



UNIVERSITEIT LEIDEN

The impact of the occupation on peace building in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Challenges and perspectives

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I. Introduction:

The region of the Middle East could easily be described as one of the most unstable in the world. Periodic wars and revolutions reveal the presence of permanent security risks and frequent changes in the balance of power among the actors in the area. One of the most ill-famed disputes in the region is the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. It is an almost-century old conflict that is 'old enough to have produced a series of theoretical solutions. This problem has been discussed enough over the decades; a variety of solutions including all the technicalities have been developed...' (Hänsel, 2010, pp. 13) and yet lasting peace still seems to be a distant mirage. Thus, the problem is more of a 'why is the progress of the reconciliation process obstructed?' than 'are there any solutions'? On the one hand, as Hänsel argues, there are more than enough theoretical top-level (official diplomacy) proposals for peace and reconciliation (e.g. Camp David Accords (1978), Oslo Accords (1993), Road Map for Peace (April 30, 2003), Geneva Accord (October 20, 2003)), however, they have all failed in bringing reconciliation. On the other hand, grassroots (civil-led) peace initiatives are also largely failing to transform the conflict. This seemingly fruitless struggle on both peace building fronts (formal and informal) naturally produces limited results - frequent periods of fragile peace and stability, followed by escalations in tension and ultimately a relapse of the conflict.

Bearing all of this in mind, establishing lasting peace and achieving reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians is important for both regional and international security in the coming global turn, perceived as a turn towards multipolarity (Kupchan, 2012). Stability, however, will continue to be an impossible goal, or - at best - its success and duration will continue to be limited, without acknowledging the specific obstacles and problems that are preventing Israelis and Palestinians from reaching a solution to this protracted and mutually-harmful conflict. Some of the core obstacles include the historical and emotional nature of the dispute, the religious differences between the two sides, and the fact that the Palestinians are a nation without a nation-state. After the Six-day war of 1967 an additional obstacle emerged, namely the fact that the Palestinian lands (the West Bank and Gaza) were among the territories subjected to a de facto occupation with Israel being the occupying force. Having these

obstructions in mind, conflict resolution and peace building prove to be extremely difficult tasks in the context of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

The genuine problem, however, is *how* these obstacles affect the peace process? There is a lot of literature concerned with the impact of the emotional obstructions, the challenges stemming from the difference of the two peoples, the different religions and the attitudes and perceptions formed during this prolonged dispute. However, the structure of the conflict after the Six-day war of 1967 and its impact on peace building are not explored in sufficient detail. It must be mentioned, however, that this issue is too vast to be covered in its entirety in the present work due to volume limitations. Thus, the current paper will focus on the occupation's escalating nature as an obstacle for the resolution of the conflict and analyze its impact on grassroots peace initiatives. The aim of the work will be two-fold. Firstly, it will argue that the occupation and its structure resemble a 'security dilemma' in terms of its escalation patterns and 'competitive' nature. Secondly, the current work will argue that the escalating nature of the occupation is detrimental for both sides, not only in terms of economy and politics, but also in terms of opportunities for peace. The current paper will also discuss the fact that nowadays, when the challenges faced by peace initiatives are mentioned, problems are almost always sought in the internal issues of NGOs and grassroots initiatives (frequently described as inefficient and divided) and external factors, such as the very structure of the occupation and its impact on the process, are often neglected. The paper will thus forward the argument that what most describe as the core problems of peace building in the Israeli-Palestinian case (e.g. inefficiency, disunity, and lack of common goals among grassroots initiatives) are actually symptoms of a deeper issue and in order for true reconciliation and lasting peace to be established in the region actors should concentrate on the underlying condition – the occupation itself. Furthermore, in order to escape particular bias, the work will treat the context of the conflict as detrimental for both sides, thus proving that not only the Palestinians are hurt by the occupation but also the Israelis, albeit not to the same extent. However, the fact that the occupation has led to a significant decrease in the effectiveness of peace initiatives over the years hurts both parties of the conflict equally in terms of achieving peace. Additionally, the blame for the spiral escalations, tensions and aggression should not and

indeed could not be put on either one of the actors alone but rather on the very structure of the occupation which, over the years, has led to a chain of events that has been limiting the pool of possible answers of both parties on every step of the way. Therefore, obtaining enough knowledge in order to fill the above-mentioned gap in the literature, understanding *why* and *how* the structure of the occupation affects the peace-building process and the severity of its impact on the grassroots activism could thus prove instrumental for resolving the conflict in future.

The main body of the thesis will be divided in three chapters. For the purposes of logical coherence in the text, the first section, which will serve as an introduction to the problem, will focus on the role and importance of grassroots initiatives and community cooperation as vital parts of the peace-building process. In this chapter, the paper will concentrate on exploring why civil society initiatives (people-to-people programs, civil society organizations (CSOs), NGOs and joint activism) are important for conflict transformation in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The second section of the paper will focus on the background of the conflict and the particularities of the nature and structure of the Israeli occupation. In this chapter, the framework of the spiral model (the security dilemma) will be applied to the study of the status quo and point out to the fact that the more security both parties aspire to, the more insecure they become and tensions gradually escalate leading to boxing of the conflict and ultimately a clash (First and Second *Intifada*) that hurts both sides' opportunities for peace, security and reconciliation. Chapter three will focus on the effects of the structure of the occupation on grassroots peace initiatives and argue that the observed escalations of aggression over the years have led to a growing hopelessness and disillusionment among the NGOs and CSOs involved in the peace-building process, which in turn has led to their decreasing effectiveness. This final section will include a case study of the Israeli and Palestinian women organizations, part of the 'Jerusalem Link' until 2009, illustrating how the latest escalation of the conflict (the Al-Aqsa (second) *Intifada* of 2001) has affected them. The paper will conclude with a summary, arguing that the structure of the occupation has led to a spiral model of escalation of aggression in the conflict that damages both sides and limits their prospects for peace and security by consistently alienating Israelis and Palestinians, which in turn produces the

problems often referred to as the core causes for the failure of the grassroots peace initiatives and their ineffectiveness.

