Persistent Peacebuilders:
Sustaining Commitment During Violent Conflict

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Abstract

While peacebuilding, in the context of a protracted conflict, is a long-term process (Lederach, 1997; Jeong, 2005), there is a dearth of literature in the peace and conflict studies field focused on how peacebuilders and peace activists maintain commitment in such tumultuous environments. The organizational and social movement studies' literatures highlight various factors that can assist individuals to maintain persistence; but, even in the above mentioned literature, very little attention is given to what allows individuals to persevere over a long-term period and in a high-risk environment (Nepstad, 2004). This article addresses this gap by using longitudinal field research data and surveys of the major educational peacebuilding initiatives in Israel and Palestine, between the years 2000 and 2010, to examine what allows peacebuilders and peace activists to carry on in a hostile, violent, and protracted conflict environment. Building on the above mentioned literatures, I contend that organizations can take various actions to help foster commitment, but perhaps the most critical factor that these organizations can effect is to recognize that persistence is not simply an attribute of an individual, but also is *socially* structured, with one's social location in the environment (e.g. what conflict group an individual belongs to) greatly shaping the reasons for one's persistence. The recognition of this concept is fundamental for being able to devise organizational actions that successfully foster commitment amongst peacebuilders across conflict lines.

Introduction

Peacebuilding is a long term-process. Indeed, Lederach (1997, 78) suggests that "it may take just as long [for conflict parties] to get out of an armed conflict as it took to get in." Given that one in three contemporary armed conflicts have been waged for more than two decades, this can be a significant amount of time (see Themner and Wallensteen, 2013). Thus as Adwan and Bar-On (2004) have argued, if peacebuilding is to be effective, peacebuilders need to be *persistent* and maintain their commitment over long periods of time.

Yet fascinatingly, there have been few studies on the social and personal factors that facilitates peacebuilders to persist, and/or actions that can be taken by these initiatives to help foster commitment (except see Gawerc, 2012; Gidron, Katz, and Hasenfeld, 2002).[1] There have been studies which have addressed the importance of symmetry and working equally (Maoz, 2004; Baskin and Al-Qaq, 2004; Golan, 2011; Gawerc, 2012, 2013), the need to maintain resources and legitimacy with critical constituencies outside the organizations (Gidron, Katz, and Hasenfeld, 2002; Gawerc, 2012, 2013), and the need to manage internal conflict (Gawerc, 2012, 2013) for peacebuilding organizations to be sustainable; but there has been very little on what factors keep peacebuilders enduring and what local peacebuilding initiatives can do to maintain commitment.

We know from the organizational studies literature that organizations have a *critical* need to maintain staff commitment and motivation. Indeed, studies have found that maintaining staff commitment is vital, in that it influences the amount of effort staff put into their work, their job performance, as well as reducing staff turnover (see Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch and Toplonytsky, 2002). The social movement literature has also highlighted the importance of maintaining participant commitment. In fact, both Nepstad (2004) and Bunnage (2014) have pointed out that retention is critical for the survival, the strength, and the vitality of both social movements and social movement organizations.

While issues of commitment are rarely discussed in the peacebuilding literature, peacebuilding initiatives have a similar need to maintain the commitment and motivation of local peacebuilders. Indeed, as Adwan and Bar-On (2004, 514) argue, "Peace processes of intractable conflicts have ups and downs, [they] are not linear, and [they] *need* a long-term commitment of the peacebuilders rather than momentary conjectural optimism or opportunism" [emphasis my own].

Thus it is critical to consider what factors motivate peacebuilders to persist in hostile conflict environments. Given that these initiatives often involve working *across* conflict lines—in asymmetric conflict environments—it is equally important to be attuned to the differences in what motivates peacebuilders, based on where they and their

conflict group are situated in the conflict (see Gawerc, 2006). Indeed, this paper argues that attention to these differences is critical for building *sustainable* peacebuilding initiatives and partnerships.

In this paper, therefore, I examine the factors encouraging the persistence of local peace actors engaged in cross-conflict dialogue and peacebuilding work in Israel and Palestine, in the ten-year period following the eruption of the Second Intifada (September 2000-2010). While this time period, which followed the resumption of violent conflict, has not been monolithic, (with the degree of violence ebbing and flowing), overall, it has been a hostile, and at times, an acutely violent conflict environment, in which more than 6,400 Palestinians and 1,050 Israelis have been killed (see B'Tselem Statistics).

It should be noted that this was a remarkably different environment that than of the Oslo peace process years (1993-2000). Indeed, the Oslo years were filled with relative hope and optimism. In the words of Hanna Siniora, a Palestinian peace activist, "The Oslo accord brought back hope and you could see it in the people. One day young [Palestinian] children were throwing stones at [the Israeli] soldiers. The next day they were giving them flowers… Because the Oslo process talked about a transitional process of five years… everybody had high hopes that both sides could arrive to the creation of a Palestinian state [and achieve peace]."

During the Oslo period, hundreds of civil society peacebuilding initiatives were established (see Chaitin et al., 2004; Hai and Herzog, 2005; Halperin, 1997). This new undertaking was largely based on the belief that peace was possible, and that dialogue between the two sides at the civil society level would be critically important to support the official peace process being negotiated at the governmental level (Baskin and Al-Qaq, 2004; also see Lederach, 1997; Kaufman, 1997). While most of these initiatives formed because of the newfound political and social opportunities implicit in the Oslo environment, they were also significantly aided by the international funding that poured in for these types of initiatives, and the legitimacy these projects received as a result of provisions included in the peace accords for people-to-people projects (Baskin and Al Qaq, 2004; Hai and Herzog, 2005).

With the eruption of the Second Intifada, and the eventual breakdown of the peace process, the majority of these initiatives stopped functioning or ceased to exist (Hassassian, 2002; Maoz, 2004). In this acutely violent environment, legitimacy was withdrawn by both the civil societies and the authorities (in both communities), and international funding for peacebuilding dried up (Gawerc, 2012, 2013). Adding to the challenges, these initiatives worked across a basic conflict line, which became increasingly polarized and characterized by high levels of animosity, mistrust, and pessimism (Gawerc, 2012, 2013). Moreover, asymmetry in terms of access to resources and legitimacy, as well as differing needs and expectations, permeated the environment, and as a result, impacted the initiatives and partnerships (Maoz, 2004; Golan, 2011; Gawerc, 2012, 2013). While peacebuilders in both communities withdrew their participation, the reduction in participation was even greater amongst Palestinians.

