



## Arab and Israeli Peace, at Least for Children



Itai Raziel

The playground at the Hand in Hand Bridge Over the Wadi school in Israel, which is bilingual.

By FELICIA R. LEE  
Published: May 3, 2008

"Bridge Over the Wadi" begins with the small and familiar to examine the big and complex. The first scene in this documentary, scheduled to have its television premiere in this country Sunday night on the [PBS](#) World channel, shows two sleepy-eyed little boys and their morning routine.

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Eyal Fried

Children at the school, whose students and their parents appear in "Bridge Over the Wadi," a segment on "Global Voices."

"My name is Assaf and I'll be going to the Jewish-Arab school," the older one says. "I think it's a good school, because you learn a lot of good things there. But on the other hand, there are Arabs there."

The camera then peeks inside the home of one of those Arabs, curly-haired Amina. Asma, her mother, says, "When I grew up, I was told to hate Jews." She continues: "When my daughter grew up and told me 'I hate Jews,' I thought, 'Why should she grow up the way I did?'"

Just what Arab and Jewish children in [Israel](#) should grow up knowing and believing about each other is at the heart of this quiet film directed by Barak Heymann and Tomer Heymann, Jewish filmmakers who are also brothers. They captured a year in the life of third-grade students, their parents and their teachers at the Hand in Hand Bridge Over the Wadi school, located in an Arab section of the Wadi Ara region in the middle of Israel.

Started in 2004 with 100 students in kindergarten through third grade, the school has grown to more than 200 students up to sixth grade, split evenly between Arabs and Jews. Its goal is to teach both Arabic and Hebrew and both Jewish and Muslim religion and culture.

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"In Israel, when people saw it, they all had different conclusions," Barak Heymann, 32, who lives in Tel Aviv, said in an interview. "The Israelis say we are pro-Arab, the Arabs say we are pro-Jewish," which led him to conclude that the film struck the right note.

"It's about being human and fighting for the right of the next generation not to be afraid of each other," Mr. Heymann said.

By now the film has been shown at several festivals around the world and won a handful of awards.

It is part of "Global Voices," a new series of internationally themed documentaries from filmmakers worldwide. The series is produced by Independent Television Services International for broadcast on PBS World, a digital channel.

The Heymann brothers have made films together and independently. Tomer, 37, won an audience award at the Berlin Film Festival in 2006 for "Paper Dolls," which examines the lives of a group of transsexual Philippine immigrants in Israel. In the past few years, Barak has produced documentaries for Israeli television, including the well-received "Zorki," about a mother's secret affair.

What becomes quickly evident in the unnarrated, almost hourlong "Bridge Over the Wadi" is that the children adapt more easily than the adults to difference. They do not talk much about this grand cultural experiment; they giggle and fumble with one another's languages, go to amusement parks together and attend bilingual slumber parties.

The adults, though, spend a lot of time grappling out loud with what it all means. "I'm afraid we'll burden our kids with our opinions, sensitivities, pain and perceptions," Ido, a Jewish father, says at a parent meeting.

Referring to her son, Moni, a Jewish mother, says, "I went out and told Yoav's father that in my opinion the Arab families go home and say, 'What suckers these Jews are.'" She eventually takes her son out of the school. "They let their children say 'Allah is great' and kneel down," she says. "I'm a total atheist, but I'm Jewish, and people died sanctifying God's name because they wouldn't kneel down."

Asma keeps her options open. "If I see my children become like Jews, I'll simply take them and go home," she says in an interview.

Assaf brings Bashar, who is Arabic, home for a play date of video games and plates piled high with spaghetti. Bruria, Assaf's grandmother, begins quizzing Bashar. Do they get along in school? Do Bashar's parents tell him about the terrorist attacks in Israel?

Assaf and Bashar seem unperturbed by the questions, twirling their spaghetti. Assaf says Bashar's parents "probably don't want him to be scared" about the terrorist attacks.

"I think it's an attempt to create a school with people who are actually our enemies," the grandmother says to the camera.

The children ignore her. They go outside and duel with plastic swords. Afterward they climb into a narrow twin bed, one at each end, and snuggle under a Bugs Bunny comforter.

*A previous version of this article and its headline included an incorrect location of the school.*

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