II. Literature Review:

Ervin Staub argues that very often the actors on the international scene choose violence as a means for settling disputes over territory, resources and other basic necessities. It is almost a natural reflex, especially if the sides let their 'negative views of the other, and mistrust' guide them (Staub, in Salomon & Nevo, 2012). With this in mind, conflict resolution mechanisms prove to be an important instrument towards establishing 'negative peace' (the absence of violence) (Galtung & Jacobsen, 2000). Although at this point the conflict might be considered as resolved, one should ask him/her-self what about the post-conflict state of relations? Resolving the conflict and establishing negative peace is not enough for achieving stability in the long-run. A conflict transformation towards 'positive peace' that leads to 'political pluralism, socio-economic justice and reconciliation' (Mikhelidze and Pirozzi, 2008) should be sought. In other words, after the violence has ceased further concentration on the social-behavioral symptoms of the conflict is needed.

As mentioned earlier, there has been no lack of official diplomatic efforts to put an end to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Stephan points out, however, that the 'countless UN resolutions calling for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from lands captured in the 1967 war and occupied illegally (the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem); and a number of "track I" (formal) and "track II" (informal) negotiated peace plans' did not achieve a considerable advance in resolving the dispute (Stephan, 2003; 2). Stephan further argues that '[i]n multidimensional, protracted social conflicts like [the Israeli-Palestinian] one, where traditional approaches have consistently failed to bring peace, an alternative to deadlock led by citizen based initiatives is imperative' (Stephan, 2003; 3). This society based approach could be found partly in what is described as the informal version of peace education and also through the activities of different NGOs and grassroots initiatives focused around peace building.

One of the most widely recognized methods for achieving reconciliation in intractable conflicts or in the post-conflict phase of a dispute is peace education (PE) (Salomon & Cairns, 2009; Salomon & Nevo, 2012). It is a vital instrument for both resolving a conflict thoroughly and transforming the negative peace to a positive one. As Salomon puts it – ‘the general purpose [of peace education] is to promote understanding, respect, and tolerance toward yesterday’s enemies’ (Salomon & Nevo, 2012). Furthermore, ‘Peace education activities that attempt to end violence and hostilities can be carried out informally in communities or formally within institutional places of learning, like schools and colleges.’ (Ian Harris, in Salomon & Cairns, 2009; 11)

In regions, where a conflict is still ongoing, the perceptions and attitudes of the parties involved are heavily defined by their prejudices, and there are no solid conditions for implementing the formal (direct) peace education, only the indirect mode could be applied (Bar-Tal, Rosen, and Nets-Zehngut, in Salomon & Cairns, 2009). Informal PE revolves around reflective thinking, tolerance, ethno-empathy, human rights and conflict resolution all put into context through communication between the parties involved. Thus, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict we could see mostly the implication of the indirect mode of peace education – through various different programs emphasizing on contact between the conflicting parties, such as workshops that promote interactive problem-solving (Kelman, 2005) and programs like "Pathways to Reconciliation" (studied by Biton & Salomon, 2006). Furthermore, informal PE forms an important part of the grassroots initiatives aimed at peace building. Extensive workshops and ‘peace camps’ encourage people-to-people interaction and dialogue with the aim of changing attitudes and perceptions, which is a vital component of the process geared towards ‘positive’ peace and reconciliation in emotional conflicts (Ireland, Israel-Palestine). As Malhotra and Liyanage point out ‘[p]articipants in these peace workshops typically live together for a few days or weeks and attend group discussions on such topics as conflict resolution and diversity and engage in role-playing activities, group projects, and so on.’ (Malhotra & Liyanage, 2005; 909) By applying a case study to the case of Sri Lanka, the authors discuss the long-term implications of peace workshops on the attitudes of empathy of the

participants. What their study shows, is that people that participated in the workshops showed significantly greater empathy for the other ethnicity than did non-participants. (ibid.)

Thus, most of the above-mentioned authors agree that civil led initiatives are an appropriate answer to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, as they have helped many other nations towards the establishment of stable peace relations by changing their attitudes (e.g. Lebanon, Nepal, Sierra Leone, and Northern Ireland). Although, it might seem at first that the relations between Israelis and Palestinians have not changed a lot over the 47 years of occupation and that the civil-based activism has not achieved their goal of successfully promoting and establishing lasting peace, there are still some prominent examples of success among the grassroots initiatives of the early days. A case in point is the interactive problem-solving workshops established and evaluated by Kelman, Cohen, Miller, and Smith (Kelman, 2005). As the author mentions in various articles of his, a series of workshops took place during the 1970s and 1980s, which culminated with a workshop, involving highly influential Israelis and Palestinians in the years prior to the Oslo agreement of 1993. According to Kelman these interactions actually paved the way towards Oslo and could thus be viewed as a major success in terms of the peace-building process. These workshops, as Kelman points out, have given the opportunity to 'politically involved and often politically influential (but generally unofficial) members of conflicting communities [to] interact in a nonbinding, confidential way.' (ibid., 5) Furthermore, '[t]he micro process of the workshops provides them the opportunity to penetrate each other's perspective; to explore both sides' needs, fears, priorities, and constraints; and to engage in joint thinking about solutions to the conflict that would be responsive to the fundamental concepts of both sides.'(ibid.) The central goal of these interactive workshops was mainly to establish a political atmosphere, which will inspire both sides of the conflict to take a step towards the negotiating table. The final 'continuous' workshop that started in August 1993 did precisely that. In the wake of the Oslo agreement, Kelman and his colleagues 'initiated the Joint Working Group on Israeli-Palestinian Relations, with the express purpose of producing joint concept papers on the final-status issues.' (ibid., 11) As the author further points out, after the Oslo accord was announced, 'various observers credited our work with having laid the groundwork for it.' (ibid.) The work of H. Kelman and his

workshops contributed immensely to the larger, albeit still limited, effort of grassroots initiatives and unofficial activism at the time. As the author further points out, '[b]efore being prepared to sign an agreement...the parties had to be convinced not only that such an agreement was *necessary*,but also *possible*.' (ibid., 13) The grassroots initiatives, the unofficial communication, workshops and joint activism against the conflict were among the vital tools that made this realization possible.

