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Palestinian-Israeli Joint Peace Activism: Community-Building in
the Context of Post-October 2023 Violence

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Abstract

The violence after October 7, 2023, and the subsequent war in Gaza have introduced new barriers to peace in Israel/Palestine and to Palestinian-Israeli relations. Yet, a small number of Palestinian and Israeli peace activists continue to work together. Based on ethnographic online research, this thesis examines how activists in Israeli-Palestinian organizations build communities across divisions in the post-October 2023 environment. Building on anthropological theories of conflict, violence, and community, this work focuses on the forms of activism pursued, how activists navigate their work amid ongoing conflict, and how they negotiate emotions and internal tensions. The findings suggest that Israeli-Palestinian activist communities are constructed through shared goals and purposes, but are continuously tested by political, emotional, and structural realities, offering new anthropological insights into community building across conflict divides.

Abstract

Die Gewalt am 7. Oktober 2023 und im anschließenden Krieg im Gazastreifen hat neue Hindernisse für den Frieden in Israel/Palästina und die palästinensisch–israelischen Beziehungen geschaffen. Dennoch setzen sich einige israelisch-palästinensische Friedensaktivisten weiterhin für Zusammenarbeit ein. Diese Masterarbeit untersuchte anhand ethnografischer Online–Forschung, wie Aktivist:innen in israelisch-palästinensischen Organisationen nach Oktober 2023 Gemeinschaften über Grenzen hinweg aufbauen. Basierend auf anthropologischen Theorien zu Konflikt, Gewalt und Gemeinschaft analysierte die Arbeit die Formen des Aktivismus, wie Aktivist:innen ihre Arbeit im anhaltenden Konflikt gestalten und wie sie mit Emotionen sowie inneren Spannungen umgehen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die analysierten israelisch-palästinensischen Gruppen durch gemeinsame Ziele aufgebaut, jedoch kontinuierlich durch politische, emotionale und strukturelle Realitäten auf die Probe gestellt werden. Die Arbeit bietet neue kultur- und sozialanthropologische Perspektiven auf die Entstehung von Gemeinschaften im Kontext von Konflikten.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Mapping the Academic Field of Israeli-Palestinian Activism.....	3
1.2. Research Questions.....	6
1.3. Theory on Violence and Community.....	7
1.3.1. Violence, Trauma, and Resistance.....	7
1.3.2. Community and Ritual.....	8
1.3. Structure of the Thesis.....	9
2. Methods.....	11
2.1. Conceptualizing “Online Ethnography” during Times of Conflict.....	11
2.2. Trip to Tel Aviv-Jaffa.....	12
2.3. Online Ethnography.....	13
2.4. Qualitative Online Interviews with Palestinian and Israeli Activists.....	14
2.5. Ethical Considerations and Reflecting on My Position.....	16
3. Regional and Historical Contextualization.....	18
3.1. Historical Overview of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Peace Process.....	18
3.2. The Conflict Situation since October 2023.....	24
3.2.1. Israeli Trauma After October 7.....	25
3.2.2. Palestinian Trauma and Life in Violence.....	30
3.3. Sociocultural Aspects in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.....	35
3.3.1. Social Segregation and Political Fragmentation.....	35
3.3.2. Asymmetric Structures Between Israelis and Palestinians.....	36
3.4. Militarization in Israel/Palestine.....	37
3.4.1. Everyday Security and Militarization in Israeli Society.....	38
3.4.2. Checkpoints and Military Presence in Palestinian Territories.....	39
3.5. Social Perceptions and Narratives in the Conflict.....	40
3.5.1. Perceptions of the “Other Side”.....	40
3.5.2. Narratives.....	43
3.5.2.1. The Jewish-Israeli Narratives.....	44
3.5.2.2. The Palestinian Narratives.....	45

4.	<i>The Peacebuilding Community after October 2023</i>	47
4.1.	The Community	48
4.1.1.	Sense of Community	48
4.1.2.	Shared Values and Goals	53
4.1.3.	Mutual Recognition and Solidarity	55
4.2.	Forms of Activism – Protests vs. Everyday Resistance	58
4.2.1.	Building Connections in Workshops and Seminars	59
4.2.2.	Protests, Demonstrations, and Direct Action	62
4.2.3.	Everyday Forms of Activism	65
4.3.	Emotions in Activism	68
4.3.1.	Emotional Support in the Peacebuilding Community	69
4.3.2.	Emotions as a Challenge	72
4.4.	Summary	73
5.	<i>Tension and Challenges</i>	75
5.1.	Internal Tensions in Activist Groups	75
5.1.1.	Internal Tensions and Political Disagreements	76
5.1.2.	Asymmetric Relations	80
5.2.	Navigating Activism in the Context of the Post-October 2023 War	83
5.2.1.	Violence and Safety Issues	83
5.2.2.	Pressure from One’s Own Society	85
5.3.	Perspectives on Peace	91
5.3.1.	Critique of the Term “Peace”	91
5.3.2.	Alternatives to Peace	94
5.4.	Summary	95
6.	<i>Conclusion</i>	97
6.1.	Creating a Sense of Community Shaped by Violence and Conflict	97
6.2.	Answering My Research Questions	98
6.3.	Combining Anthropological Theories of Conflict and Community	99
6.4.	Reflections, Limitations, and Future Directions	101
7.	<i>References</i>	102

1. Introduction

On October 7, 2023, Hamas crossed the border from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel/Palestine¹, to launch an attack on southern Israel, killing over a thousand people and taking more than 200 hostages. This not only caused shock among the Israeli population but also led to collective trauma, as often described by Israeli individuals (David 2024: 65). In response, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) started a military campaign to destroy Hamas, which claimed many civilian victims (Ben-Shitrit 2024: 3-5). By August 2025, at least 61,000 civilians will have lost their lives due to the military operation, with most areas completely destroyed, and the blockage of entry that prevents bringing in aid has resulted in a humanitarian crisis of unimagined proportions in the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023 (UNRWA 2025). There are already studies that are showing that the onslaught on Gaza is leading to catastrophic psychological trauma responses with long-term effects for the people in the Gaza Strip (e.g., Kienzler, Daniel, Hamoudeh et al. 2024). In the wake of these tragic events, both Israelis and Palestinians have been and continue to be afflicted by different levels of significant trauma, driving the two people further apart and making any solution to the violent conflict seemingly out of reach. However, there are small groups of Palestinian and Israeli activists who actively work together towards a common goal, often framed under the term peace.

The events became central to global political debates, with many voices choosing sides with either Israelis or Palestinians, showing that deep divisions in opinions reach far beyond the region. I followed the news about the violence that unfolded in the region from my home in Vienna, Austria, with dismay, bringing back old memories of my time in Israel/Palestine, where I spent a year volunteering in Tel Aviv-Jaffa years before the recent escalation. I, having never engaged with the conflict in the region or its impact on both sides, was quickly confronted with the reality of division and hatred from the Israeli perspective, mainly through encounters with several Israelis who verbally despised the Palestinians, referred to as “Arabs,” which left me in confusion. Over the year, I learned that the separation is not only visible in the physical borders of the security wall that divides Israeli and Palestinian territories, political doctrines, and Israeli military occupation, but also deeply manifested in society, leaving not much space for negotiation and reconciliation with the other side. These early experiences left me

¹ I use the term "Israel/Palestine" because my research recognizes both the Israeli and Palestinian territories and focuses on peace organizations that are made up of and work with both Israelis and Palestinians.

questioning the content of the conflict, the injustice manifested by Israel's government, and the possibility for connection between Israelis and Palestinians, a question I continued to pursue after returning to Europe, continuing learning Hebrew and keeping a connection to Israel/Palestine.

These early encounters with the division and the later escalations shaped my motivation to examine how Palestinian and Israeli organizations continue to exist, and I was compelled to understand how these individuals manage to transcend their differences and work towards common goals – and if this is even possible. This prompted me to ask the initial question: How do Israeli and Palestinian peace activists continue their work in the aftermath of the events since October 2023, and what sustains their collaboration despite deepening violence and separation?

In this master's thesis, I examine the phenomenon of peacebuilding movements through an ethnographic online investigation of Palestinian and Israeli activists who are part of peace organizations in Israel/Palestine in the current conflict situation. My primary research interest focuses on the relationship and dynamics of Israeli and Palestinian activists and what it is that keeps them working together, striving to achieve a resolution through their engagement during the ongoing conflict, characterized by violent confrontations between the state of Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories. While my personal experiences shape my research interest, this thesis does not aim to explain the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself or solutions to it, but to analyze how activists navigate conflict, violence, and community, and how they view the current situation through their lens.