Notwithstanding the immense challenges and the significant decrease of people working in this realm, some local peace actors managed to persist, working in a handful of civil society initiatives; while newly motivated individuals actually started to engage in this work during the Second Intifada period.

This paper, drawing from a larger fifteen-year study focused on peacebuilding organizations in Israel-Palestine, investigates those factors which motivate and encourage local peace actors to maintain persistence in periods of acute violent conflict, the way in which these motivations differ based on where the participants are socially located, and what civil society initiatives can do to maintain the commitment of their staff and participants.

Theory

Peacebuilding organizations combine elements of both non-profit organizations and social movement organizations (see Gidron et al., 2002). Like non-profit organizations, peacebuilding organizations provide a service to the public and/or their participants, in line with their goal of fostering peace. At the same time, peacebuilding organizations resemble social movement organizations in that their mission is to promote cultural values that *diverge* from dominant values, which create the potential for conflict with the authorities and/or the public (Gidron et al., 2002). Given that there is not an established body of literature looking at hybrid organizations such as these (see Hasenfeld and Gidron, 2005), this article draws on both the organizational and social movement studies' literatures to highlight the different factors that help to maintain commitment.

In the organizational studies literature, commitment is seen to be multidimensional and to involve *three* different components: an affective attachment to the organization, which fosters a *desire* to remain; a normative aspect that expresses itself as an *obligation* to remain; and a continuance element which involves a feeling that one *needs* to remain due to the costs associated with leaving the organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Cohen, 2007). It is recognized in the literature that these constituent elements are not mutually exclusive and that staff and/or participants are likely to experience each of these components, albeit to different degrees. It should be noted that even though the above conceptualization focuses on the individual's commitment to an organization, it can also be

applied more broadly to look at an individual's commitment to a particular goal or vocation (Meyer and Herscovich, 2001).

The social movement studies literature has also drawn on this multidimensional framework as a way of understanding commitment (see Klandermans, 1997; Nepstad, 2004).[2] The literature also recognizes, however, that the challenges faced by social movement organizations are significantly *greater* than those faced by most other organizations. Beyond the fact that social movement organizations are only able to provide limited financial compensation for time—if any at all—there is also the reality that social movement organizations have great potential for conflict with the authorities or the civil societies, given that the undertaking tends to be focused on promoting cultural values that differ from the dominant and often institutionalized values (Barkan et al., 1993; Gidron et al., 2002).

We know from the social movement studies literature that people disengage or withdraw from social movement organizations for various reasons including: frustration, disappointment, hopelessness, burnout, despair, pressure from significant others, and bad relationships within the movement organization (Klandersman, 1997; Goodwin and Jasper, 2009; Gamson, 2011; Corrigall-Brown, 2012; Bunnage, 2014). Studies have also found that changes in the political and/or social environment can also cause people to leave, if it leads them to believe that their previous ideas were naive or unrealistic (Goodwin and Jasper, 2009). Indeed, Hermann (2009) suggests that this was the reality inside the Israeli peace movement after the violent eruption of the Second Intifada. Similarly, Hassassian (2002) suggests that the heavy-handed response of the Israeli military to the Second Intifada and the lack of protest against IDF actions by Israeli peace activists, led many Palestinian peace activists to feel that their previous activity was naïve, and played a significant role in the dramatic decrease of Palestinians involved in such initiatives after September 2000.

Nonetheless, the literature indicates that modest victories can help activists overcome a sense of helplessness and despair (Gamson, 2011). And Flesher-Fominaya (2007, 2010) suggests that even when there have not been modest victories and the group is not meeting its goals, commitment can be sustained, *if* participants are having a positive emotional experience and there are strong emotional ties between activists (also see Gamson, 2011).

Dowton and Wehr's (1991, 1998, 1999) study of peace activists in the United States indicates that individuals *can* also take actions to manage the factors that lead to dropout. These include dealing with burnout, managing life responsibilities, and handling opposition. Their study also makes a solid case that peace movement organizations can help individuals maintain their commitment by forging bonds of solidarity through shared leadership, involving members in more active roles in the organization, reinforcing ideology, utilizing rituals to strengthen core beliefs, and strengthening social relations (also see Klandermans, 1997 and Corrigall-Brown, 2012).[3] Schwebel (2008) also highlights the importance of individual and organizational practices to maintain the morale of peace activists. In terms of the former, he highlights the importance of developing a historical perspective and cultivating patience. In terms of the latter, he highlights the importance of introducing organizational practices that cultivate a historical perspective, intentionally drawing people together through social experiences to strengthen the social bonds, finding ways to manage conflict, establishing modest and short-term goals, and celebrating achievements.

Nepstad (2004) similarly highlights movement organizational practices that can help to sustain commitment, with a focus on *high-risk* movements such as the Plowshares Movement. More specifically, she highlights the role of plausibility structures, which she describes as practices and relations that provide emotional, cognitive, and material support for activists. In the words of Valocchi (2010, 129), "'Plausibility' connotes the sense that what these people are doing—engaging in high-risk action which demands many sacrifices and offers few material rewards—requires a *structure* and a *culture* that makes these ostensibly irrational actions understandable" (emphasis my own).

Interestingly, drawing on the distinction between affective, continuance, and normative commitment, Klandermans (1997) observes that of all three components of commitment, affective commitment is the one that is most fluid and the easiest for a movement organization to affect. Indeed, he argues that normative commitment is a product of life-long socialization (both familial and cultural), and continuance commitment is based on the investments made and the lack of perceived alternatives—neither of which movement organizations can really address. Thus, he argues that movement organizations need to pay attention to *the interactions* within, with the goal being to have these interactions be gratifying to the participants. Flesher-Fominaya's (2007) study, described earlier, similarly supports this emphasis on making the involvement/interaction more gratifying. Beyond it being the "easiest" component to address, Mannarini and Fedi (2012) also found that it was the most crucial component for maintaining commitment.