In addition, during the 1990s a lot of new NGOs for peace and cooperation started appearing on the horizon. As Dajani and Baskin point out, '[f]rom the early days of the first Palestinian intifada in November 1987, more and more mainstream Palestinians and Israelis began to engage in joint activities... aimed at creating a formal peace process...' and '[b]efore the second intifada prior to September 28, 2000, there were hundreds of peace joint activities' (Dajani & Baskin, in Kaufman, Salem and Verhoeven, 2006; 87) It was an optimistic period that saw the expansion of grassroots initiatives and CSOs for cooperation in different fields (e.g. water, environment, health). For a brief moment it looked that the conflict had almost reached its end. However, the failure of the talks in Camp David in 2000 and the subsequent outbreak of the Second *Intifada* in 2001 signaled the end of the 'Oslo process' and thus an end to a period of long awaited peace. This, naturally, brought about a new set of challenges for the grassroots initiatives and NGOs and 'it became very difficult to get people from both sides back on the peace track to work together' (ibid.)

As Karin Aggestam and Lisa Strömbom (Aggestam & Strömbom, 2012) point out 'Since the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada in 2000 and the breakdown of the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) several peace building activities between Israelis and Palestinians have either collapsed or are struggling for survival.' Moreover, it has become increasingly common nowadays to attribute the failure of the peace-building process to the disunity, difference in agendas, lack of mobilization and inefficient methods of the civil society and describing them as the core obstacles of the grassroots initiatives. (Glenna, 2012; Høigilt, Atallah and el-Dada, 2013) Although this might be true to a certain extent, the literature on the topic often focuses on these challenges and fails to dig deeper into the issue. If the initiatives were so inherently

flawed, why did they manage to produce a series of successful joint actions and cooperation on various levels between Israelis and Palestinians over the years? Why did they start withering and their effectiveness decreasing precisely after the Second Intifada? Something must have changed.

In connection to this idea, it is important to mention the work of Neve Gordon. In his book *Israel's Occupation*, the author constructs the impression that the occupation has a life of its own. He argues that a lot of studies in the field of occupation 'portray Israel's military rule as static, as if the occupation had remained stable...' (Gordon, 2008; 2) The truth is that both Israelis and Palestinians are not completely free agents, whose actions are unobstructed by contingencies. As Gordon points out further – 'Even though the Israeli state appears to be a free actor from which a series of policies originates, a closer investigation reveals that its policies and, more particularly, the modification of its policies over the years have been shaped by the different mechanisms of control operating in the OT.' (Gordon, 2008; 3) The author argues that the mixture of what he describes as 'interactions, excesses, and contradictions' produced by the mechanisms and institutions used by the Israeli government in order to maintain the occupation can explain the changing nature of the occupation over the years and the increasing amount of violence and deaths.

1. Theoretical framework:

Having in mind the zero-sum nature of the conflict and aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians, an appropriate theoretical framework for this research proves to be the school of Realism, and more precisely the Structural Realism (Waltz, 1979). According to the realist in general, the International Relations are defined by the absence of an authority higher than the state, and thus, the relations between the main actors (the states) on the international arena are heterogeneous and characterized by anarchy, in which every state is on its own and is responsible for its own security. This, in turn, leads to constant competition for security among the states which defines their relations. Realism is also the school of thought from which the term 'security dilemma' (also known as the 'spiral' model) originated. The concept could easily be applied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict context, as it theorizes on the subject of the pursuit

of security by a country, which is increased on the expense of the security of the others. Jervis points out that the 'spiral' model 'describes how the interaction between states that are seeking only security can fuel competition and strain political relations.' (Jervis, 1976, Glaser 1997; 171) The dilemma revolves around the situation in which actions by a state intended to enhance its security, can lead other actors on the international scene to respond with reciprocal measures, producing increased tensions that create competition and ultimately conflict, even when no side really desires it (Jervis, 1978). Therefore, similarly to the interactions observed during the Cold-War years between the USA and the USSR, and the bipolar world as a whole, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the context of occupation revolves around building security on the expense of the other actor's one. Thus, the continuous escalation, the nature of the occupation and the way it boxes the conflict fit the patterns of the 'security dilemma'. Bearing this in mind, the overview of the occupation and the relations between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), which will be described in detail in chapter two of the current paper, will be viewed through the lens of the Structural Realism, and the spiral model in particular, arguing that the more each side presumably increases its security the more the other actor feels threatened and further pursues an increase of its security, which leads to a vicious circle of escalation that is often undesired.

2. Methodology:

As far as methodology goes, the case study is an appropriate method for this research, because it is used to explore causation in order to find underlying principles (Shepard & Greene, 2003; Van Evera, 1997) and it is one of the best methods to apply if one wants to infer or test an explanatory hypothesis, or if cases have been unevenly recorded (Van Evera, 1997). Furthermore, the case study methodology gives us the opportunity to exemplify and support the thesis we have in mind. As Soy points out, '[c]ase study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research.' (Soy, 1997) It is a widely used method for research that emphasizes detailed contextual analysis of a small number of cases and how they relate to each other in confirming the main hypothesis. The current paper will include a case

study of the joint Israeli-Palestinian women peace organization - the Jerusalem Link - in order to illustrate the impact of the constantly changing nature of the occupation and its structure on the grassroots peace-building process.

III. Chapter I

The role and importance of civil society for peace building and conflict transformation.

Since the beginning of the 20th century the world has witnessed an alarming amount of deep, emotional and ethnic conflicts. Some of them were considered resolved by the international community (Ruanda, Congo, Sierra Leone, Northern Ireland) but others, like the Israeli-Palestinian one are still ongoing and finding a solution to them seems to be a constant uphill struggle. As Malhotra and Liyanage point out, referring to authors like Kelman, White, Larson, Deutsch and Coleman - '[o]ne of the barriers to conflict resolution and reconciliation is the lack of empathy (and indeed the rampant dislike and antagonism) that exists between the two (or more) parties to the conflict.' (Malhotra & Liyanage, 2005, 908) The broader literature on the topic of disputes and conflicts, however, often concentrates on the institutional level of politics and makes, at best, little reference to the contribution made by peace movements on the grassroots level. Whether this is because the civil-led initiatives are taken for granted or thought of as ineffective, the case is that too little attention is given to an instrument that might very well prove to be among the most promising ways out of a conflict (Paffenholz, 2009; Shemesh, 2011) because of its concentration on transforming the dispute by encouraging empathy, cooperation and understanding among yesterday's enemies.