To explore these dynamics, I have adopted an anthropological approach through online ethnographic research that was conducted between September 2024 and February 2025, focusing on four anti-war organizations of different sizes, structures, and strategies that bring together Palestinian and Israeli activists. The members of these organizations provide the empirical base for my research. In my analysis, I am informed by theory on violence and conflict and resistance and theory on community and ritual, which allows for a close attention to how Palestinian and Israeli activists experience realities of violence, and how they create shared communities despite differences.

1.1. Mapping the Academic Field of Israeli-Palestinian Activism

To situate this thesis within existing research, I now discuss the academic literature on peace activism in Israel/Palestine and map the field to identify empirical and conceptual gaps to which this work contributes. Scholars across disciplines that study peace and conflict have highlighted the diversity among peace organizations, with many peace initiatives exhibiting different ambitions, goals, approaches, and strategies for achieving peace. These include educational encounter-based approaches (Gawerc 2012; Ide & Tubi 2020), planned contact interventions between Palestinians and Israelis (Thiessen & Darweish 2018), shifting dynamics such as the transition from protest to testimony strategies (Helman 2015), or the use of dialogue as a mode of peacemaking communication (Hostetter 2023). There are also more radical accounts, focusing, for instance, on Palestinian-Israeli protests against the separation wall (Pallister-Wilkins 2009) or anarchist movements (Gordon 2010). These perspectives analyze Palestinian-Israeli organizations through a multitude of strategies and approaches, but what often remains less visible are the relationships between activists outside of strategic and formal interactions, which reveal how activists sustain trust, deal with tensions, and create shared meanings in their everyday interactions.

Turning to motivation and the creation of community ties, researchers have also examined other aspects of peace activism, including the role of emotions and identity in sustaining Palestinian-Israeli activism. For example, they highlight the importance of hope in motivating peacebuilding movements (Halperin 2022) or how joint organizations have managed to maintain trust and collective identity even during times of heightened violence (Gawerc 2017: 530). These accounts often focus on trust, regularly described as created through developing a collective identity across the divide. This explanation is to be disputed as it risks undermining the diversity and different perspectives present in such communities due to diverse Palestinian and Israeli backgrounds. In my analysis, I challenge this wording by highlighting the different perspectives and realities of activists who work together.

There has also been interest in historic developments of peace activist communities (Ben-Eliezer 2024) and in how the broader political and conflict environment affects Palestinian-Israeli peace activism. Research has shown how major events such as the Second Intifada (Hallward 2009) and the Gaza war in 2014 (Gawerc 2017) reshaped strategies and relationships among activists. Moreover, domestic politics and ideologies have been found to weaken peacebuilding efforts in the Israel/Palestine case (Elman, Hahlai & Spruyt 2014). These

accounts suggest that the conflict situation since October 2023 has altered the political and, consequently, the peacebuilding environment, potentially influencing activists' realities, relationships, and their work. Until now, there have not been enough accounts to deal with these changes, as research on Israeli-Palestinian activism since October 2023 is only beginning to emerge. Kroll-Zeldin (2024) examines the landscape of Israeli-Palestinian co-resistance in the West Bank since October 7, showing that the intensified challenges activists face in their work have been exacerbated since the recent escalations. Yet there has not yet been much published on the effects of the current situation on Israeli-Palestinian activist groups.

From a more critical perspective, several authors have highlighted the limitations of grassroots peacebuilding organizations, expressing concerns about the asymmetries and inequalities within these organizations that mirror the unequal power relations at the national level. They note that Israelis have more resources, freedom of movement, political power, and communication skills than Palestinians, which can create imbalances in organizations (Gawerc 2012; Maoz 2004; Aggestam & Strömbom 2013), and potentially reinforce the very colonial racial hierarchies it seeks to dismantle (Todorova 2020: 332). This poses a challenge, which must balance the diverse needs and expectations of both sides while avoiding the reproduction of asymmetric relationships within their own organization to foster equal partnerships between Israelis and Palestinians. While I am aware of the tensions caused by asymmetric structures in organizations, which I will also discuss in my analysis, I am also interested in understanding how activists negotiate these challenges of inequality. I want to highlight not only the limits they face, which is important, but also how dealing with asymmetry can foster community.

Anthropological and Ethnographic Insights

Anthropological and other ethnographic accounts of civil society peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine provide greater detail about peace organizations, often emphasizing both subtle and overt forms of building peace in everyday life that can be easily overlooked, as well as the moral dilemmas that arise among activists.

Fiona Wright (2018) employs the concept of “complicity” to illuminate the complexities and ambiguities of Israeli anti-occupation radical left activism, outlining how complicity is exposed, performed, and denied as an integral part of solidarity through the movement's interaction with the state and the expression of love and mourning for Palestinians as an attempt to work in solidarity. An approach that is concerned with anti-militarist movements within

Israeli peace activism is presented by Erica Weiss (2014), who examines how anti-militarist activism is enacted, outlining activists' motivations, challenges, and positioning against the state. While these accounts offer in-depth accounts of anti-war activists in Israel/Palestine, highlighting both practices of solidarity in public and everyday life, and ambiguities that arise due to the complex situation, they focus only on the Israeli activists, and do not capture how relationships with Palestinians are made, negotiated, and sustained, leaving collaborative Palestinian-Israeli organizations unexamined. Elizabeth Faier (2005) explores, in her ethnographic work on Palestinian activists in Haifa, how they construct and enact their own distinct discourse of modernity to reconcile their position as a minority within Israel/Palestine, their critiques of Palestinian society, and feelings of displacement, again focusing only on one side. Ayala Emmet (1996) studied Palestinian and Israeli activists, but her work focused on collective actions in female-led peacebuilding activism in Israel/Palestine, emphasizing public events rather than the activists' relationships outside of these events.

Other ethnographic work explores unconventional spaces of activism and the Israeli-Palestinian connection. For instance, Kaddar and Monterescu (2021) describe a bar in Jaffa as a site of encounters with the “political other” and political expression, and Stein (2010) analyzes the practices of the Israeli organization *Zochrot* that offers educational tours that trace the history of Palestinian life and raise awareness of the Nakba. While these perspectives highlight how peace activism can extend beyond formal NGO spaces into everyday life and cultural and historical settings, creating a first idea of how such spaces can build connections between Palestinians and Israelis, they do not explicitly refer to activists of the same organizations that deal with the contents of the current political situation, or individuals that live on different sides of the border.

As I have examined in this review of the academic literature on peace activism in Israel/Palestine, despite extensive interdisciplinary and anthropological accounts of Israeli-Palestinian peace activism, little is known about how joint organizations are sustaining themselves in the current context of war and increased violence. Given that previous studies have shown the impact of violent environments on peace activism, the current conflict situation creates a new context for analysis. Furthermore, many studies and ethnographic accounts have emphasized different strategies and approaches to peacebuilding communities, as well as challenges and limitations in Palestinian and Israeli activism. These often isolate the two sides, and have paid less attention to *why* they work together, what sustains their collaboration in

these times of pressing violence and more fragmentation. What remains underexplored, then, is the community creation between members of the two conflicting sides, and there has not been much attention to the dynamics that sustain a Palestinian-Israeli connection despite structural asymmetry and widening social distancing. An anthropological perspective on the connection between Palestinian and Israeli activists can provide new insights into the conflict and its impact on civil society activists, shedding light on the challenges posed by the heightened conflict, the acute violence, the emotions provoked, and the positions of the actors, and contribute to a better understanding of the current peacebuilding process at the local level. Furthermore, it may facilitate a deeper comprehension of how disparate groups navigate their differences and manage conflict in pursuit of peace and equality.

1.2. Research Questions

As I have discussed in my discussion above, there is a rich body of existing literature on peace activism in Israel/Palestine before October 2023 that focuses on themes such as strategies, goals, and limitations in organizations. The question of how activists continue their work, particularly in the context of the escalation of the conflict since the attacks by Hamas on October 7, 2023, and the Israeli counterattacks on Gaza, remains to be explored. The review has also shown that scholars often view Palestinian and Israeli members of the organizations in isolation or do not explain their connection in a convincing way. I therefore also focus on the question of what keeps the activists working together and creating a Palestinian-Israeli community. This leads me to two research questions that I now present and explain.

- 1. How do Palestinian and Israeli activists in Israel/Palestine engage in peacebuilding activism following the escalation of the conflict since October 2023?*

The first question relates to the current conflict situation post-October 2023 and how it potentially shapes the reality of activists, the activist communities, and their work. It asks if there are new challenges and changes in the environment, and how activists navigate their work within the realities of heightened conflict.

- 2. How do Palestinian and Israeli activists from diverse backgrounds maintain collaboration across divides, and how does this play out in practice post-October 2023?*

The second question is directed towards the activist community to explore why and in what way Palestinian and Israeli activists create and sustain their shared community. This question

is not limited to the current conflict situation, but to the community-building itself. Yet, it requires a special focus on aspects of community after October 2023, as this aligns with the first research question and the data collected in the context of the situation after October 2023.