While the above studies focused on the importance of the interaction between participants, it should be noted that affective commitment also involves an important cognitive component, which organizations can also seek to reinforce. In the words of Meyer and Herscovitch (2001, 308), affective commitment includes the "recognition that there is an important purpose in what one is doing," and that the work is congruent with one's values if not an expression of one's values (also see Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001).

As suggested above, the social movement literature is clear that in addition to the actions individuals can take to maintain their own commitment, organizations can also take various actions to help buttress commitment—particularly affective commitment (see Dowton and Wehr, 1991; Klandermans, 1997; Nepstad, 2004; Bunnage, 2014). Indeed, in a recent review of the literature, Bunnage (2014, 440) concludes, "Though still underexplored, a movement's ability to sustain itself is a deeply interactive question predicated by its relationship to its participants: their availability, their relationships to others, and the organization's capacity to make them feel empowered, obligated, and invested. Leaders might build on this insight in a number of ways…"

Yet as Nepstad (2004) has pointed out, no one (with the exception of her own article) has addressed the question of *what* factors motivate and/or allow individuals to maintain persistence over a *long-term* period in a *high-risk* campaign and/or environment.

Moreover, there have been few long-term studies of commitment involving groups that work *across* conflict lines in situations of acute violent turmoil. In fact, most peace organizations, documented in the social movement studies literature, *avoid* working across conflict lines for reasons of maintaining legitimacy with one's own civil society (see Cortright and Pagnucco, 1997; Hermann, 2009). Viably, because few of these studies focused on groups that intentionally work across difference or power asymmetry in a hostile and/or conflict environment, there has been little attention given to the *differences* in what motivates people and whether these are a reflection of where individuals are situated in this hostile environment—particularly as members of their conflict group. Yet presumably, recognizing the impact of where one is socially situated in the environment, and the ways in which this influences motivation, is critical for maintaining commitment of diverse groups and building sustainable peacebuilding organizations and partnerships. In terms of the literature, it is also important, as it makes clear that what motivates individuals to persist is not simply a reality of the individual themselves, but is also socially structured and patterned. This recognition challenges us, as Melucci (1995) urges, to move beyond essentializing movement organizations and to recognize the different goals of participants, as well as the struggles and the negotiations that occur within.

Generally, studies in the social movement and peace and conflict studies literatures suggest that the social locations of participants play a significant role in multiple ways. This is manifest in one's sense of agency and empowerment (Gamson, 1991); in one's understanding of what the issues are—including what the conflict is about in situations of protracted conflict (Montier and Macapagal, 2006); in one's sense of urgency (Dajani and Baskin, 2006; Golan, 2011); in the challenges individuals face (Zak, 2006; Gawerc, 2012, 2013); in what motivates people to attend joint workshops (Zak 2006); in opinions regarding what the goals of peacebuilding initiatives should be (Hassassian, 2002; Golan, 2011; Gawerc and Lazarus, 2015); and finally, in one's thoughts on what activities/actions peacebuilding organizations should be engaged (Maoz, 2000; Gawerc, 2012, 2013, 2015, forthcoming 2016).

Indeed, with regards to Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders and peace activists, we know that Israelis tend to feel more agency and less urgency, are more apt to highlight the social psychological causes of the conflict, face significantly less challenges than Palestinians engaged in peacebuilding work, are motivated to participate in joint workshops largely to learn more about the situation, and are inclined to believe that the goals of peacebuilding organizations should be more educational and less political. Palestinians, on the other hand, tend to feel significantly less agency and yet more urgency, tend to highlight the structural causes of the conflict (most notably, the occupation), face significantly more challenges engaging in peacebuilding work and may at times feel conflicted wondering if dialogue and educational encounters are a betrayal of their peers who were killed in the struggle, and finally, almost always believe that peacebuilding organizations should have a clear political agenda—one that includes ending the occupation (Baskin and Al Qaq, 2004; Maoz, 2004; Zak, 2006; Golan, 2011; Gawerc, 2012, 2013, 2015). Nonetheless, few have drawn on this literature to investigate the factors that keep peacebuilders persisting and how peacebuilding organizations that work across conflict lines can maintain the commitment of their peacebuilders and peace activists.

This article addresses this gap by investigating the affective and normative factors that keep peacebuilders persisting with a focus on the differences, based on where one is socially situated in the conflict. Moreover, building on the above mentioned literatures, this article then considers what peacebuilding organizations can do to maintain the commitment of peacebuilders from communities in conflict, even during periods of increased tension, hostility, and polarization.

Methodology and Individuals Studied

In order to investigate the factors that contributed to persistence amongst peacebuilders from conflicting communities in a hostile and acutely violent conflict environment, I collected and analyzed field research data in Israel/Palestine in the years following the eruption of the Second Intifada. The field work data, being utilized in this paper, was collected after the start of the Second Intifada in October 2000 up until to January 2010. Field work and interviews were carried out during the following periods: August 2001-July 2002 (during the Second Intifada); September 2007-June 2008 and January 2010 (post-Second Intifada).

I interviewed more than 100 Palestinian and Israeli peacebuilders participating in 12 of the major Israeli-Palestinian people-to-people initiatives that have used educational encounters. These organizations are engaged in a variety of activities including: working with youth both in and out of the classroom, working with teachers, and writing historical narratives and educational curricula. I chose to focus on peacebuilders engaged in educational initiatives—rather than advocacy, solidarity, or humanitarian interventions—because of the reality that the educational initiatives are seen in the peace and conflict studies literature as an integral part of peacebuilding, which should accompany the peacemaking process. While some scholars have argued that advocacy, solidarity, and humanitarian action should also be understood as an integral component of peacebuilding (Schirch, 2005; Gawerc, 2012; Gawerc and Lazarus, 2015), there is no consensus on the former (Gawerc, 2006; Kahanoff and Neumann, 2007).