Over the past 47 years, as mentioned earlier, there were numerous attempts by top-level actors to end the intractable conflict between Israelis and Palestinians through negotiations and official diplomacy tracks and yet, they have all failed to bring lasting reconciliation between the two peoples. In situations like this, where no tangible results could be reached by the top-down level, grassroots efforts prove vital (Bekdash, 2009). Because of the nature of the conflict and its inherent complexity (involving emotions, attitudes,

perceptions, differences) top-level peace initiatives are not enough primarily because they focus mainly on purely political and/or economic aspects of the conflict. In such deep and emotional protracted conflicts the need for change in perceptions and attitudes is imperative. Bekdash, thus, further argues that, '[t]op-down peacemaking approaches to conflict negotiations without parallel and adequate bottom-up grassroots efforts has proven ineffective and should be avoided in Israel and Palestine.' (ibid., 1) After all one of the main purposes of and prerequisite for stable peace is the public support for the settlements reached by the top-level actors. Such support proves impossible if reconciliation on the grassroots level is not introduced. Therefore, for the purpose of bridging the divide between the two peoples and in order for each one of them to understand the other, civil-led initiatives and grassroots joint activism are vital. Thus, the combination of top-down and bottom-up efforts will ensure that both political and socio-psychological issues are addressed in a way that will create the space and conditions for stable, positive peace.

1. CSOs, NGOs and Joint Activism

The London School of Economics' Centre for Civil Society describes civil society as 'the arena of uncoerced collective actions around shared interests, purposes and values... [It] commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power....' (Mikhelidze and Pirozzi, 2008; 5) Besides communicating through workshops and meetings, typical for the informal type of peace education, it also often operates on the basis of non-profit and non-governmental organizations that according to Mikhelidze could be broadly defined as civil society organizations (CSOs). The aim of such organizations in the Israeli-Palestinian case is to promote peace and reconciliation on the basis of co-operation on various levels ranging from healthcare and environment to renewable energy and water supply. CSOs and NGOs thus epitomize the grassroots initiatives and represent the bottom-up forces in search of paths to conflict transformation that are usually not explored by official track diplomacy and top-down initiatives. They seek to 'engage representative citizens from the conflicting parties in designing steps to be taken in the political arena to change perceptions and stereotypes, to create a sense that peace might be possible,

and to involve more and more of their compatriots.’ (Chigas, 2007; in Mikhelidze and Pirozzi, 2008; 9)

As Shira Herzog and Avivit Hai have noted, despite the overwhelming hostility and mistrust between them, Israelis and Palestinians have communicated for decades. At first, ‘[t]hroughout the 1970s, a handful of individuals initiated informal, clandestine talks in order to examine the potential for a negotiated resolution to the conflict.’ (Herzog & Hai, 2005; 7) During the 1980s this developed into more frequent contacts and track II diplomacy that were supplemented by ‘joint political solidarity and humanitarian activities during the first Intifada.’ (ibid.) After the signing of the Oslo peace agreement, these dispersed civil backchannels and forms of cooperation became known as people-to-people programs and received greater organization and a better institutional framework, on the basis of which to further their goals of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation and reconciliation. Despite the hopeful aims and ideas, however, the often unfortunate truth is that civil-led initiatives still remain limited and as the reality shows, the conflict is still ongoing with no actual resolution on the horizon, which means that people-to-people interactions and activism continues to be largely unsuccessful. Why then should support, funding and development of such initiatives be continued? As Herzog and Hai conclude - ‘given the protracted nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ontological issues related to “conflict repertoire” and realities need to be seriously addressed for the conflict to be resolved.’ (ibid., 9) In this context people-to-people activities and joint cooperation provide a challenge to the status quo and offer alternative paths to conflict transformation that are both unique and much needed in stalemate situations observed in protracted and emotional conflicts such as the one between Israelis and Palestinians. However, as mentioned, the nature of the conflict provides specific obstacles and challenges that limit the efforts of grassroots initiatives. In the following chapter the attention will be focused on the specifics of the conflict context and its unique character.

IV. Chapter II

Background of the conflict and the structure of the occupation

As Kai Frithjof Brand Jacobsen argues in a Joint Report produced by the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) – PATRIR and NOVA, ‘Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Palestine) have seen one of the most extensive investments in conflict resolution and transformation, nonviolence, ‘people-to-people’ projects and peace education programs of nearly any region in the world.’ (Frithjof Brand Jacobsen, 6) Albeit the success of many of the projects and their continuous struggle against the conflict, the results remain limited. The author points out that ‘[t]he building of the separation wall/fence, the war in Gaza, continuing expansion of settlements and continued violence both within and between Palestine and Israel have all taken place - and indeed escalated and intensified - during this period of ‘investment in peace.’ Although there are many variables that produce various sways in the conflict, and thus in the peace process, among the most detrimental is the very way the occupation in the OPT has evolved during the past 47 years. Jacobsen further writes that an ‘analysis of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict over time shows that the conflict and the occupation fuelling it have significantly worsened in the 16 years since the signing of the Oslo Accords and are continuing to worsen now.’ Some of the most widely believed causes - also shared by the author - for this continuous worsening of the situation between Israelis and Palestinians are connected to the zero-sum nature of the dispute, the failure to address the root causes responsible for this conflict, and the general hopelessness of all actors involved that there could ever be a ‘fair’ resolution to the conflict. However, the context of occupation and its structure, albeit very important to this specific conflict, are rarely addressed in sufficient detail. Some of the authors that chose to concentrate on the occupation often focus on either the diplomatic and peace efforts of the international community and their collective impact on the occupation, Israel’s different approaches towards the OPT, or Palestinian resistance. Although these kinds of research are important for understanding the nature of the occupation, they (1) fail to capture its inner dynamic and (2) portray Israel’s rule as static, as almost exclusively dependent on agency, which is often not the case. However, among the few that do venture deeper into the

issue at hand, Neve Gordon presents some interesting points that should be taken into consideration when talking about the nature of the conflict and the future of the peace process.