By posing these research questions, I aim to explore the relationship between Israeli and Palestinian peace activists in the context of the Israel/Palestine post-October 2023. Additionally, these questions also address the motivations of activists to continue their work and their impact on their environment and prospects for peace. In addressing this, I draw on and integrate anthropological theories of conflict and community, which guide my understanding of how Palestinian and Israeli activists navigate violence and build connections. These theories will be briefly introduced in the next section.

1.3. Theory on Violence and Community

To understand and interpret what peacebuilding during conflict involves, it is essential to ground my work in relevant theories that examine the connection between peace and conflict. When analyzing joint Palestinian-Israeli peace activism, I draw on several key theoretical concepts from cultural and social anthropology and related fields to explore how activists continue to collaborate despite ongoing conflict.

1.3.1. Violence, Trauma, and Resistance

To relate to the activists' environment, I incorporate various theoretical perspectives on conflict, war, and violence. This includes earlier approaches that describe conflict in interpersonal contexts, such as those of E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940/1969) and Max Gluckman (1955/1991), as well as broader experiences of violence. Drawing on Edward Said and Judith Butler (2009/2016), I analyze how violence shapes perceptions of the “Other” and influences narratives in Palestinian and Israeli society, aiming to understand how division is constructed between the two sides and how this is challenged by the activists I engaged with. In the context of post-October 2023 Israel/Palestine, I discuss violence and trauma and their impact on the everyday lives of the Palestinian and Israeli activists who experience violent events, mainly guided by Veena Das's (2007) work on trauma and violence. Additionally, works such as *Fieldwork under Fire* by Nordstrom and Robben (1995) and *Cultures under Siege* by Robben

and Suárez-Orozco (2000) are included to provide a more nuanced understanding of the context of violence.

Resistance to violence and state power is also part of Israeli-Palestinian activism. James Scott's (1985) notion of everyday resistance helps to view resistance as more than direct actions in public events and grand gestures and instead highlights the centrality of more subtle acts of overt resistance that might otherwise be overlooked. To account for the meaning of peacebuilding in the context of war and violence, I also include Carolyn Nordstrom's (1997) work on Mozambique during the civil war, in which she points to the creative ways in which civilians respond to violence and create potential for peace.

1.3.2. Community and Ritual

The second strand of theory I engage with concerns how groups form and sustain a sense of community. In the context of violence and conflict following the events since October 2023 and prior to that, my analysis focuses specifically on the dynamics within peace organizations themselves. The Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding organizations I present can be described as a community; however, this description should not overlook the challenges involved, as the members come from diverse backgrounds, with the most notable differences being national and religious identities, shaped by different historical and current narratives between the Israeli and Palestinian group members. To understand the structure and activities of Palestinian and Israeli activist groups, I draw on anthropological approaches to community, not only based on geographic or kinship-related community construction, but also in a broader and more diverse context, asking *how* community is created and sustained to inform my analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian connection. The concept of community has been one of the most widely used in social sciences, while at the same time, there is no exact definition of it (Rapport 2010: 142). For my own analysis and definition of community, as well as its creation, I primarily focus on two central works in anthropology that explore community construction.

I critically engage with Victor Turner's (1969) concept of *communitas* and *liminality* and discuss not only how it may explain how activists create a sense of community through their actions, but also expose the limitations of his concept in this particular case of the Palestinian-Israeli connection that is shaped by complex realities of conflict and violence and characterized by diversity. To account for where Turner falls short, I refer to Anthony Cohen's (1985/1993)

understanding of the symbolic construction of community, to analyze how a sense of community is created between Israeli and Palestinian activists based on shared symbols.

To gain a deeper understanding of actual practice, I also include relevant anthropological theories of rituals and discuss how I define them in relation to community building, to analyze Israeli-Palestinian activism. Inspired by Leonardo Schiocchet's (2022) discussion of rituals in the context of Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, I include central work on ritual practices by central authors, like Edmund Leach (1964), Ray Rappaport (1999), and Seligman et al. (2008). These help me to build on a ritual theory that, contrary to classical works, such as those by Durkheim, understands rituals as not only religious and separated from mundane life, but instead as performed through profane acts in everyday life. This enables me to interpret activist practices through the lens of ritual theory, while also relating back to Turner's (1969) and Cohen's (1985/1993) understanding.

Overall, these theories guide my analysis of Israeli-Palestinian activists, focusing on their community-building efforts, violence, and challenges that arise in the context of heightened conflict. By combining these approaches, I explore how Palestinian and Israeli activist communities not simply emerge but rather are enacted through various forms of activism, symbols, and negotiation of tensions and violence, which will be unpacked throughout my engagement with the empirical data.

1.3. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters, each building on the previous one to develop an ethnographic account of peace activism in Israel/Palestine. In the Introduction (Chapter 1), I have so far outlined the research problem and my motivation, reviewed relevant literature, and presented the research questions guiding me. In Chapter 2, I describe the ethnographic approach that underpins my research in detail. It discusses the online research process, including data collection and my application of the qualitative interviews, as well as questions of reflexivity, positionality, and ethics I considered for the research process. In Chapter 3, I focus on the historical and regional contextualization to situate my analysis of Israeli and Palestinian activists in the field of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I first discuss the history of the conflict and the peace process, and describe the different aspects of social life on both sides in connection to the conflict. This is followed by my analysis, which I structured into two chapters. Chapter 4 focuses on the peacebuilding community after October 2023. It

shows how Palestinian and Israeli activists create a sense of community through their activism practices and how they deal with their emotions in the context of the current escalations. To parallel this, in Chapter 5, I discuss the internal tensions and external challenges that activists face in their work, and explore how different backgrounds create different experiences and meanings of the contents of the conflicts, and how activist communities negotiate and deal with them. In the conclusion (Chapter 6), I synthesize these findings, revisit my research questions, and reflect on how my analysis is situated within the theoretical discussion in cultural and social anthropology.

Following this structure, I aim to shed light on how Israeli-Palestinian activists create a community, and on the tensions and challenges they are facing amidst the reality of conflict and violence. To do so, I conducted online ethnographic research, focusing on qualitative interviews with Palestinian and Israeli activists who are part of peace-oriented organizations in Israel/Palestine. The following chapter details this methodological approach.

2. Methods

The research design of my master's thesis is grounded in the principles and methodologies of social and cultural anthropology. In selecting my methods, I have drawn on established qualitative methods, such as participant observation and qualitative interviews, but given the insecure situation in the Israel/Palestine region, I have decided to do online research on the topic of Israeli-Palestinian peace activism. During my research process, I conducted “online/remote ethnography” with an Israeli-Palestinian civil society peace organization based in Israel/Palestine, and the West Bank. I also visited Tel Aviv-Jaffa and conducted online qualitative interviews with Palestinian and Israeli activists through online video calls. I also participated in online talks and seminars hosted by other Israeli-Palestinian organizations and activists. Additionally, I monitored the online presence of the organization and the Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding community on social media and other online platforms to gain further insights into the current situation. These interviews form the foundation for my analysis. My research phase took place between September 2024 and February 2025. In the following, I provide a more detailed overview of how I conceptualized my research methods and describe my research and data collection process.

2.1. Conceptualizing “Online Ethnography” during Times of Conflict

In anthropological research, the traditional method is ethnographic fieldwork, which typically involves participant observation in the field and qualitative interviews. However, the ongoing conflict in the region presents significant barriers to physical fieldwork. Several anthropologists have debated the question of how to study local phenomena from a distance in conflict situations and whether remote fieldwork is a reasonable method for doing so. In the aftermath of World War II, when anthropologists faced challenges studying societies on the ground, Margaret Mead and Rhoda Métraux (1953) published the handbook *The Study of Culture at a Distance*, in which they conceptualized doing anthropological research by using alternative methods to being on the ground, such as analyzing materials from newspapers, films, letters, and other sources from that time and space, to understand local phenomena. They argued that these methods were particularly useful when it was difficult to participate in person (Mead & Métraux 1953: 3).

In the 1990s anthropologist Hayden has used emails as a source for his research on the ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia, arguing that there are email networks centering on Serbs and Serbia,

Croats and Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, and Slovenia that make a range of material available to researchers around the world, offering the opportunity to collect data without being in the field (Hayden 1996: 785).

In a more contemporary context, John Postill (2016) has similarly pointed out that remote fieldwork is particularly useful in conflict-ridden or otherwise dangerous places, as it provides a safer way to conduct research without exposure to hazards present in the field. Furthermore, Postill argues that with the availability of new networked technologies, online ethnography can now be seen as more than just an alternative to traditional on-site fieldwork. It offers its own set of advantages for gaining valuable insights from a distance. For example, with the availability of technologies such as social media and other platforms for online connections, anthropologists now have the ability to access sites remotely in real time (Postill 2016: 66-67). Following the subject remotely, online "being-then" rather than "being-there" on the site is a valid anthropological research method that produces useful results that are different from, but no less valuable than, those produced by traditional methods (Gray 2016: 508).