Furthermore, Hassassian (2002) argued that organizations focused on educational issues, including changing attitudes, beliefs and narratives, were the *most likely* to have trouble maintaining commitment of participants and cease to exist after the breakdown of the Oslo Accords, given their elusive goals and their basis in the moderate forces in both camps. Interestingly, social movement theorist Lofland (1993, 288), had anticipated this, with his argument that organizations with a consensus orientation (rather than a conflict orientation)—which describes most educationally oriented peacebuilding initiatives—are likely "to slump as quickly as they soared" when the conditions that fostered them change (also see Lofland, 1992).[4]

While the majority of the organizations I studied were joint Israeli-Palestinian organizations, I also looked at separate Palestinian and Israeli peacebuilding organizations that partnered together for projects.[5] The peacebuilders and activists that I interviewed were affiliated with the following organizations: Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, the School for Peace at Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East's History Textbook Project, the Seeds of Peace Jerusalem Center for Coexistence, Middle East Children's Association, Windows-Channels for Communication, Crossing Borders, Hewar Center for Peace and Development, Center for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation, Sulha Peace Project, and the educational initiatives of the Parents Circle-Families Forum, and Combatants for Peace.

The peacebuilders that I interviewed were from different geographical locations in Israel and the West Bank and I used a semi-structured interview guide for each. The majority of the interviews were conducted in English, with a few conducted in Hebrew. While all of the Palestinian peacebuilders were capable of doing the interview in English or Hebrew, in a few cases, I also offered Palestinian peacebuilders, the choice of conducting the interview in Arabic with the help of a translator.

I coded and analyzed the data using Atlas.ti. The analysis was thematic, although with particular attention paid to the differences that emerged between the Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders. While the coding was largely inductive, I also coded, where relevant, theoretical constructs and concepts derived from the literature.

It should be noted that a focus on Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding organizations and the peacebuilders and activists associated with these organizations make an outstanding case for a study such as this, given that these groups involve individuals working together across a significant conflict divide, with tremendous power asymmetry. Indeed, one side in this polarized conflict is socially situated as the occupier, and the other, the occupied.

The remainder of the paper discusses the different factors motivating and encouraging the peacebuilders to persist, the differences that existed based on where one was situated in the conflict, and the organizational actions that helped to foster the persistence of peacebuilders, in both communities. As will be evident in this data section—and is discussed further in the conclusion—where one was situated in the conflict intimately shaped the factors maintaining commitment, and these differences in terms of what keeps peacebuilders and activists persisting, needs to be considered by both scholars and the organizations themselves, in order for organizations to be able to maintain commitment across conflict lines.

Factors Motivating Persistence

As to be expected, affective and normative commitment both played a significant role in helping to explain persistence for the Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders. This next section will describe the forms it took for each. As will be clear from this section, what kept the Palestinian peacebuilders persisting differed substantially from what kept the Israeli peacebuilders persisting.

Affective Commitment: Desire to Persist
For the peacebuilders, affective commitment took numerous forms including: identification with the organization or peacebuilding in general; identification with a specific goal; emotional bonds to relationships formed across the conflict lines; the hope that comes from working across the conflict lines; and a feeling that one is learning, growing and developing, and/or engaged in interesting work. Fascinatingly though, while affective commitment helps to explain what kept *both* Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders persisting, there were some important differences in the way in which peacebuilders experienced and expressed this component of their commitment.

Identification with the organization or peacebuilding versus one's national struggle
For instance, it was largely Jewish Israelis who expressed identification with the organization or peacebuilding in general. More specifically, they saw the work as an expression of their values and/or their strong ideological commitment to working together for peace. Several also described feelings of anger or a strong sense of justice that had them choosing to endure despite the difficulties. Consider the following:

> Roni: "It's a big challenge, but I know that between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, there are 3.5 million Palestinians. I know for sure they won't just disappear—and they won't become Zionists either, so we have to live together. Living together is not building a wall and saying they are over there and we are here. This will not work. This is one area and we have to work together… *This is the big challenge for us— to try [to live together] … We make it in our organization*… It's not easy [though] because in this type of work you don't see results. So there is a lot of frustration [involved in] doing this work… To be realistic, I don't know if I will see a peace agreement or the ending of the conflict in my day or lifetime. But it's something that I believe in [so I persist]" (Interview, May 19, 2008).

> Boaz: I feel that I am doing something very important... [For me] it's the ideological level. We have to live together. If you don't believe in genocide, or transfer, then we have no other choice but to learn how to live together… The Palestinians won't leave this place, and neither will we… The only question is how will we live together, and it is very important to me to try and make things so we could live here together in a much better way. Otherwise, *if we can't live together, we will die together—this is the [Parents Circle-Families] Forum's slogan* (Interview, May 12, 2008).

> Nava: "I could in some way do a career in the university and forget about all this. But what kept me over the years is really because I'm connected to this place. I didn't choose [nor do I want] to go away to some other country. And I'm very upset about the political situation, the occupation, and the situation inside Israel. So [it's] the political and the ideological aspects, as well as the change I see happening in the participants, [that] keeps me going" (Interview, May 27, 2008).

In contrast, most Palestinians expressed identification with the specific goal of influencing Israelis to change their mindset, to work more equally, and most fundamentally, to take action to end the occupation. Indeed, Palestinian peacebuilders and peace activists tended to view this work as part of one's national struggle against the occupation. Contemplate the following comments:

> Sana: "We try everything in Palestine. I mean we trusted once the Palestinian Authority, and we trusted the politicians once and these agreements… once we believed Fatah, once we believed Hamas, and at the political level nothing changed… After like fifteen years, it is the same, nothing changed—even its worse. So I think for me personally it's worth it [to do this work] if you can *influence some people who are living there [in Israel] and can do something [to end the occupation]*. It is worth it... if you can influence them to do something" (Interview, June 11, 2008).

Mazen: "After my experience in 1997, when I met the other side and I learned new things, I started to believe and to be more active in these things. Then in 2002, my father was killed by the Israeli army. The reason [he was killed] was because of the conflict; because of the occupation… Many, many Palestinians… were killed in the Second Intifada without any reason [i.e. justification]. And after this big tragedy, you have to choose again… you have to choose what to do… [My father] was just sixty-three years old, expelled from his original village, suffered… and then he gets killed in this way. So [I want] to take this story and to tell the story… It's not easy all the time to talk about these things, but I think I have enough strength to do it, because I want *to prove* that my father never got what he deserved… It's easy to revenge…. But that is not the way. Because my issue as a Palestinian, it's not revenge and reaction—my issue is my rights! My issue is my freedom! And *I have to prove that I deserve it, and that I have rights too*" (Interview, June 11, 2008).