In his work, the author explores in detail the different stages the occupation went through, arguing that almost every aspect of the lives of Israelis and Palestinians has worsened overtime. If we take for example the death toll on both sides, one clearly sees the escalation, particularly obvious after the Second *Intifada*. As Gordon points out, '[d]uring the six-year period between 2001 and 2007, Israel has, on average, killed more Palestinians per year than it killed during the first twenty years of occupation.' (Gordon, 2008; xvi) The same goes for the Israeli side, where the number of deaths has also increased over the years – '[d]uring the thirteen-year period between December 1987 and September 2000, 442 Israeli were killed by Palestinians, but during the six-year period from the eruption of the second intifada until the end of 2006, 1,019 Israelis were killed.' (ibid., xvii) What is interesting, is that both sides 'defend' the escalating nature of their actions by arguing that they have altered their methods in response to the activities undertaken by the other side. (Israel started using lethal force, *because* it found itself obliged to do so in response to the changed methods of violence deployed by Palestinians (suicide-bombers) and in order to heighten its security. Palestinians, on the other hand, justified the change in tactics of violence in response to Israel's more frequent use of lethal measures.) In addition, having in mind the zero-sum nature of the conflict, one could find striking similarities between the occupation and the security dilemma, which to a large extent defined the relations and arms race between the USA and the USSR during the Cold War years. The same narrative and discourse is applied as well as similar actions undertaken. This has led to a vicious circle of escalation (more lethal force by Israel, has led to the use of suicide-bombers by the Palestinians, which in turn has led to the building of the separation wall/fence by the Israelis) that has negative repercussions on both sides, especially on their opportunities for peace and reconciliation.

Furthermore, Israel's occupation is unique in its goal - to expropriate the territory of the West Bank and Gaza without taking responsibility for the people inhabiting it. Gordon argues that 'from the very beginning, Israel governed the territories by making a clear distinction

between the land occupied and the people inhabiting it...' (ibid., 6) For this purpose, a series of mechanisms of control were created – some concentrating on the acquisition of the land without its proper annexation, and others were focused on managing the Palestinian population without integrating it into Israeli society (Gordon, 2008). Naturally these two contradicting efforts have led to a failure in 'normalizing' the occupation and thus in regular and continuous escalations in aggression on both sides. As Gordon argues, since the 1967 war 'the occupation was presented as simultaneously temporary, moral, *and* nonexistent.' (ibid., 7) Therefore, because of the conflicting nature of the main goal of the occupation, many of the institutions and control mechanisms deployed by Israel in the OPT have produced, what Gordon describes as a series of 'excesses and contradictions'. By excesses, the author means the additional 'effects that are not part of the initial objective of the means of control.' (ibid., 15) An apt example of excess in this case would be the establishment of a Jewish settlement in the OPT, where the main purpose is to confiscate land and divide the space of the Occupied Territories, but this act also implies that the occupation is not temporary and thus contradicts the discourse upheld by Israel. As far as the 'contradictions' go, according to the author, there are two types – '[o]ne type is created within the controlling apparatus itself' (Israel officially does not want a one-state solution, but the actions it takes on the ground render such a solution highly probable) and the other involves contradictions fueled by the interaction among different forms of control (during the first years of the occupation Israel was continuously helping the Palestinian economy, while simultaneously establishing mechanisms aimed at limiting and preventing a completely self-sufficient and independent Palestinian economy) (Gordon, 2008).

These excesses and contradictions are among the root causes that triggered Palestinian resistance, which in turn shaped Israel's response. Thus, ever since the beginning of the occupation, the accumulation of excesses and contradictions has led to a spiral model of escalation based on actions and counteractions clearly visible in the changing nature of the occupation. Similarly to the security dilemma after each escalation on one side, the other side further escalates in order to protect its interests and security, which, in turn, leads to a second escalation on the part of the first actor and so on. As Gordon argues, 'the first intifada, which

was spurred, in part, by the excesses and contradictions informing Israel's forms of control, drove Israel to [...] modify the ways its controlling apparatuses operated' emphasizing more and more on violent and lethal force, which eventually led to the Second *Intifada* and the building of the security wall/fence afterwards. This upward spiral of violence and aggression shows two important things. First of all, the agency of both actors is not as free as it might seem, but is rather limited and shaped to a large extent by the changing structure of the occupation and second of all, the escalating nature of the relations between the two parties, largely governed by a security dilemma, has boxed the conflict and has led to an ever-growing distrust and hopelessness that has a huge impact on the prospects for peace among the two peoples.

V. Chapter III

The impact of the escalating nature of the occupation on the peace process. Challenges and perspectives.

The boxing of the conflict and its increasingly negative impact on both sides is visible in almost every aspect - economy, infrastructure and politics. Additionally, it is also hindering the peace activism on both sides, which severely limits the possibilities of reconciliation in both the short and long term. This chapter will explore the challenges and perspectives of joint activism and the peace camps on both sides, exemplifying the escalating nature of the occupation and its hazardous impact on the prospects for peace. However, it is important to note at this point that there are a few limitations to a thorough analysis of the issues faced by peace camps on both sides, namely - (1) the difficulty of accurately evaluating the current state of NGOs without a field study and (2) limitations imposed by the length of the paper.

1. Challenges

To begin with, it is important to mention that peace initiatives and the peace process on grassroots level in general have never been particularly strong in either society. As Salem and Kaufman argue, 'peace building in Israel can be seen as oppositional activity and confined to a "peace camp" or temporary coalitions. On the Palestinian side peace building was scattered before being officially sanctioned by the PLO...' (Salem & Kaufman, in Kaufman, Salem and

Verhoeven, 2006; 31) In addition to this, peace initiatives on both sides have often been unable to act as major protagonists as on many occasions were influenced by the context of the conflict rather than having an impact on it. Furthermore, there has been a continuous lack of unity, mobilization and issues stemming from the interactions with 'the other', as well as a weak overall contribution to important concerns. In general, CSOs in this conflict have largely been considered as ineffective and weak (Frithjof Brand Jacobsen, 40). However, many authors agree that peace activism and cooperation on grassroots level is a necessary, positive and helpful instrument in difficult conflicts (like the ones in Northern Ireland, Abkhazia, Israel-Palestine, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria and Western Sahara) (Mikhelidze and Pirozzi, 2008; Julia Chaitin, Fida Obeidi, Sami Adwan, and Dan Bar-On, 2004) and that no matter how limited an impact Israeli and Palestinian peace initiatives and NGOs tend to have, they still play a crucial role in the peace process aimed at future agreements and eventually reconciliation (Kaufman, Salem, Verhoeven; 2006), which would undoubtedly be impossible without cooperation and understanding among the civil societies on both ends.