Given these considerations, remote fieldwork not only provides a practical solution for conducting my research on Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding organizations despite the inability to be physically present, but it also holds great potential for enriching the quality of the data collected in the context of heightened conflict. Besides the advantages of the online ethnography in this case, I recognize limitations that come with not being there during the course of my fieldwork. These include missing direct observations of events and the general atmosphere, as well as observing more subtle details that might get lost through my research from a distance. To mitigate these gaps, I employed a combination of online research methods, including online interviews, analysis of digital content, and a short visit to the region. In the following, I describe how I implemented the qualitative methods in the case of Palestinian and Israeli organizations in the context of post-October 2023 Israel/Palestine.

2.2. Trip to Tel Aviv-Jaffa

I visited Tel Aviv-Jaffa in the first week of September 2024. The trip was a complementary context visit that informed my perspective and, therefore, is included in my methodology chapter. During the visit, I met with Israeli friends I have known since I lived in Tel Aviv-Jaffa years ago. We talked a lot about our experiences over the past years, including the conflict in Israel/Palestine and its impact on their personal lives. I also had conversations with people I

met for the first time and observed people in the streets, bars, and other areas of daily life. I visited Hostage Square, demonstrations calling for a cease-fire and a hostage deal, and talked to people about these places and events. I took many notes during my visit, and it helped me gain a clearer understanding of the situation in Israeli society and the sensitive issues that matter to them. Reflecting on my experiences and conversations during my visit evoked new questions that I aimed to answer through my research. Recognizing that my experience was somewhat limited, I sought to balance it by gathering data and information about the situation in the Palestinian Territories. The visit also helped me with my research as it is useful spending time on the ground at least parts of the research or having previous local experiences (Gray 2016: 508; Postill 2016: 67). Therefore, my experience with the current situation on the ground, in addition to my previous year-long stay in the region, provided me with a solid foundation for my online research.

2.3. Online Ethnography

To further enrich my understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding community, I used the internet and social media to gather more information. This approach, described as 'multi(web)sided' by Koch (2014: 369-370), allows for a broad exploration of the online field. Instead of confining the research to predetermined locations, this method involves tracing the subject through multiple online spaces. I used organizations' websites to gather information, followed various organizations on the social media platform Instagram, and subscribed to their newsletters. Furthermore, I joined seminars and talks by the Israeli-Palestinian organization *Combatants for Peace* and the grassroots movement *Standing Together*, which took place online. Some of these events were recorded and uploaded to YouTube afterward, which enabled me to rewatch them, but I made sure to join all of the events live to have a sense of "being-then" (Gray 2016). In total, I joined six online events and one event in person in Vienna, which lasted around 1-2 hours. These events presented an interesting and valuable insight into the activist's reality on the ground as well as their perspectives on their work and the conflict. I took notes during and after the talks and seminars, reflecting on the setting, the speaker's share of speech, the interaction, and the content itself.

For the case-oriented part of my research, I did participant observation in the form of an unpaid online internship with the small civil society peacebuilding organization *Windows – Channels*

*for Communication*², which has a triangular system that includes members from Israel/Palestine, Gaza, and the West Bank, and has existed for more than 30 years. They have a mainly educational approach, working with youth to educate them about the conflict and bring Israelis and Palestinians together. During this internship, I supported the organization in developing an online education platform that provides a comprehensive overview of the conflict by presenting a balanced history of Israel/Palestine. I actively participated in regular meetings and maintained communication with one of the organization's members. I had some difficulties due to the remote nature of the internship, and I would have liked to interact with more members of the organization. My fieldnotes focused on the dynamics of my online participation and interactions with the organization's members.

Throughout my research, I monitored these online observations in my fieldwork diary alongside notes from my internship, ensuring that I capture ongoing updates and developments within the Palestinian-Israeli community. Additionally, I reflected on my own positionality and the challenges of ethnographic observations from a distance. The internship provided valuable insights that guided my research, but I gathered my data mainly through participation in online interviews and through interviews with Palestinian and Israeli activists.

2.4. Qualitative Online Interviews with Palestinian and Israeli Activists

The qualitative interviews with Palestinian and Israeli activists are of particular importance for my research. Through them, I obtained most of the data I needed to answer my research questions. The interviews were conducted online via video calls, which allowed for flexibility due to the current conflict situation that prevented in-person meetings. The interviews were conducted using an open interview guide, which was adapted to fit the specifics of each interview situation. The design of this open-ended interview guide was first grounded in my theoretical framework, and later adapted accordingly to my observations during the term of my research, aiming to address thematic fields in the context of the current conflict situation and within the peace activism community. The thematic focus was on various aspects of the activism of my interlocutors, with a special emphasis on the situation since October 2023 and on their work and community, whereby I left the formal and content-related direction and emphasis to my interviewees. As my interlocutors were diverse, consisting of Israeli and

² Website of the peace organization “Windows – Channels for Communication”: <https://www.win-peace.org/>

Palestinian activists from different regions within Israel/Palestine and the West Bank, I aimed to develop the interviews in a way that allowed for diversity in answers based on different backgrounds and perspectives, and emphasize of similar topics to allow for comparable, and I addressed a few basic points with each interviewee, while allowing them to also speak about different aspects that were important to each of them.

I conducted interviews with six Israeli and three Palestinian activists who are actively engaged in Israeli-Palestinian organizations. For their own safety and following their requests, the identities and real names of my interlocutors remain confidential, and I will use pseudonyms in the following and future descriptions. Seven of the interlocutors were connected to the peace organization *Windows – Channels for Communication*. Five of them, Hadar, Adi, Ariel, Yaara, and Shira, are Jewish Israelis from different areas in Israel/Palestine. Shira is currently based in Germany. Two Palestinian activists, Yousef and Omar, are from the West Bank, and Amal is an Israeli-Palestinian activist and lives in Israel/Palestine. All of them are actively engaged in the organization and other initiatives, and they regularly participate in activities. However, their participation is not on a full-time basis, as they maintain employment to support themselves. One additional interview was conducted with Aviv, a member of the Israeli-Palestinian movement *Standing Together Vienna (STV)*, which is part of the artist collective *onenationstate* and was formed in October 2023 as a reaction to the conflict escalation in Israel/Palestine following October 7. The interviews were between 1 hour and 1 hour and 30 minutes. I recorded the interviews and transcribed them for further analysis.

The first step in data analysis involved making sense of the data by summarizing, organizing, and sorting it into thematic and descriptive categories to gain an overview of the material (O'Reilly 2009: 184). I organized my data, which includes written fieldnotes, transcribed interviews, and content from online sources related to peacebuilding activism. I used the software MAXQDA for this process with an inductive approach to generate thematic codes by reviewing the data multiple times. Afterward, I described and analyzed the research data. This involved reviewing the data to identify facts, themes, or patterns and developing analytical concepts (O'Reilly 2009: 193), and situating the findings within relevant literature in the field (Hoeck 2013: 111). I compared and connected data from my participant observations, interviews, and online content to create a comprehensive view of the field. Through coding, conceptualization, and identifying recurring themes, I analyzed and interpreted the data to

answer my research questions about peacebuilding activism in Israel/Palestine, linking my findings with theoretical perspectives in a meaningful way.

2.5. Ethical Considerations and Reflecting on My Position

The conflict situation and the more violent setting of my research opened further aspects to consider before I entered the field. First, there is the question of objectivity. Interacting with activists in the field not only demanded that I engage, but also ‘pretend’ to show understanding and interest in the cause and agenda of the activists. I also had to show real compliance with their position and express criticism of the current political situation in the region. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) discusses this dilemma of not being ‘objective’ as an anthropologist in the field of conflict. For her, being objective and not taking sides is not desirable. Instead, an anthropologist, as a witness, must allow a certain subjectivity and take sides when studying in war zones. Accordingly, I was aware of my own subjectivity in the field and conscious of my positioning towards both Palestinian and Israeli activist causes, while at the same time avoiding having a one-sided view due to my closer connection to Israelis, and staying critical of them.

Second, I also have a responsibility for the safety of my interlocutors (Nordstrom 1997: 8). To enter the field in a respectful manner, it was important to me to guarantee the interviewees’ safety by respecting their need for anonymization, as some fear consequences following the publication of their statements. This was especially important for my Palestinian interlocutors, who had more concerns with anonymity and confidentiality due to fears of stigmatization in their community. I therefore handle any information about their personal data with care and do not include any data in my writings, like names, professions, or exact locations, that might reveal the individual’s identity.