Mohammad: "When I see that my [Israeli] partner in the organization [now] calls me and tells me what he wants to change [before changing it], and I can convince him of something [different], it means a lot to me. So there are changes! Today I changed my colleagues, *maybe tomorrow I can change [those with more power]*—[Israeli] leaders or Knesset members… In the fifteen years I have been working in this field, I have met more than five thousand Israelis. Maybe three hundred of them are in sensitive places so *they can influence* and *make the changes that they can*. They can't do everything even if they want to [because] there are limits in the places that they are working in—but still they can change [things]. [For instance, in the army] they can refuse to kill. If they [the commanders] want to command them to shoot Palestinians, maybe they [will] say, 'No, I will not shoot into a group of people because one [person] throws a stone… They are human beings and they have names—I have met [them]...' This is what gives me support and gives me the power to continue and to exist in this situation" (Interview, May 31, 2008).

Emotional Attachment to Friendships Versus the Hope that Comes from People Struggling With You
Similarly, while both Israelis and Palestinians identified the relationships across the conflict line as key to why they persist, interestingly, it was primarily Israelis who tended to emphasize the emotional attachment to the friendships that were formed across the conflict lines. For example:

Itamar: "[Part of what keeps me persisting is the realization that the organization] was something that we set up and it's beautiful; and the connection with the Palestinians is something that is *deeply touching* after you're actually friends" (Interview, April 17, 2008).

Gabriel: "It inspires me when *sulha* [i.e. reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians in the organization] happens. It inspires parts of me that don't get inspired when I perform [music]. There is a *certain level of holiness* that reaches parts of me that other things don't reach" (Interview, June 2, 2008).

Palestinians, on the other hand, while also expressing an attachment to the relationship, tended to describe it as giving them hope when people across the conflict lines are struggling with you. Reflect on the below thoughts:

Najeh: "[I persist to] not lose the hope… What might encourage more people is if more people have the opportunity and the chance to know more about the other side…, [who share] the same vision. As much as you know *there are people who are with you, who are in the world struggling with you, and for you*, and for themselves at the same time, this is a good energizer. And this is a good thing to keep people committed and to keep people wanting to do this" (Interview, April 15, 2008).

Osama: [After the Palestinian founder's daughter was killed by the Israeli army] all of us as Israelis and Palestinians were around him, at his house, supporting him, supporting his wife, [and supporting] his children… And this gives us hope. We're trying to strengthen this personal thing between each other. I invited all the Israelis into my house [twice] and we had traditional food. *[Because] my house [is] in Ramallah, they [the Israelis] had to enter illegally… But [doing this] gives us strength [and the Israelis' courage to come even though it is illegal according to Israeli law] is giving hope* (Interview, March 31, 2008).

Interesting Work – An Opportunity to Learn, Grow and Develop
Finally, and unique to the Israelis, numerous individuals indicated that part of their desire to persist was due to the reality that they experienced this work as interesting. Indeed, a handful noted their ability to learn, grow, and develop in this work. So commented the following:

> Rutie: I enjoy doing it. If I wouldn't enjoy it, I don't think, I would have the strength to continue. Basically you come to an office, you have a nice big group of people to work with you… it's challenging, it's interesting, and it's a lot of fun on the way, between all the tragedies and the hard stuff… It is difficult, very difficult, but I wouldn't want to do anything else" (Interview, April 3, 2008).

> Adina: "Everyday there's something new. Everyday there's a new challenge. Everyday is a new discovery about myself, or about the reality that I'm living in with other people, or about how things work better… what mistakes I made, what I discovered that I didn't know, or what I discovered that I thought I knew, but then [realized I didn't] You know, that can keep someone persisting" (Interview, June 6, 2008).

Fascinatingly, none of the Palestinians I interviewed suggested that this played a role in their commitment… The focus, as we saw above, was on the need to influence Israelis to take actions to end the occupation, and the hope that came from their joint struggle.

Normative Commitment: A Sense of Obligation to Remain
In addition to the affective component, which created a desire for both Israelis and Palestinians to persist, peacebuilders and peace activists from both communities also attributed part of their tenacity to their normative commitment. While this held true for both, there was a significant difference in how this component of commitment was expressed, just as there was with affective commitment. In terms of normative commitment, for the most part, Israelis expressed a sense of duty and responsibility given the reality (i.e. the desire to not be a bystander) or a sense of responsibility given the injustices being carried out by one's government. Consider the following:

> Rutie: "Many people shut themselves in bubbles and ignore the situation. But if you feel that you cannot ignore it, and you can't live here unless you believe in what is happening, you [have to be] active against it" (Interview, April 3, 2008).

> Dan: "Everything is political. Nothing is not in such a situation. [If you do nothing] you support those who want a stalemate—so every activity has political consequences… There are people who ask themselves, 'In 30 years what have [I] done? Where have [I] been?' Will he just be able to say that he fought Palestinians at the checkpoint or that he did something more?" (Interview, April 3, 2008).

> Anat: "I can't leave and I can't accept the injustice, which is done by Israel, by the Zionist movement, unfortunately. The evilness is not something that I can live with. [So] I persist" (Interview, May 20, 2008).

Palestinians, on the other hand, expressed their commitment as a sense of responsibility towards one's children and grandchildren; and towards Palestinian children, more broadly. The only Israelis who similarly expressed this sentiment, belonged to Parents Circle-Families Forum, and were bereaved parents. Conflict the following quotes by Palestinian peacebuilders:

> Mohammad: "[I persist because] I don't want my kids to [live] the same way that I did, to be in jail, to not be free… My father and my grandfather—all of them from the Ottoman [period] until today—were not free. [And we are] still under occupation and still didn't establish [our own state]… So I intend to continue fighting—even if it is for another generation—until we have a state or a normal life. So this gives me the motivation" (Interview, June 1, 2008).