However, as Naomi Chazan points out, '[p]eace organizations... do not operate in a social or political vacuum.' (Chazan, in Kaufman, Salem and Verhoeven, 2006; vii) The most recent escalation of the conflict, the excessive violence and the subsequent physical separation (the building of the security fence/wall) marked a historic low point in the century old dispute, and have led to the rapid deterioration of the already fragile state of peace activism on both sides. Furthermore, the deadlock created by the worsening situation after the failure of the Camp David Summit in 2000 and the subsequent eruption of the Second *Intifada* has a twofold impact on the prospects for peace – it facilitated the halt of peace initiatives on the grassroots levels, while giving impetus to militant extremists among both societies. As Chazan further stresses, '[e]ven though so many more Palestinians and Israelis support a viable two-state solution today than in the past and... yearn for a cessation of violence, most have succumbed to the tactical dictates of conflict advocated by the militants...' (ibid., viii) The relapse of the conflict after 2000 instilled an even more resilient atmosphere of doubt, suspicion and distrust, which 'developed a dynamic of its own' (ibid.). The negative perceptions of 'the other' have returned more reinforced than ever before. All of this has led to a new vicious circle of violence,

dehumanization and hatred, which represents the main obstacle to the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, the return of the 'war' rhetoric has produced confusion, antagonism and hopelessness among the peace movements on both sides. 'Ambiguity about the objectives of peace work, its aims, its methods, and its target audiences has set in.' (ibid. viii) Thus, what many authors (like Glenna, 2012; Høigilt, Atallah and el-Dada, 2013) identify as the main causes of failure of the peace-building process on the grassroots level (disunity, difference in agendas, lack of mobilization and inefficient methods) could partly be viewed as symptoms of what has already become an integral part of the conflict and its underlying condition – the escalating nature of the occupation. After the second intifada 'the relationship between the two nations has reached its lowest point ever, and antagonism at both the government and societal level is very high.' (Kaufman, Salem and Verhoeven, 2006; 2) Naturally, this has led to the weakening and shrinking of the peace camps on both ends. As Hermann argues, 'the whole peace movement was taken aback by the breakdown of the Oslo process in July 2000 and the eruption of the second intifada in October.' (Hermann, in Kaufman, Salem and Verhoeven, 2006; 51) It could further be argued that the state of relations between the two parties after the latest escalation of the conflict is worse than the situation in the pre-Oslo era chiefly because 'the disillusionment with the other side and the frustration at the futility of the Oslo negotiations were much greater than ever in the past because they came after a period of such great hope.' (ibid.) Thus, the deteriorating Israeli-Palestinian relations and the outbreak of the Second *Intifada* marked a new cycle of unprecedented violence and hostility that has never been witnessed before. The repercussions of this for the peace camps on both sides are obvious – the external financial support has withered substantially, the disillusionment, skepticism and hopelessness have grown, peace demonstration and activism have slowed down (due to both growing suspicion and physical separation), joint activism is nowadays often seen as collaborating with the 'enemy' on both sides, and the overall peace process is rapidly losing credibility.

Despite all of the above-mentioned, it should be noted that both peace camps still continue to function. However, the limitations they are struggling with currently are much greater and affect the peace initiatives both directly and indirectly. For instance, among the

indirect obstacles that both peace camps are facing, one might identify the psychological barriers – the belief that joint activism is equal to collaboration with the enemy. For the Palestinian side, after the relapse of the conflict some of the organizations that were ‘more ideologically oriented curbed their functions of advocacy and joint ventures under the pretext that such activities are considered as normalization with the enemy...’(Hassassian, in Kaufman, Salem and Verhoeven, 2006; 81) Furthermore, the author mentions that ‘several joint organizations totally froze their functions’ as a consequence of the escalating violence and the following resurgence of the narrative of ‘the other’ as an adversary. As a result of the growing mistrust after the Second *Intifada* many joint activities started to function separately, which in turn results in less overall coordination and ineffective methods and strategies in terms of the objectives pursued. This ‘disengagement’ has a strong negative impact on the overall peace building efforts as it hinders the process of cooperation and trust, which are crucial factors for the success of peace initiatives. As a result, the perception of peace initiatives as nothing more than the legitimization and ‘normalization’ of the Israeli occupation by a large portion of Palestinian population and elite grew rapidly and the performance and strength of most peace NGOs regressed noticeably. The same applies to the Israeli side as well – soon after the outbreak of the second intifada the right-wing elites re-deployed the rhetoric of the ‘other’ as the enemy. The narrative revolving around ‘*they want to destroy us*’ resurfaced and it was widely claimed that the relapse of the conflict was the fault of the Palestinian elite, who refused ‘the most generous peace proposal possible at the Camp David summit’ and thus ‘[t]he second Intifada was accordingly perceived by the peace movement [in Israel] as an attempt [made by the Palestinians] to grab by force what could not be attained through negotiations.’ (Gordon, 2010; 40) As Hallward also confirms, after the breakdown of the Camp David summit and the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa *intifada* ‘the problem of ‘joint’ struggle has been further compounded by the ‘no partner’ narrative among Israelis and ‘anti-normalization’ rhetoric among Palestinians.’ (Hallward, 2009; 542)

Another example of an indirect obstacle that impedes the efforts of both peace camps is the asymmetry reinforced by the occupation and aggravated by its most recent escalation. Although the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been an asymmetrical one from the beginning (one

example being that the Palestinians do not have a sovereign state), the escalating nature of the occupation and the ascending spiral of violence have amplified the polarization between the two sides. As Dajani and Baskin point out, when talking about joint activism between Israelis and Palestinians and the gaps between them, 'Israelis engaged in the dialogue may feel a pressing need for a better solution, but for the most part they are not personally affected as the status quo persists. The Palestinians arrive with the feeling that the current situation is the worst possible, and they are searching for an immediate change.' (Dajani & Baskin, in Kaufman, Salem and Verhoeven, 2006; 90) In other words, the more the situation deteriorates, the wider the gap between Israeli and Palestinian NGOs and their priorities and goals will be. Moreover, the disparity in terms of resources, capabilities and opportunities between the two peace camps (which also grows the more the situation deteriorates) leads to erosion of trust, poor coordination and unsustainable results.