Third, I had to be aware of the complexity of the field that encompasses war and violence before entering the field. As Nordstrom and Robben (1995) argue, “*The complexity of violence extends to the fieldworkers and their theories as well*” (Nordstrom & Robben 1995: 4). Furthermore, when studying and writing about violence it is most important to treat people’s experiences of violence with dignity (Nordstrom 1997: 9). Accordingly, I remained sensitive to shared realities of the conflict and experienced violence from different viewpoints of the Israeli and Palestinian people I encountered during my research process with an open approach that also shaped my methodological approach. Anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom (1997) presents the approach of listening as “*the art of studying violence*” (Nordstrom 1997: 78) based

on her fieldwork on the frontline of the war in Mozambique and emphasizes the importance that words bear in the context of war and violence. She states:

Words serve to give voice to the unspeakable, and therefore render it at least somewhat more controllable. Words serve to mourn the dead and create meaning in a new brittle world. Words serve to construct a tomorrow in the face of chaos. People also feel the need to convey their stories to challenge the “facts” of war spun by the politico-military institutions and by outsiders with vested interests – and thereby to break the reality these people have constructed upon the victims (Nordstrom 1997: 79).

The activists in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that I engaged with are themselves on the frontline of a war against which they do not cease to resist. Their words are powerful, bringing meaning to their worlds and presenting a counter-reality to much of what is presented in popular media, the state, and the military on both sides. Taking the role of someone who listens to the words said in the context of my research without entering the field with my own pre-expectations and definitions was, therefore, one of the central aspects that influenced my methodology and my approach to the field. I took it into account during my interviews and other interactions with individuals from the field. Conducting anthropological research in a setting of conflict and violence is a complex and sensitive matter. It requires being conscious of the subjects’ perspectives and experiences and treating them with dignity, and not being completely objective, allowing for taking sides before respectfully entering the field. These understandings guided me throughout my research and writing process.

By combining online ethnography, a short visit to Tel Aviv-Jaffa, participation in a remote internship, and qualitative interviews, I was able to gather data from multiple perspectives on Israeli-Palestinian activism. This approach allowed me to observe organizational practices, activist networks, and public discourse in the peacebuilding community in Israel/Palestine, while also accessing in-depth personal experiences and reflections through interviews from a distance. Before I discuss my analysis, the next chapter focuses on the historical and regional background of the conflict in Israel/Palestine.

3. Regional and Historical Contextualization

Peace and conflict are deeply intertwined. Therefore, peacebuilding cannot be understood without understanding the affiliated conflict. To contextualize peacebuilding activism in Israel/Palestine, it is important to discuss the conflict situation in the region and to show the central role that the conflict plays within the Israeli and Palestinian societies. In the following, I present the current conflict situation in Israel/Palestine before addressing various aspects connected to this conflict within both societies. As Carolyn Nordstrom (1997) describes, the field in war zones is complex, and to understand it, there is a need to see the whole conflict as the field. Accordingly, to contextualize the field of Palestinian-Israeli activism, I describe the conflict in Israel/Palestine. To do so, I first discuss the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and of the peace process, activism, and resistance within civil society. Then, I discuss the conflict situation in Israel/Palestine since October 2023, drawing on literature in the field, insights from my Palestinian and Israeli interlocutors, and observations from online events I participated in, as well as my own experiences. I describe the reaction of Israeli and Palestinian societies and how the conflict situation influences their reality, before discussing socio-political aspects, issues of militarization, and perspectives on the other side formed by narratives and reactions to the reality in the region from both Israeli and Palestinian perspectives to illustrate the field in which activists operate, and as a base for my analysis of Palestinian-Israeli communities in the subsequent chapters.

3.1. Historical Overview of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Peace Process

To situate my analysis of peace activism after October 2023, it is necessary to provide a background on both the conflict itself and the development of activism and peace initiatives in civil society. In this section, I discuss the key historic events, tracing how recurring cycles of violence, occupation, and political negotiations shaped the struggle today, and some of the reactions in civil society, and how resistance and peace activism movements have formed and developed in light of the conflict.

The Establishment of the State of Israel vs. The Palestinian Nakba in 1948

In November 1947, Great Britain announced it would end the Mandate and handed the Palestine issue over to the UN. The UN set up a special committee, UNSCOP, which

recommended partition, approved by the United Nations General Assembly (Pappe 2024: 58). The Palestinians rejected the plan, leading to the outbreak of civil war. On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was declared with Ben Gurion as its first prime minister and recognized by the USA and the USSR. Israel was at war with the Arabs, with troops entering Palestine from neighboring countries. At the same time, they completed the expulsion of the Palestinian population, demolishing half of its villages, and emptying and destroying eleven of its twelve towns. While the year 1948 marks the independence for Israelis, for Palestinians, it is remembered as the *Nakba*, a catastrophe of ethnic cleansing and displacement that significantly shaped Palestinian lives until this day. These events mark one of the central events in the history of Palestinian oppression. In 1949, armistice agreements were signed between Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. During this period, military rule was enforced on the remaining Palestinian citizens within Israel/Palestine, and relative peace persisted until 1966. During the period following 1948, there was not much space for peace discussions within Israeli society, as state-building and security concerns dominated the national agenda (Cohen 2019: 11).

The Six-Day War in 1967 and Its Consequences

The Six-Day War in 1967 between Israel and Egypt, Syria, and Jordan broke out, during which Israel occupied the Sinai and the Gaza Strip from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, from Jordan. The Israeli settlement project and extended military control in the West Bank began in the same year. As a reaction, the Palestinian concept of *Sumud*, “steadfastness”, and *Muqawama*, “resistance”, became central to a non-violent mode of resistance against the occupation of their land (Schulz & Hammer 2003: 105). The concepts are deeply rooted in the Palestinian identity and shape national and political narratives to this day (Monterescu 2015: 24), and are characterized by the “*continuation of daily practices and rituals developed by hundreds of years of agrarian living*” (Yiftachel 2002: 83) to maintain normalcy in these difficult times.

During the same period, the Six-Day War, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, and the Lebanon War gave rise to leftist Israeli initiatives calling for an end to the overall conflict in the region and advocating for peace with the Palestinians (Cohen 2019: 11). One of the first significant actors in this period was the Israeli peace group *Gush Shalom*, founded in the 1970s, advocating for a two-state solution and direct engagement with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) at a time when official Israeli policy rejected any contact with Palestinian leadership. While

Gush Shalom was fighting for the creation of a Palestinian state with a few others, these efforts remained marginal, as there was no mass mobilization movement (Cohen 2019: 20).

The 1978 Camp David Accords, peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt, while not directly addressing the Palestinian issue, had significant repercussions for the peace movement in Israel/Palestine, strengthening voices calling for a broad resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Cohen 2019: 27). The movement gained widespread public support, organizing large demonstrations and mobilizing Israelis against settlement expansion and the continued occupation of Palestinian territories. By the 1980s, *Peace Now* had become a leading voice within Israeli civil society (Gordon 2003: 41).

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon in an attempt to destroy the PLO, which was then evacuated from Beirut, and the Palestinian cause appeared to have been weakened. The core objectives seemed to be achieved, but paradoxically, these events led to the Palestinian national movement away from the neighboring countries and back inside Israel/Palestine, giving rise to a new resistance by the Palestinians (Khalidi 2020).

The First Intifada (1987-1993)

Five years after the PLO's defeat in Lebanon, the Palestinian uprising, or Intifada, erupted in December 1987 as a resistance against Israeli occupation, land grabs, and military rule (Khalidi 2020). The Intifada erupted as a spontaneous Palestinian uprising in the Palestinian Territories after an IDF vehicle crashed into a truck in Gaza carrying Palestinian laborers, of whom four were killed in the accident. After rumors spread that the accident was an intended act by the IDF, thousands angrily protested, which marked the beginning of the Intifada that would go on violently until 1993 with over 100 Israelis and over 1,000 Palestinians dead and tens of thousands of Palestinians wounded (Harms & Ferry 2017: 141-144). Despite these losses and no improvement for the Palestinian situation, the Intifada remains a central moment for Palestinian resistance.

Khalid Farraj (2017), who participated in the First Intifada, shares his personal experiences. He portrayed the Intifada as a mass movement and pivotal moment in Palestinian history that fueled hopes of an entire young generation, as he states: “*the 1987 intifada remains one of the brightest moments in Palestinian history. It erupted as a mass movement to end decades of systematic oppression and subjugation under occupation.*” (Farraj 2017: 96). While not romanticizing given the high levels of violence committed on both sides during this time, it

must be pointed out that Palestinian Uprising marks a central event for understanding Palestinian resistance against the occupation.

