what that looks like! Everyone shared some of their thoughts, but more about what they liked than any real feedback. I do need to write up all the things from my interviews and send them to the professor! Still very interesting to listen to everyone!

Some of the responses at the shelter:

- • Some mentioned that it will take a while to comprehend what they learned and that they need to continue learning. They stated that it is hard to verbalize the experience; with this group, it is different, because we all went through similar things, were here together and have similar memories but others won't understand what they are talking about.
- • What made this trip special for them was the personal connection they got to the conflict, the country(ies) and especially the people here. There have been difficult and intense moments (stabbing of policewoman, hearing the bombs).
- • The participants were struggling to answer the question "How was your trip?" – it is impossible to share the real experience, because they (family and friends back home) haven't been here. Hearing the bombs in the Golan Heights was one intense moment for some, as it brought war much closer than just hearing about the Civil War in the news.
- • Someone acknowledged that they have to question their own narrative in order to process this experience.

- • They called it an important, life-changing experience.
- • It is important to share that there are different shades of grey, not just black and white.
- • The conflict is human, it is impossible just to show one side of it.
- • They have more questions than answers now.
- • They feel encouraged to be “prophets” and not to stay quiet.

Again, there was a little struggle about an itinerary change. As one person was leaving today, the professors wanted to do the debriefing with him, but to do that, we would not be able to go to the bilingual kindergarten. People were very upset about this, so they somehow tweaked it so that we were able to do both and cut the afternoon program shorter.

From there we had a visit to a bilingual kindergarten, they were on holidays due to the end of Ramadan though. Very inspirational to hear that the kids are “clean” and that this helps them to make friends between different backgrounds! Their opinion depends on what you tell them, so it is better to just let them live and don’t explain. Lunch after that and then a short visit to Rabin’s square for those who wanted to go. The Israeli guide made us team up and go ask strangers questions. Unfortunately, my group was all introverts. So not too successful... ;) Still an interesting exercise. Then a little free time to shower and get ready for dinner at a home from a women’s association that goes to the streets every day and demand peace. Really a feast this time. We didn’t even nearly finish! Also, because a few people didn’t join, which I thought was not ideal. The remaining still had a lovely night, some shared personal stories, and others discussed about current issues or reflected on the experience. I had the chance to ask our Israeli guide some more questions. He states that everyone we visited got paid, except 2 people (Marc, the security guy and David Krezmer, since he was a friend of one of the professors). Most times we had organized meals, it was with smaller, local businesses in order to support them. He feels that the difference Mejdī is making is a slow process of visiting people over and over again and showing interest into their stories, making them feel more respected and eventually make them listen to other stories too.

The Bachelor part of the group had a separate feedback session then and most Master people went out to dance. I didn’t really feel invited, so I decided to stay back. Also since my roommate wasn’t going.

Day 14 – Tuesday, June 27, 2017

The final day of the group. Somehow surreal how fast the time went by! We were crazy enough to decide to watch the sunrise again and woke up at 4.45. At least this time I wasn’t the only one! My roommate and another girl joined me (Others decided to stay in bed...). It was super pretty even though I was skeptical at first about being able to see anything because of all the buildings. We did not go into the water completely though. There were too many jelly fish around. Back in the hotel, I had breakfast and then went back to sleep since

checkout would not be until 11, which then changed to 12. But around 10.40, 113 left and I had to say bye to her! Very sweet girl and just amazing to imagine that she is already a mum! One of the professors offered to go to the market at 11.15, so my roommate and I decided to join, along with several others. We got a couple of good deals and I bought myself 2 new rings and a couple of other things. We had lunch over there and then headed to the beach. The temptation was too large, so the professor and I went into the water. However, we couldn't stay long. Maybe because of all the jellyfish, but the water just hurt on our skin. On the way back to the hotel, I finally stopped by a post office and it took forever until they charged me like a million shekel for my 6 postcards. But at least I got to send them!

Then there wasn't much time left until the flight, we just sat in the lobby, everyone kind of tired or rather exhausted. A couple of people went out the night before and barely slept. I got some more answers for my questionnaire and then it was already time to say goodbye! I was pretty sad. It has been such a great experience for me and even though I did do all these interviews, I still got to relax and discover so many great places! But most of all I will remember all the people I met. More regarding the group than the speakers though. It has been amazing to observe them and see how they developed during this trip! I am sure for most people it has been a very valuable experience!

I took a bus to the hostel and met a guy that I was sharing a room with. After packing my stuff, we headed out to a supermarket and bought something for dinner which we had at the hostel including a good chat.

Day +1 – Wednesday, June 28, 2017

The hostel did not have me for long... Since I like to be on the safe side + because google maps suddenly didn't show the train I was planning to use, I left far too early and had breakfast at the airport instead of in the hostel (leftovers from yesterday...).

I could just drop my bag after answering a few questions, mostly why I have been to Egypt, VAE, and Turkey and if I know anyone there. Some general ones about my trip too. Then I got a sticker on my passport (a 5 in the beginning, I knew that 6 is the worst or rather means the most scrutiny for further security...). So, I proceeded to check my luggage, then headed for security. There the sticker was scanned and I was asked to go to a different section where they carefully checked my bag and all my electronics for something suspicious. It took quite a while, but wasn't too bad. I was a little concerned about being questioned, since the confidentiality of the interviews could have been breached if they search my computer or take a closer look at my documents...

But in the end, they just did the normal procedure, scan the luggage and send me through a metal detector. Done. Others did need to do more, but I couldn't see that. Passport control was much faster than on the way in, since I could just scan my biometric passport and get the exit paper!

In Istanbul, I had to go through security again, which was pretty annoying, since my water bottle was still full... But the flights were without any problems and I arrived home safely.

Now it's work, to analyze all the information I collected and also to process everything that we experienced.