Alongside the indirect obstacles, which are a result of the latest escalation, the challenges faced by the peace camps on both sides are accompanied by direct ones - 'legal measures and physical infrastructure aimed at separating the populations' (Hallward, 2009; 542). The building of the separation fence/wall, as a response by the Israelis to the Second *Intifada*, has numerous impacts on peace NGOs on both sides as well as on joint activism. It introduced a checkpoint system enforcing movement restrictions on both Israelis and Palestinians. As Hallward argues, '[t]he numerous checkpoints - 47 permanent checkpoints within the West Bank in addition to 33 'last inspection points' between Israel and the West Bank and hundreds of 'flying' checkpoints [...] have significant ramifications for joint activism as they impede the movement of Palestinians within the West Bank and can prevent Israelis from entering.' (Hallward, 2009; 544) In addition to this, the trajectory of the separation barrier re-introduces and reinforces geographical boundaries of identity, which further divides the two peoples.

2. The 'Jerusalem Link'

An apt example, illustrating all of the above-mentioned challenges is the struggle and experiences of the Israeli and Palestinian women of the 'Jerusalem Link'. A case study of the Jerusalem Link was chosen because of two reasons: (1) women are a majority in the peace camp activism in both Israel and the OPT and (2) the challenges faced by and the developments within this joint organization after the year 2000 exemplify the impact of the escalating nature of the occupation and its negative impact on the peace initiatives and the peace process as a whole.

In 1989 in Brussels a meeting between notable Israeli and Palestinian women peace activists was held. The gathering opened an on-going dialogue that in 1994 resulted in the establishment of The Jerusalem Link - an association for joint work between a Palestinian women's NGO – the 'Jerusalem Center for Women' and an Israeli women's NGO – the 'Bat Shalom'. The two organizations shared political principles, which served as the basis for a cooperative model of co-existence between the two societies (Hilal and Touma, 2008; iv; Aggestam & Strömbom, 2012; 10). These principles included 'a joint vision of a just peace according to democracy, human rights, women leadership, and a two-state-solution, Jerusalem as the capital for two peoples, moral, legal, political and economic responsibility of Israel for the Palestinian refugees and a complete territorial withdrawal to pre-1967 borders.' (Aggestam & Strömbom, 2012; 10)

As Kumpulainen points out, in an extensive research based on field work and interviews conducted with both Israeli and Palestinian women who formed part of the Link in 2008, '[m]any of the interviewees on both sides noted that during its early days the Link used to be much more active than it [is] today'. (Kumpulainen, 2008; 52) Since the establishment of the joint organization both Bat Shalom and JCW had participated enthusiastically in various events together, such as 'youth camps, dialogue groups, demonstrations, revising the political agenda of the Link, and publishing joint statements on important political issues.' (ibid., 51) Among the numerous joint projects, the biggest and most successful one has been the event 'Sharing Jerusalem: Two Capitals for Two States' conducted in 1997 and funded by the EU. As

Kumpulainen points out, '[m]any of the interviewees emphasized that in achieving an agreement on the Jerusalem issue and organizing the campaign, the Jerusalem Link was ahead of all the other peace groups.' (ibid.) Thus, in spite of the difficulties (mainly due to criticism of the event from both the Israeli and Palestinian society) the project was a huge success.

The failure of the peace process and the eruption of the Second *Intifada*, however, had a severe impact on the organization – tensions between the two constituent NGOs over the political stance taken towards the relapse of the conflict grew overtime and resulted in the eventual end of the partnership after the Gaza war in 2009 (Aggestam & Strömbom, 2012; 10). Although the separation might be viewed as a result of issues present from the beginning (overall asymmetry in resources, opportunities and abilities, and the differences produced by this asymmetry), it was to a large extent catalyzed by the escalating nature of the occupation, responsible for the growing polarization, radicalization and disillusionment among the two peoples. In 2008, many of the interviewed by Kumpulainen complained about the lack of effectiveness of the organization following the relapse of the conflict. The increase in violence, aggression and polarization in the two societies has led to a decrease in membership in the organization, belief that neither side was doing enough in terms of the Jerusalem Link and its goals, increased pessimism among the members, and a shift from an active stance to a more re-active one (similarly to most grassroots NGOs, after the Second *Intifada*, they ended up being influenced by the development of the conflict, rather than influencing it) (Kumpulainen, 2008; Daniele, 2014).

The latest escalation also had an impact on the attitudes of both sides in the organization – on the one hand, '[i]n the face of heavy violence inflicted on the Palestinians, a Palestinian woman "felt that the Israeli women use us to [...] beautify the Israeli face in the public..." On the other hand, '[o]ne of the Israeli Jewish interviewees described the situation in terms of a feeling of "always being tested [...] as if they were waiting to see our performance...in terms of trusting us: can they trust us."' (Kumpulainen, 2008; 75-76) This illustrates the previously mentioned effect of the escalating nature of the occupation on amplifying the asymmetry between the two sides. As aggression and violence intensified, the

priorities of the Israeli and Palestinian women in the context of the organization grew apart and '[t]he focus of the activism of both JCW and Bat Shalom was in 2004-2005 very clearly on their independent activities.' (ibid., 52)

The building of the separation wall also affected the cooperation and unity of the Link. As Kumpulainen points out, '[w]ith the increasing movement restrictions, the wall and the checkpoints, joint meetings and joint activities became increasingly difficult, if not impossible.' (ibid., 86) Furthermore, the general radicalization of both societies also transferred to the realm of the peace initiatives – 'Where the Palestinian JCW was demanding more and more of the hard issues to be discussed, also Bat Shalom's positions changed for more radical ones.' (ibid., 87) As Maura James argues, the Second *Intifada* felt more like a war in comparison to the low-intensity conflict observed during the Palestinian uprising of 1987 and thus, the militarization following the latest escalation has led to a natural decline in the activity of civil society in general (James, 2013; 21). The impact of this for the Link is obvious. Even before the Al-Aqsa uprising, '[t]he situation of the military occupation of the Palestinian territories *per se* positions the women differently, making it difficult to feel equal despite good intentions on both sides' (Kumpulainen, 2008; 83). The intensification of the conflict further amplified this feeling of inequality and doubt and frustrated both sides of the Link. Thus, the outbreak of the Second *intifada* in 2000 has caused a widening gap between both organizations in the Jerusalem Link and their members, which ultimately resulted in their separation in 2009.