The Oslo Accords and Hopes for Peace

The Intifada was followed by the Oslo Accords, which were peace negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides that began in 1991 and continued throughout the 1990s as the most dramatic yet ultimately unsuccessful attempt to achieve peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Kumaraswamy 2023: 167). The issues that concerned the participants included, for Palestinians, Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the fate of Israeli settlements in their territories, the recognition of a Palestinian state, and the right of return for refugees. Israel's concerns centered on ensuring security from Palestinian attacks, affirming Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel, and preventing the return of Palestinian refugees (Bickerton 2023: 136). These key issues reveal the level of conflict between the two sides when they entered the negotiations for the peace process in a highly asymmetric manner. Peace movements were excluded from the Oslo Accords, leading to a decline of active peace movements within civil society in the early 1990s. As a result, activists delegated peacebuilding responsibilities to the government (Hermann 2006: 49).

Despite initial hopes, the Oslo Accords would later prove to fail. Israeli historian Ilan Pappé (2024) argues that Oslo failed to bring long-lasting peace and liberation for Palestinians. Rather than fostering peace in the region, it appeared more like an opportunity for Israel to advance its interests and secure its military presence in the Palestinian territories through the establishment of Areas A, B, and C, which gave Israeli military control over more than 70 percent of the land, while excluding Palestinian agendas (Pappé 2024: 105). The assassination of Rabin by an Israeli right-wing extremist in November 1995 revealed the deep polarization in Israeli society over the Oslo process and marked one of the turning points that led to its fall. At the same time, on the Palestinian side, frustration over the peace process also grew, and Hamas started a violent struggle against the Oslo process, and in the end, they did not make an agreement (Kumaraswamy 2023: 175). The peace efforts in the 1990s have failed to achieve a solution for the Israel-Palestinian conflict. However, the period remains a notable chapter in the history of peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine, highlighting both the potential and limitations of negotiating agreements amid the ongoing conflict (Bickerton 2023: 148).

Following the failure of the peace process and the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, a paradigm shift occurred within the civil society peacebuilding environment. With the weakening of major peace movements, new organizations emerged from the 2000s onwards, driven by bottom-up and grassroots attempts to bring about political change and overcome the weaknesses and failures of the previous peace process, marking a shift in their strategies and objectives (Ben-Eliezer 2024: 167-170). The new peace initiatives formed NGOs with Israeli and Palestinian participants and concrete concepts to achieve peace, focusing on changing the conflict situation on the ground. The organizations began conducting targeted projects, such as monitoring the situation under occupation, advocacy, humanitarian aid, storytelling and testimonies, educational tours, building dialogue in the general public, and other campaigns to build peace from below by including the civil society (Ben-Eliezer 2024: 175-181).

The Second Intifada and the West Bank Wall (2000-2005)

After a long decade of negotiations, the Second Intifada erupted in the early 2000s. During the second Intifada, both religious groups, like Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and secular Palestinian groups such as Tanzim and al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, engaged in acts of violence aimed at harming Israeli civilians, with shopping malls, public buses, and restaurants being sites of suicide attacks. The Israeli military reacted with counterattacks on Palestinians by targeted killing of Palestinian civilians and house demolishing of more than 600 homes in the occupied territories (Harms & Ferry 2017: 173). Israel began constructing the security fence in 2003 during the Second Intifada. The wall starts at the northern end of the West Bank and loosely follows the border, mostly along the Green Line when heading south, sometimes going deep inside the West Bank, claiming its land, which is questioned by human rights organizations and the UN (Harms & Ferry 2017: 175). The wall marks the land to this day, presenting a physical barrier that divides the land between the Palestinian Territories and Israel/Palestine.

The Second Intifada created a tumultuous environment that influenced the internal structure of many peace organizations and their work (Gawerc 2012; Helman 2015; Weiss 2015: 420; Ben-Eliezer 2024), especially as new challenges arose (Gawerc 2012: 203) and as violence on both sides destroyed any hope for a peaceful solution at that time (Bickerton 2023: 150). As a result, organizations were challenged to survive, and had to deal with internal and external conflicts between Israeli and Palestinian members. Both sides had to contend with the erosion of social legitimacy for the joint peace efforts. At the same time, Palestinian members began to advocate for their own needs and demand a more equal position within the organization's structures,

which were then still dominated mainly by Israeli activists and reflected the asymmetric power structures of the state (Gawerc 2012: 211). The changing environment after the peace process and the Second Intifada, therefore, had a notable influence on the peace organizations at that time.

Following the end of the Second Intifada, the peacebuilding environment has been characterized by a diverse array of actors, goals, and strategies. Palestinians' resistance to Israeli military control, settler violence, and land confiscation continues through various forms of protest. The emergence of the *Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS)* movement in 2005 marked a new phase in the internationalization of Palestinian activism and solidarity. Advocating non-violent pressure on the Israeli government to comply with international law, it has been both influential and controversial (Sánchez & Sellick 2017: 86). Israeli civil society and grassroots NGOs with specific strategies have continued to play a fundamental role in negotiations for peaceful solutions between Palestinians and Israelis (Ben-Eliezer 2021: 169). Protests and demonstrations take a central role in the political life of Israelis and Palestinians, serving as a key means of demanding rights and mobilizing for social and political change.

Post-Intifada Peacebuilding and Internationalization of Movements (2006 - Present)

Since the mid-2000s, Gaza has increasingly become a central area of conflict and harm for Palestinian civilians. In 2006, Hamas won the elections for the second Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). In response, Israel, the Middle East Quartet (USA, Russia, United Nations, European Union), several Western countries, and Arab nations imposed sanctions on the Palestinian Authority, suspending all foreign aid. This also led to the siege of Gaza through blockage and boycott in 2008, leading to a humanitarian crisis in the Strip (Pappe 2024: 134). In 2009, Netanyahu was re-elected after his first election in 1996, and tensions between Gaza and Israel persisted with an array of Israeli operations in Gaza under the name of self-defense, causing a lot of destruction of civilian infrastructure and deaths in Gaza, with some rockets as a reaction by Hamas that did no comparable damage in Israeli territories (Pappe 2024: 135-137).

Radical left-wing groups actively oppose the occupation and advocate for solidarity with Palestinians. As Wright (2018) notes, this activism is grounded not only in political activism but also in emotional identification with the cause of solidarity with Palestinians. Since the 2000s, leftist groups have also challenged the deep militarization in Israeli society by

supporting young Israelis who refuse military service on ethical or political grounds, feminist critiques of power and patriarchy, opposition to the occupation of the Palestinian Territories, and solidarity with Palestinians (Natanel 2012: 80-85). However, the impact of such activism has been limited.

Overall, the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is characterized by ongoing violence, highlighting its asymmetric nature. While Palestinians are often portrayed “*as the disrupters of Israel’s and the West’s existence, or [...] as a surmountable obstacle to Israel’s creation in 1948*” (Said 1978/2003: 286), the reality shows that Palestinians have frequently been targeted, violently attacked, and displaced since the founding of Israel. Although the Palestinian side has initiated violence through suicide bombings and acts of resistance, they have rarely had a real chance against the Israeli occupation and have been met with even greater violence from the Israeli military. In conclusion, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is deeply shaped by the asymmetric nature of the conflict and the long history of violence that has influenced its development since 1948.

3.2. The Conflict Situation since October 2023

In the present day, the conflict in Israel/Palestine remains unresolved. The latest wave of violence began on October 7, 2023, when a group of armed Hamas fighters crossed from the Gaza Strip and carried out a massacre of Israeli civilians in nearby villages, towns, and a music festival. That day, they left 1,200 people dead, captured 240 hostages, and transported them into tunnels in Gaza. The attack shocked the Israeli population, leaving many overwhelmed by pain, fear, and anger (Ben-Shirit 2024: 3). In response, the Israeli government launched a military campaign in the name of self-defense to eliminate Hamas immediately after the attacks. This led to the destruction of cities, the displacement of 1.9 million people—about 90 percent of the population—from their homes. According to UNRWA (2025), from October 7, 2023, to August 13, 2025, more than 61,000 Palestinians have been reportedly killed in Gaza, with over 154,000 injured. Moreover, Gazans live in extremely difficult conditions, facing severe food insecurity, destroyed infrastructure, and limited access to healthcare (UNRWA 2025). The situation in Gaza has deeply affected Palestinian society, not only inside Gaza but also in Israel/Palestine and the West Bank, where people watch the news and feel helpless. After the war in Gaza began, there were also attacks against Israel/Palestine by *Hezbollah*, the *Houthis*, and Iran. Missile strikes and ongoing clashes on the front lines have forced

residents from the northern and southern regions of Israel/Palestine, creating a turbulent situation in the region.