> Mahmoud: "I have been in the jail for 3 ½ years and I don't want my kids to live or to see what I have seen, [or to experience] what happened to me. I want my kids to live in peace, with security, and to look forward to their future…. [I stay committed because] I believe in this. I want my kids to live in peace, not to live in war, or in the jail… [Look] our problem is with the Israelis. Our problem is not with the Americans, not with the Italians, or French, or British, or Egyptians. If I have a problem with Ghassan, if I want to talk

about the problem, I must talk with Ghassan… If we want to get a solution about our problem with the Israelis, we must talk with the Israelis" (Interview, May 25, 2008).

Najeh: "I want my own kids, my six kids, I want them to have a better future, better chances, better opportunities. My million other [Palestinian] kids—[including my] students—I don't want to see any one of them dying in front of a tank or carrying a gun themselves or being brainwashed by whoever. I want to see this million or two millions of my kids, my children as Palestinians, more aware of their rights, more aware of their humanity, the human side, and more life loving… We don't have much of a life to love here, but I want them to grow with hope not desperation, not sorrow, not siege. When I see kids carried in Gaza from a destroyed house, it's like my personal kids I'm watching. You know, what chances do they have? What keeps me is the hope that one day these children might have a better opportunity and I believe… I trust, that if we don't do this, we will not have this chance. If we don't like preach to you [as an American], preach to the Israeli community, preach using the media, we won't have this chance… This is a jihad [a non-violent jihad]" (Interview, April 15, 2008).

Interestingly, two of the peace activists would not have been surprised. In the words of Itamar, "[What keeps people persisting] is very different for both sides. Israelis are almost purely ideological. It's the inconvenience from being occupiers and oppressors. I think, fueling a part of [this is]... a personal feeling of doing something, being responsible for what I'm paying taxes for, or the feeling that I can't live here without doing it..." (Interview, April 17, 2008). Osama would have also predicted this. Indeed, he argues, that Palestinians tends to see efforts focused on ending the occupation, not as a matter of personal choice, but as a communal responsibility; a necessary [and nonviolent] jihad (Interview, March 31, 2008).

Organizational Actions to Help Maintain Commitment

As discussed in the theory section, movement organizations can take various actions to strengthen commitment (see Klandermans, 1997; Downton and Wehr, 1991, 1998, 1999; and Nepstad, 2004). Perhaps not surprising given the exceedingly hostile environment, each of the 12 surviving peacebuilding initiatives engaged in significant efforts to try to maintain the commitment of their peacebuilders and peace activists. Most notably, in order to increase affective commitment, they sought to strengthen the relations and bonds between the participants, give the participants more ownership of the project and strive for equality, recognize the asymmetry in the daily experience of Israelis and Palestinians and address the needs, goals, and agendas of *both* groups, and install a sense of collective identity across these differences and the power asymmetry.

Strengthening Social Relations and Emotional Bonds Among Participants
As noted above, when it came to explaining what aided their steadfastness, Israelis tended to highlight what they experienced as the touching nature of the cross-conflict relationships, while Palestinians gave voice to the hope that comes from having Israelis struggle with them. Thus while for different reasons, the relationships played a role in aiding persistence for both Palestinians and Israelis, and consequently, many of the organizations sought to strengthen these ties.

For instance, the Peace Research Institute of the Middle East (PRIME), encouraged staff and participants to share their personal experiences with the conflict (whether as soldiers, as prisoners, as victims, etc.) in order to encourage a deeper understanding of the conflict, to foster more trust and understanding, and strengthen their commitment. PRIME also encouraged the participants to bring their families to the international seminars in order to further deepen and personalize the relationships.

Combatants for Peace similarly came to recognize that strengthening these relationships was critical for maintaining the commitment of their participants after a tragedy in which the ten-year old daughter of one of the Palestinian founders of the organization was killed by a rubber bullet shot by an Israeli border policeman. As Osama argued, "It was a hard time. But [during this period when the Israelis were in the hospital with us] we became more and more like friends... [The fact that] all of us, as Israelis and Palestinians were around Bassam, at his house, supporting him, and supporting his wife and children… I think this gives us all hope… [It was important that] the Israelis said they were against what happened and joined with us. We went to the [Israeli] courts together and demonstrated jointly… it gave us [Palestinians] hope… [It made it clear] that we are still committed to our joint message and that the Israeli [participants] are against this occupation; and it increased the trust...We're now trying to strengthen this personal thing between each other" (Interview, March 31, 2008).

As the latter example indicates, it was not enough for organizations to simply focus on strengthening the relationships. While this could work for the Israelis as they experienced the relationships in and of themselves as touching, it was not sufficient for Palestinians who needed to know that the relationships involved a commitment to struggling together (and/or separately) to end the occupation.

Delegating More Ownership of the Project and Striving for Equality
With a desire to increase commitment and motivation, a handful of the organizations also gave participants more ownership of the project and participation in decision-making. For instance, Combatants for Peace, opted to give more ownership to the local groups, believing that if they could work in their own geographical areas and make their own decisions, the members would be more committed. In the words of Osama, "I think the local groups are solving one part of the commitment [issue] because they don't need to come from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem to meet—they can meet there [in Tel Aviv]. They can get involved in direct action [if it's what they want]; it's made there by *their* own decision… it's not made by the central steering committee here" (Interview, April 15, 2008).

Given the asymmetry in resources, freedom of movement, and the ability to acquire legitimacy—all of which favored the Israelis and has led to Palestinians claims of Israeli dominance in peacebuilding organizations (see Maoz, 2004; Gawerc, 2012, 2013)—granting more ownership involved making sure that the Palestinian participants had and felt just as much ownership of the project as the Israelis.

Perhaps the clearest example of this was the Parents Circle/Families Forum, which changed from an Israeli organization to a joint Israeli-Palestinian organization, after the Palestinian participants made it clear that they would not continue to participate in the organization unless it became joint, and they had a voice and decision-making power in the organization. In the words of Aziz, the former chairman of the Palestinian steering committee, they no longer wanted to be "Palestinians on a shelf," that the Israelis could just take down when they needed them, and put back up when they were done with them (Interview, April 9, 2008). The Israeli leadership made the decision to incorporate Palestinians into the organization as equal members, with equivalent power; recognizing that it was the only way for them to maintain the motivation and involvement of the Palestinian participants.

