Workplaces where Jews and Arabs work together constitute a microcosm of Israeli society. Employees in these workplaces are exposed to and influenced by the external political environment, and each employee comes with his own prejudices and culture characterizing his ethnic group. The encounter between the employees creates an opportunity for cooperation, friendship, and a mutual understanding of the difficulties each group faces. This encounter, and the relationships forged, is fertile ground for studying the nature of the relationships between Jews and Arabs in an uncontrolled environment and to unveil the flash points between both groups.

This study examines the relationship dynamics between Jews and Arabs working in an Arab-owned organization, in an Arab city. Jewish-Arab relations have already been studied in the past, however this study is unique since the workplace is a reversal of the prevailing power relations in Israel. The studied organization is Arab-owned, and the Jews, the majority population in the country, are an ethnic minority in the organization employing them. Except for a previous comparative study of an Arab-Jewish workplace, this study is the first to conduct an in-depth examination of the nature of the relations in a setting where the Arabs are the majority and the Jews the minority. Consequently, this study enables an examination not only of the relationships created among the employees, but also of the perspective of Arab and Jewish employees when they meet at workplaces under conditions that differ from other workplaces.

The study attempts to identify the nature of the relations forged between the Jewish and Arab employees and to reveal the flash points between both groups. The study also explores whether there are offensive ethnophaulisms and analyzes how the members of both groups and the management cope with such offensive remarks. The study also examines the hierarchical relationships between the Arab management and the Jewish employees and attempts to discover whether Jews are excluded or discriminated against in the organization.

The study includes semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 employees - Jews and Arabs - and four observations in the organization during a four month period.The interviews were analyzed and interpreted according to the theory anchored in the study field, enabling conceptualization of social patterns and drawing conclusions regarding the nature in which meanings and perceptions are built and formed around various social practices. Thus, the study findings help to identify the nature of the relations between Jews and Arabs working together in an Arab-owned organization.

The employees in the studied organization share work spaces and are constantly interacting with each other. These conditions help to foster positive colleague relations and encourage situations where the employees can get to know each other better. This acquaintance often leads to friendships, which sometimes extend beyond the workplace and include meetings with family members and acquaintances.These relationships remain virtually untarnished even during violent or turbulent times. Although there is a salient rise in tension, it dissipates rapidly, partially because of the open dialog between the Jewish and Arab employees regarding political topics and various events outside the organization.

The findings teach that the Arab ownership and environment significantly contributes to reducing tension and racism between Jews and Arabs in the organization. The relatively low tension levels, compared to the external environment or other workplaces, are also associated with the role reversal in the studied company compared to greater Israeli society. In a Jewish-owned business, the Arab employee is in a doubly inferior position, both as an ethnic minority, and as financially dependent on the Jewish managers and owners. In contrast, in an Arab-owned organization, the Arab employee feels empowered because he belongs to the same ethnic group as the owners and the ones paying his salary. This sense of belonging reduces the Arab employee’s vulnerability and raises his degree of tolerance and acceptance towards the Jewish employees, who are the minority group in the studied organization. According to interviewee testimonials, cooperation at all levels of the organization and equal representation of Jews and Arabs in all levels of the hierarchy, including in senior management positions, have empowered the Arab employee and created symmetry in the power relations between the Jewish and Arab employees. On the other hand, the Jewish employee is dependent on the Arab employer for his livelihood and must defer to his management authority. Despite being a minority in the workplace, the Jewish employee knows that belonging to the country’s majority group in the country opens numerous opportunities for him, which reduces his dependence on the Arab-owned workplace. Moreover, the Jew’s presence in the workplace is considered vital and desirable, partially because of his belonging to the ethnic majority group. In this situation the employee’s Jewishness becomes an asset from the perspective of the company's management. Because of the Jewish employee’s financial dependence, and possibly also because of the company’s management’s respectful treatment of him, it seems that the Jewish employee tempers his ethnophaulisms and behaves in an egalitarian manner with his Arab colleagues.

According to testimonials from some of the employees (Jews and Arabs), management treats Jews fairly and respectfully and they even receive preferential treatment compared to the Arab employees. This treatment manifests in salary, employment conditions, and benefits they receive. The study also reveals that the management appreciates the professional skills of the Jewish employees, and therefore tends to rely on them for more professional matters than on the Arab employees. The interviews revealed that one of the reasons for this is the management’s treatment of the Jewish employees as a resource that the Arab employees and management lack - belonging to the majority group in the State of Israel. This belonging gives them power and influence in economic society, and they are therefore chosen to represent the organization in professional meetings with various institutions and state bodies that award the company contracts.

The findings show that the work environment in the organization supports a shared space for both cultures and allows each group to express its own culture. Thus, the Jewish employees experience Arab culture from up close, become familiar with it, and understand the different nuances that they were not previously aware of. Working together, the constant interaction, and maintaining cultural pluralism, have resulted in dismantling prejudices that the employees held before working in the organization. However, Jewish and Arab employees expressed regret that the dynamics created at work do not affect the greater society and the actual political conflict.

The conclusions of this study may be applicable for Israeli organizations employing Jewish and Arab employees, and for all organizations that have a majority group and a minority group. A few applicable recommendations can be gleaned from the study’s findings for the purpose of creating optimal shared spaces. These recommendations include: Creating ethnic heterogeneity in the workplace; creating communication and cooperation between the employees; maintaining reciprocity, egalitarian discourse and fair representation of members of all the groups in all levels of the hierarchy; and maintaining cultural pluralism.