The events of October 7, 2023, and the subsequent war on Gaza present significant events that have influenced the social and emotional landscape of both Israeli and Palestinian societies. This section focuses on how the escalations of violence have been experienced by those who are affected. Drawing on field observation in Israel/Palestine and interviews with Palestinian and Israeli activists, I explore how both societies make sense of the rupture and how trauma is processed in the aftermath. In what follows, by drawing on my field observations during my stay in Tel Aviv-Jaffa and a demonstration I attended in September 2024 I first focus on collective trauma in Israel/Palestine, particularly as it unfolds in Tel Aviv-Jaffa one year after October 7. I then turn to the Palestinian experience, as described by my Palestinian interlocutors, and discuss how the war has exacerbated the ongoing structural violence of the occupation, and how Palestinians navigate life caught between violence and daily survival. Together, these perspectives offer insight into the deepened polarization since October 2023, while highlighting how trauma is present on both sides in different ways.

3.2.1. Israeli Trauma After October 7

In September 2024, I visited Tel Aviv-Jaffa for a private trip of seven days. I knew that the situation had been quite tense since October 7, 2023. When I arrived, I first saw the city skyline and noticed construction sites around the city. There were many more modern high-rise buildings in the city than in the past. I was confused by it, since Israel/Palestine were at war for almost a year. I still had the images from Gaza in my mind. The destruction, the displacements, the tents, and thousands of people homeless – it was undoubtedly transformed into a battlefield. Tel Aviv-Jaffa, on the other hand, was growing. It was busy and cluttered, but to me it did not seem as one would imagine a city entangled in the middle of a war, at least not at first glance. It was almost uncanny that I could not see any evidence of the conflict, such as destruction or displacement, clearly before my eyes.

3.2.1.1. Urban Memorials and The Embedded Trauma in Everyday Life

At second glance, however, I saw the many posters and pictures of the missing and the hostages on the streets. They were everywhere, reminding me of what makes this country hold its breath.

And only then did I realize that there was indeed war. I walked across Rothschild Boulevard, one of the main streets in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, and followed the way down through the city roads until I reached the sea. Everywhere I looked, I saw banners, posters, stickers, and graffiti with the faces of the missing and the victims of the war, a yellow bow, the symbol of the missing hostages, and messages demanding the return of the hostages held in Gaza. These messages were everywhere, as if they imprinted the memory of those that must not be forgotten. And yet life goes on. Cheerfully, people were sitting outside bars, drinking wine, chatting, and laughing together. Above their heads, the sign was placed right at the top of the entrance door of a bar, reading “#BRINGTHEMHOME”, and on top of that, an Israeli flag hung from a balcony. Remembering the war and its consequences for the Israeli people is imprinted into the cityscape wherever you go. The loss and pain become visible.

This became particularly clear to me when I crossed Hostage Square. It was a memorial site for the hostages. On the square was a collection of different memorials in the form of digital and art installations, monuments with more or less strong symbolic components. One particularly emotional memorial was the recreation of a Hamas tunnel from Gaza, where the hostages are held captive. The tunnel is open to the public, and everyone is welcome to enter it. The sign at the entrance says: “*Entering the tunnel may elicit strong emotions. Visitors enter at their own risk.*” As the sign says, the installation is a production of the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, like many other memorials at the Square. Memorialization is a central motif in the Israeli political culture and has evolved into a national cult with vast numbers of memorials and shrines (Aronoff 1999: 43). These kinds of memorials are therefore very characteristic in Israel/Palestine, although this time they are even more present as they are spread throughout the city. What the memorials achieved was to evoke emotions and to remember the missing people. I encountered the deep feelings of pain, loss, trauma, and grief of the Israeli people materialize in this place.

The visible presence of the hostage memorials across Tel Aviv-Jaffa, where people pass memorials on the way to work or see the pictures of hostages while sitting in cafés or going to shops, shows how grief and loss are absorbed into the mundane rhythms of daily life, and reflect what Veena Das (2007) describes as dealing with the experience of violence and loss through a “*descent into the everyday*” (Das 2007: 62). These traces of remembering, scattered through the streets of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, are not just expressions of mourning, but also allow people to make sense of violence and trauma while continuing their lives. In this way, the city itself

becomes a bearer of pain and memory, and everyday interactions serve as spaces in which violence is lived with, rather than moved past. This reality was also reported by my Israeli interlocutors, who shared about the trauma they feel in their society and provided insights into how it shapes the emotional terrains in which Israeli activists mobilize.

3.2.1.2. Public Performance of Grief: A Demonstration in Tel Aviv-Jaffa

The reaction to the violent events of the conflict in Israeli society also became visible through more public events, such as protests against the war with various actors. On September 5, 2024, I attended a demonstration in Tel Aviv-Jaffa calling for a ceasefire and the release of hostages. This protest was part of a series of nightly demonstrations occurring across the country in response to the deaths of six hostages in Gaza before being discovered by the Israeli army in the tunnels. The incident intensified public anger, with many questioning the government's approach and blaming it for the death of these hostages.

The demands of the protesters were clear: "*Seal the deal. Stop the war now.*" These slogans were shared online, on protesters' signs and shirts, and were repeatedly shouted by demonstrators through megaphones. The movement brought together various actors, such as well-established peace movements, like *Standing Together*, and other political movements like the radical-left *Antifa* or *Looking the Occupation in the Eye*, recognizable by their shirts, signs, and flags. While some of the actors identify as peace activists or have the objective of supporting Palestinians, others joined out of frustration with the government's handling of the hostage crisis rather than a broader commitment to peace activism. *Standing Together* actively invites its members to join these demonstrations on their social media platforms, like Instagram and WhatsApp, reminding them to wear their purple shirts, the identity color of the movement. Additionally, the movement shared videos and pictures of the demonstrations on their channels, making public protest a central element of their activism.

The protest I attended took place on a major road between the Azrieli Center and the Ministry of Defense, near the *Begin Gate*. Usually, a bustling traffic route, the street was blocked off by trucks, creating a space that slowly filled up with protesters. As time passed, the crowd swelled until the street was full, with most protesters gathering under a bridge that spanned the road. The protest featured numerous visual and symbolic elements. Signs and shirts carried messages like "*Bring Them Home*" or "*Seal the Deal*," often featuring the pictures of the hostages, and,

in bold, the word “*Now*”. The symbol of the hostages – a yellow ribbon – was also present everywhere, tied to backs, on shirts, and held up on banners and flags. The crowd’s chanting was rhythmic and powerful, with calls echoing between the ministry building and the Azrieli Center across the street. The repeated calls of the word ‘now’ conveyed a sense of urgency. For the protesters, sealing a deal and securing the hostage’s release was not a future negotiation but an immediate emergency.

Some protesters broke away from the crowd, carrying blue and white coffins on their shoulders, resembling national symbols with the colors of the Israeli flag. They walked in a procession away from the rest of the demonstration before placing the coffins down, lighting candles, forming a circle around them for a funeral-like ceremony, and giving speeches remembering the hostages who had already lost their lives. At their feet, on the ground of the street, the names of the missing were written in Hebrew letters in yellow paint. The performance reminded me of the religious symbols associated with traditional funeral rituals and represented what Turner (1969) would call *rites de passage*, rituals that move liminal beings from one state to another, in this case, from life to death. For Turner, participants of such rites experience temporary moments of human connection and unity, a “*moment in and out of time*” (Turner 1969: 96) – outside of status, property, or indications of rank or role while Turner emphasizes the transformative potential of rites de passage, in this case the ritualized funeral procession was more about symbolic communication as there were not actually any bodies in the coffins to be buried. They can therefore rather be understood closer to what Edmund Leach describes as “*symbolic statements about social orders*” (Leach 1964: 14).

This act of mourning stood in stark contrast to the rage-fueled protest taking place a short distance away, where demonstrators continued to shout slogans, accompanied by rhythmic drumming. The street in front of the ministry quickly filled, as I heard one woman shouting through a megaphone in a hoarse, impassioned voice: “*The hostages have been in Gaza for too many days!*”. As the demonstration progressed, the situation became more tense. More police and military personnel appeared, standing at a distance and observing the situation. While their presence was not confrontational, they were visibly prepared to intervene as protesters began lighting pyrotechnics. After I left, reports surfaced on social media showing footage of clashes with police, small fires being set by protesters, and attempts to push past barricades.