As the above suggests, given the sensitivities surrounding power issues between the two groups inside these initiatives, a perception of shared ownership and equality in joint projects was especially critical. Najeh of Windows-Channels for Communication stated that one of the main reasons he joined Windows and continues to persist "because I felt that you have a free hand as an equal partner. We [the team have] talked about the curriculum that I prepared [as the Palestinian coordinator] and I was given the chance to see the curriculum that Natalie on the Israeli side prepared, as well as Eihab on the Palestinian-Israeli side. I [have] felt like I'm a full partner and I have an equal chance and opportunity" (Interview, April 15, 2008).

Recognize Asymmetry and Different Needs/Goals to Help Maintain Affective Commitment.
As revealed above, Israelis had a tendency to identify with their organization or the more traditional goals of peacebuilding (most notably, dialogue and education), whereas Palestinians identified more with the specific goal of convincing Israelis to take action to end the occupation and struggle with them (Gawerc, 2012; Gawerc, 2013).

Given these radically different orientations to this work, many organizations found that they needed to be aware of the differences in experiences, the different goals and agendas; it was also necessary to find a way to negotiate between these, in order to maintain the commitment of local peace actors from both communities. Indeed, it was critical for both communities to be able to see their work as important and congruent with their values.

For many of these organizations that started off engaging in dialogue and educational work, this involved being more explicit about their opposition to the occupation. For instance, Combatants for Peace as an organization turned more towards protest and direct action. While Windows and the School for Peace could not do this as easily as educational organizations, they also started to engage in direct actions on an individual level. Moreover, they initiated the incorporation of humanitarian projects in the West Bank to further meet the needs of Palestinians. The School for Peace, for example, in their joint project with Hewar, focused on bringing medical professionals to the Palestinian territories, which helped Hewar gain some legitimacy in Palestine. Similarly, Windows focused on bringing clothes and other supplies, which helped to foster legitimacy for the organization both with Palestinians in general, and with their Palestinian partner organizations in particular.

Rutie from Windows relayed, "Many [Palestinian] organizations would be more careful in trusting Israelis, and one of the ways to gain the trust is if you are active also, in [humanitarian aid or] more direct action because education [itself] is a long process… We assume that if we work with many kids and teachers it will have an impact, but it's not going to change the situation tomorrow or make it easier for the Palestinians to live better tomorrow. So I think this was one of the things that helped us… We don't do humanitarian aid or participate in different direct

actions because we want to build trust—we do it because we believe in action—but it definitely helps" (Interview, April 3, 2008).

These actions helped organizations to maintain legitimacy on the Palestinian side, and helped the Palestinian participants see the relevance and significance of their work, thus aiding their persistence. Indeed, Najeh commented, "When Rutie told [the Palestinian participants] that she just came from Bi'lin, where, she was in the demonstration against the wall, this [gave the teachers the feeling] yes, we are in the right place…we want do it! [We want to be active in this project!]" (Interview, April 15, 2008).

Critically, these changes came about due to recognition of the asymmetry in the daily experience of Israelis and Palestinians, and a desire to address the needs, goals, and agendas of *both* groups.

Installing a Sense of Collective Identity Across Differences to Aid Affective Commitment.
Finally, and similarly, with a desire to strengthen affective commitment and identification with joint peace work, several of the leaders of the different organizations started to develop forums and other events where peacebuilders could get together and strive to build a collective identity that goes beyond the organizational level, to the field level. For instance, the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information began to organize education for peace conferences, on a regular basis. This practice brought together peacebuilders and peace activists from the different organizations to talk about peace education and people-to-people activities. As Gershon noted, "We thought that one of the things that was necessary was to give the teachers [i.e. our participants], a sense that they were not alone, that there was a community, and that there was a body of knowledge and experience out there that could be generated by this community" (Interview, February 20, 2008).

In addition, in 2006, several organizations came together to help to create the Palestinian Israeli Peace NGO Forum, which now serves as a network of organizations. While the intention of this forum was to encourage coordination, cooperation, and strategizing among the different organizations engaged in joint peacebuilding work, there was also the recognition that this forum, by bringing people together, would allow for supporting each other, and help to maintain commitment and motivation. Nancy, the Coordinator on the Palestinian side noted, "The first unilateral meeting we had [on the Palestinian side] was after the election of Hamas to the legislative council. We thought that this was the right time for Palestinian NGOs who believe in peace and dialogue to come together and to have a say in what's going on and to discuss unilaterally first:... Are we going to keep working? Are we going to shift our work?... [Given] the whole duration of the political situation and the peace process, people [were and] are totally devastated! They stopped believing that peace would prevail… It's this frustration that the organizations [and activists] have that is the real obstacle. [So] we decided that maybe this is the right time for Palestinians and Israelis to have a dynamic platform—something that would unify a certain agenda for Palestinian and Israeli civil society NGO's" (Interview, April 29, 2008).

Yael, the Israeli Coordinator noted, "I think this project really came up from the field. You hear from the [member] organizations that they want to recruit additional organizations. They [the peacebuilders and peace activists] want to come together in order to mobilize this community… After 2 ½ years of working under the Forum, we have more of a sense of community than what we had a few years ago. On the Palestinian side [especially], you see that they are really coming together as a group... For us, this is really an amazing outcome because the West Bank is so separated and so you have one coordinator who is working in Jenin, and one who is working in Hebron, and they don't have the feeling that there are other people who want the same thing, and that they are not alone... [Now] they can support each other, and they can protect each other at times. So this is a very good development on the Palestinian side" (Interview, April 3, 2008).

Thus in addition to the various actions taken by the organizations themselves to strengthen affective commitment, there were also these broader actions taken by networks of organizations to build and reinforce a stronger sense of community and a collective identity. This is critical, as in the words of Gamson (1991, 27), "Any movement that hopes to sustain commitment over a period of time must make the construction of a collective identity one of its most central tasks. Social relationships that embody values of participation and community in their concrete practices contribute to empowering people."