3. Perspectives

And yet, despite the bleak prospects for the future, there are still joint Israeli-Palestinian CSOs and NGOs that have managed to adapt to the latest escalation in the relations between the two fighting sides and continue the uphill struggle for reconciliation and an end of the conflict (Hallward, 2009; Coskun, 2009; Højgilt, Atallah and el-Dada, 2013; Stephan 2003; Wilkins 2009). The Israeli and Palestinian joint activism against the separation wall in Bil'in is an apt example for the ability of some organizations to adapt to the changing realities (Hallward, 2009). As Hallward points out, in Bil'in, 'Palestinians and Israelis strategically – and creatively – use the resources at their disposal to confront Israeli administrative and military power through

nonviolent activism.’ (ibid., 542) What makes the activists stand out is their clever use of symbols and practices aimed at challenging the legitimacy of the occupation in a non-violent manner. Moreover, as Stephan concludes - ‘the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not be found in any military strategy nor will it be dictated from above following high-level negotiations’ (Stephan, 2003; 23) By making a detailed comparison between the First and Second *Intifada* the author further argues that ‘terrorist warfare [during the Second *Intifada*] has undermined, rather than helped, the Palestinian self-determination movement.’ (ibid., 4), thus claiming that the only productive way of reaching a solution is the non-violent resistance, which served the Palestinian cause in the First *Intifada* much better than the self-defeating violence, observed during the Al-Aqsa uprising (Stephan, 2003). Therefore, given the general radicalization of both societies after the year 2000 and the overall deterioration of the relations between Israelis and Palestinians, the future of both peace camps falls in the hands of adaptive and creative SCOs that look for a way to break the vicious circle of escalating violence and distrust preventing the resolution of the conflict. In the light of this insight, the joint activism in Bil’in is most certainly a step in the right direction.

VI. Conclusion

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has often been characterized as one of the most prolonged conflicts in the world where no simple and straightforward solution is at sight. This makes the efforts by both the international community and the regional actors a constant uphill struggle. Indeed, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a deep and emotional dispute with numerous obstacles to its resolution.

Among the most successful instruments for the solution of such conflicts and establishment of sustainable peace and reconciliation is the concept of peace building. A major role in this process is thus played by peace initiatives and NGOs alongside official Track I diplomacy and negotiation. However, having in mind the context of the conflict, cooperation among the official levels is rather scarce and has so far proved to be insufficient on its own. In this sense, although peace activism on grassroots levels is often seen as a supplement to the

official track of negotiations, in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict it appears to be the most powerful instrument towards the goal of peace and stability.

However, by taking a broader look at the conflict from its inception until now, one might argue that the state of relations currently is at its lowest point ever. This raises important questions such as - how is it possible for the situation to be worsening while for almost a century both the international community and the regional actors have extensively invested in resolving the conflict and working towards reconciliation (whether actively or passively)? Part of the confusion stems from the fact that many believe that the occupation and the direction of the conflict are in the hands of the two conflicting parties (the Israelis and Palestinians). Although the agency of both sides should, and indeed cannot be denied, over the years the situation developed its own dynamic. The structure of the occupation has transformed the interactions between the conflicting parties into an action-reaction chain of events that has been gradually intensifying and escalating over the years until the point that neither one of the parties has complete control over the situation. Some of the results of this changing dynamic include the rise in the number of deaths on both sides, the increasingly aggressive interactions, the reinforcement of the 'us' versus 'them' discourse, the radicalization of both societies, and militarization of the elite. Moreover, this pattern of escalation is comparable to the 'security dilemma', a key feature of realpolitik during the Cold War, whereby actions by one of the actors aimed at enhancing security, can lead other actors on the international scene to respond with reciprocal measures, producing increased tensions that create competition and ultimately conflict, even when neither side truly desires it.

Furthermore, this changing nature of the occupation undoubtedly has an impact on the peace process and the opportunities for reconciliation. While in the early days of the conflict more and more Israelis and Palestinians were engaging in joint activities and the number of peace NGOs and SCOs on both sides were growing (especially after the signing of the Oslo Declaration of Principles), the Second *Intifada* proved to be a turning point. After the breakdown of the peace talks and the Oslo process in general, many joint activities and grassroots organizations ceased to exist. Bringing people from both sides together with the goal

of working towards peace and reconciliation became increasingly difficult. Major parts of both societies felt hopelessness and disenchantment with the idea of peace. Working with 'the other' became equal to treason. In other words, the latest escalation of the conflict brought truly dark times for both the Israeli and the Palestinian peace camps.

And yet, there is hope. Although a large segment of the peace camps on both sides have become reactionary and lost their impetus, some SCOs and NGOs revolving around joint activism based on non-violent resistance have managed to adapt to the harsh reality and continue their struggle for peace and stability. The case of the Bil'in's resistance against separation and the clever, creative ways deployed by the activists there, show promising results as protesters not only managed to bring a case of the route of the security fence/wall going through Bil'in to the Israeli High Court, but actually won it (Hallward, 2009; 544). Thus, only time will confirm whether both peace camps would succeed in adapting to the changing reality sufficiently in order for their struggle to continue and finally bear fruit. Meanwhile, the international community should devote more attention to the underlying condition, responsible for most of the problems faced by the grassroots peace initiatives – namely, the escalating nature of the occupation and its problematic structure.

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