Conclusion

In line with Dowton and Wehr (1991, 1998, 1999), Klandermans (1997), Schwebel (2008), Nepstad (2004), and Bunnage (2014), this paper highlights the wide variety of actions organizations can take to strengthen affective commitment. For these peacebuilding organizations that worked across conflict lines, and operated in a hostile and violent context, these actions included: strengthening the social relations and emotional bonds between the participants, delegating more ownership of the project and striving for equality, recognizing asymmetry and the

different needs and goals, and installing a sense of collective identity across these differences. These actions were critical in helping to maintain commitment, in part because they helped to strengthen the bonds of solidarity, which Dowton and Wehr (1991, 1998, 1999), Gamson (1991), and Corrigall-Brown (2012) have argued is critical for maintaining commitment. Just as importantly, these actions helped to improve the interactions within the organizations and foster a positive emotional experience, which is so fundamental, according to Flesher-Fominaya (2007), that it can help maintain commitment *even* when the group is not experiencing any modest victories (also see Klandermans, 1997; and Mannarini and Fedi, 2012).

Yet what this paper indicates, that was not addressed in the above mentioned literature, is that in order to design organizational actions that can help maintain commitment—especially for organizations that work across difference and power asymmetry—one needs to be aware of the reasons that keep people persisting, and to recognize that what keeps participants persisting is not just individually structured but *socially* structured. In other words, where people are socially situated, particularly in conflict settings, impacts their motivation to persist, and the factors that keep them persisting. Indeed, as this paper revealed, while Israeli peacebuilders and peace activists tended to attribute their affective commitment to their identification with the organization or peacebuilding in general, Palestinians tended to attribute theirs to the desire to influence Israelis to end the occupation.

Relatedly, while Israelis often saw the work as interesting and an opportunity for growth, which provided a motivation to persist, not one Palestinian suggested the same. Indeed, Palestinians tended to express more internal conflict with regards to persisting, given the normalization taboo in Palestinian society. In this more collective-oriented society, that is engaged in a national struggle for liberation, persisting because the work is interesting would be seen as a selfish action and one that might be normalizing the occupation (see Gawerc, 2012).

Israelis and Palestinians also experienced normative commitment differently. For Israelis, this obligatory feeling to persist was experienced largely as a general sense of responsibility given the reality and/or the injustices carried out by the Israeli government. For Palestinians, on the other hand, this duty focused almost completely on a sense of responsibility towards one's children and grandchildren, with the hopes that they too would not spend their lives under Israeli occupation.

If organizations wanted to be able to maintain the commitment of their staff and participants, they needed to be aware of the *differences* which influenced peoples' perseverance, the ways in which these differences were socially structured and patterned, and to take them into account.

For instance, it was critical for organizations to recognize that while the strengthening of bonds between the two groups tended to help strengthen the affective commitment of both Israelis and Palestinians, the reasons for this differed, and thus the ways in which they sought to strengthen the relationships mattered. While for Israelis, these cross-conflict relationships were touching, which encouraged them to persist, for Palestinians, these relationships were a source of hope *as long as* it allowed them to see that there were Israelis—or people outside of Palestine—that were struggling with them in their quest for sovereignty. Thus for Palestinians, meeting for meals and meeting simply to meet was not enough—they needed to know that their Israeli partners were *struggling with them* to end the occupation. Otherwise, these relationships would be seen and experienced by Palestinians as superficial, and the work might no longer be seen as important and/or congruent with their goals and values.

Even if organizations were committed to granting more ownership to participants, they needed to recognize the differences in what kept people enduring. For Palestinians in these initiatives, it was not simply about ownership, but it was about *matters of equality* between Israelis and Palestinians inside the organizations. Moreover, these changes were about having projects that explicitly met the needs of Palestinians. This often meant engaging in activities that went beyond educational work and included direct action against the occupation and humanitarian work. As this paper indicates, for Palestinians, even the act of seeing how they are able to influence their Israeli partners, whether to work more equally in the organizations and/or to take action to end the occupation, helped them to see that the work was congruent with their goals and values, and helped fuel their persistence in this hostile conflict environment.

Thus, as this paper shows, it is critical to not essentialize organizations and to recognize that persistence is not simply an attribute of an individual, but is *socially* structured and patterned. In other words, where one is socially situated in a conflict setting, impacts the reasons for one's persistence. Moreover, peace organizations—especially those operating in protracted conflict environments—would do well to heed these differences, as recognition of these principles is critical in being able to maintain persistence among diverse groups of peacebuilders.

Acknowledgment

Notes

[1] This article draws from my recent book, *Prefiguring Peace: Israeli-Palestinian Peacebuilding Partnerships* (2012), but builds on and adapts the material presented in the book. This material has been adapted and reprinted with permission.

[2] Interestingly, while there is a significant amount of social movement studies literature on recruitment, there is a dearth of social movement studies literature on commitment and the processes that sustain commitment (Flacks, 2004; Gould, 2004; Nepstad, 2004; Mannerini and Fedi, 2011). Flacks (2004, 143) argues that this neglect to "understanding and depicting the processes that generate and sustain highly committed activists" is in part a reaction against old fashioned social movement studies, which didn't recognize activists as rational beings. Nepstad (2004), on the other hand, suggests that this omission may be due to a mistaken assumption that once recruited, individuals would remain. Regardless of the reason, this gap in the literature is recognized by social movement scholars as problematic given the findings that retention is critical for the survival, the strength, and the vitality of social movements (see Nepstad, 2004).

[3] It should be noted that Gamson (1991, 2012) similarly argues that solidarity is critical. In his own words, "Solidarity refers to the strength of our loyalties and commitment to a movement collective identity… every attack is a test, forcing participants to consider whether the group deserves their loyalty and is worth the risks involved (Gamson, 1991, 45)." Hirschman (1970) also spoke to the importance of solidarity and loyalty to an organization, and makes the case that it is a key factor in determining whether people will choose voice if dissatisfied or walk away.

[4] In the social movement literature, these initiatives are typically understood as "consensus movements" (Lofland, 1989, 1993) or "restrained movements" (Downey, 2006).

[5] This category, it should be noted, does not include groups where the encounter is between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel rather than Palestinians and Israelis given that the issues are different.

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