The demonstration I attended reflects a broader struggle over the meanings of protest, security, and peace in the broader Israel/Palestine. These kinds of protests can be understood as public

performances of resistance and grief, where the streets become arenas of collective anger, and emotions are expressed through chants, symbols, and ritual-like processions. Beyond the ritual-like processions, the whole demonstration itself can be understood as a ritualized practice, resonating with Rappaport's understanding of rituals, which identifies five features of the form of rituals. For him, rituals are encoded by others than performers, formal, since ritual behavior tends to be punctilious and repetitive, through stylized gestures, and are performed in specified contexts and at established times, more or less invariant, collectively performed, and are formal and do not directly produce practice (Rappaport 1999: 32-46). With their highly stylized performance, collective participation, regular repetition – at the time I joined the protest, it was reorganized every night at the same time – and routinized sets of action, these protests took on the character of rituals. Yet these actions had little immediate efficacy to return the hostages and end the war, and functioned more as a powerful tool to express urgency and messages. Therefore, according to Rappaport (1999), these rituals can also be seen as a *mode of communication*, suited to transmit messages. The ritual then is “*a special medium peculiarly, perhaps even uniquely, suited to the transmission of certain messages and certain sorts of information*” (Rappaport 1999: 52). However, not all participants express the same messages. While some demonstrators positioned themselves with the peace movement and articulated an anti-war stance, others framed their participation as a demand for the return of hostages, rather than a rejection of military actions in Gaza itself. The diversity of actors, emotions, and strategies within the demonstration points to the tension within Israeli society, where grief, rage, and political hope intersect in various ways.

My Israeli interlocutors also spoke about these demonstrations that they regularly join, along with other, more directly Palestinian-Israeli cooperation-related activities. My observations of the demonstration in Tel Aviv-Jaffa highlight the significance of ritual actions in activist practices in Israel/Palestine. In my analysis of the activists' practice, I will revisit the discussion of ritual actions and highlight not only its distinct forms but also its particular connection to power, which enables individuals from different backgrounds to come together and convey similar messages.

Overall, my observations in Tel Aviv-Jaffa and during the protest revealed how deeply Israelis react to violent events and conflict, which have permeated their lives, shaped their realities, and created a sense of urgency to end the war and bring the hostages home. Meanwhile, most Israelis seem indifferent to the Palestinians' fate, as I will discuss later in this chapter. While

Israeli grief and protest shaped public spaces in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Palestinians experience trauma in ways that intersect with structural violence and everyday security, which I focus on in the following section.

3.2.2. Palestinian Trauma and Life in Violence

With the outbreak of the War on Gaza, there has been a lot of suffering among Palestinian civilians. Bombing houses, restricting imports of aid supplies, and tens of thousands dead or wounded, with the worst situation of starvation within Gaza yet to come in the months after I conducted my interviews. These events have impacted Palestinian society, both inside Gaza and in Israel/Palestine and the West Bank, as Palestinians watch the news about what is happening and feel powerless to stop it. All the Palestinian activists I spoke to and encountered in seminars described how the situation in Gaza has deeply saddened the Palestinian community and themselves. Amal, an Israeli-Palestinian activist I interviewed, spoke about feeling powerless about the situation in Gaza:

“As a human being, as a Palestinian, as a Muslim, this war has killed me from within. The people of my nation, my brothers and sisters in Gaza, have been annihilated. They lived through hell, and I was powerless to stop it. This war did not change me; it completely rebuilt me.”
(Amal)

Amal’s words illustrate how the violent events of the conflict deeply affect both emotional life and activists’ engagement, which I will come back to in my analysis. Like Amal, many Palestinians share similar feelings about the situation in Gaza. Buch Segal (2016) discusses the role of mourning for Palestinians in the context of Israeli military occupation in the West Bank prior to the events that took place since October 2023. She argues that there is an exhaustion in Palestinian society to mourn every death and states: “*The duration and oscillating intensity of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict have meant that events of death and detention have become woven into the fabric of everyday life for most Palestinians.*” (Buch Segal 2016: 475). This shows that, for Palestinians, violence is a regular part of everyday life. While they feel pain and suffer from the conflict, they often cope with it in subtle ways, as violence is woven into their reality. The cause of the experiences of violence often lies in the settler harassment perpetrated to drive Palestinians away.

3.2.2.1. Settler Violence and Everyday Life

Before the war started, there was already a lot of violence by the military and Jewish settlers that attempted to push Palestinians away from their villages by using different violent strategies, which different researchers documented. Often, groups of young settlers went to the villagers and harassed Palestinian inhabitants (Eiran & Krause 2018). Other strategies involved systematic slow violence against Palestinians, such as dumping sewage waste onto Palestinian villages or releasing wild boars to disperse Palestinians and take over territory currently inhabited by them (Amir 2013). Violent attacks by Jewish settlers have therefore reportedly been present for a while before October 2023.

Settler violence against Palestinians has not decreased since the Gaza War began, but rather the opposite has happened, and attacks intensified (Lund & Browne 2025: 304). As Palestinian and Israeli activists informed me and as human rights organizations like B'Tselem³ reported, more settler violence against Palestinians has caused a lot of insecurity for farmers and shepherds in the West Bank, making the olive harvest and herding sheep difficult. Young settlers are going to Palestinian villages and harassing Palestinians. Various activists and human rights organizations reported this throughout the time of my research. In interviews and during online talks, Israeli and Palestinian activists shared a lot of stories of settler violence against Palestinians, highlighting that people in the West Bank experience aggression and oppression daily. My Palestinian interlocutors and activists in online talks have shared their firsthand experiences in the West Bank. People are having trouble living their daily lives due to restrictions and violence. Yousef shared the situation in the West Bank from his point of view, stating that the situation has become worse than ever before:

“It's changed completely since October 7. I refuse to deal with the Palestinian-Israeli issue, as it's the beginning of where everything started, 7 October, that's completely wrong. I will not talk this way at all because there were 75 years of suffering before that. But if you're talking about how reality changed since that day, a lot of people still don't realize that we're living a new life and a new situation and a new – if I'm allowed to say – a new conflict. It's completely different than before. And they're using all the attention that Gaza News is having to do a lot more in the West Bank. I couldn't recognize more than 50 percent of the way between Abbas

³ Documentation by B'Tselem: https://www.btselem.org/settler_violence_updates_list

and Ramallah because I went out once to that city in the war. A lot of roads are being taken, a lot of settlements are being built, thousands of houses are being taken, almost a thousand from the West Bank have been killed, and there's demolishing and arresting, and we're talking about, what's the number now, 9,000 people in prison? And people are dying in prisons for different reasons. I don't want to get into the details of that. But yeah. We're living a new life, we're living a new reality. Not everybody really realized that, but we chose not to give up in a careful way.” (Yousef)

Yousef’s account shows the devastating conditions under which Palestinians have to live, where he stated that the attention on Gaza is used to drive more forces into the West Bank. Similarly, other Palestinian and Israeli activists observed these developments in the Palestinian Territories. An Israeli activist of *Combatants for Peace* described in an online talk how he sees the war being used by settlers to inflict more violence on Palestinians and drive them out of their territories, and described that the settlers view the situation as “an Armageddon – a one-time chance to kick everybody out.” (Online Talk *Combatants for Peace*). These accounts reveal how much Palestinians are under pressure, constantly fearing for their own lives and those of their loved ones. These violences and uncertainties are the backdrop under which activists have to operate and against which they resist, which I will come back to in more detail in my analysis of challenges activists face in Chapter 5.

Furthermore, most Palestinians live in displacement and exile, which influences their lives as well. Schulz & Hammer (2003) argue that due to the situation Palestinians are in a constant state of waiting in a state between exile and nationhood: “*Identity can only be fully expressed in the future, when the terrible present has been changed, when the Palestinians have achieved what others already have, i.e. a state, a passport, a place to call home, when waiting has delivered. The Palestinians are to endure, to go through this process of waiting, and be transformed in the process.*” (Schulz & Hammer 2003: 95). Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza don’t feel safe and experience violence. With the pain and suffering under the military rule, their lives are in transition, waiting for the end of the occupation.

For Palestinians, ritual-like practices in social gatherings, like celebrations of religious events or personal events such as marriage or funerals, take on an important role. This is described by Schiocchet (2014) based on his observation during fieldwork in a refugee camp in Lebanon:

Al-Jalil camp had a very defined and frequent set of public practices and discourses ranging from the simple day-to-day social interaction to a specific calendar of events. That is, a certain “*ritual tempo*” socialized members of the community into a set of values, practices, and behaviors, helping demarcate the boundaries of the community *vis-à-vis* others, and organize history by providing frameworks for understanding and engaging the world. Al-Jalil’s ritual context was marked by ubiquitous symbols of “Palestinianness,” such as the Palestinian flag, images of the fighter and the martyr, the key, map of the political borders of historical Palestine before 1948 (Schicocchet 2014: 154).

In his descriptions, he shows how Palestinians remembered their struggle and expressed claims for justice on almost every occasion with ritualistic characters (Schicocchet 2014: 155). This shows that for the Palestinian public, ritualistic performances are central modes of communication and remembrance of collective trauma and create moments of connections, similar to what I discussed about Israeli demonstrations.

Overall, Palestinian lives have for decades been shaped by ongoing violence, loss, and the constant wait for safety, a homeland, and recognition. The recent events have caused even more suffering among Palestinians, deeply hurting them. This cycle of violence and uncertainty underpins the reality of Palestinian lives and also plays a key role for the activists I interviewed, as I will discuss in my analysis.

3.2.2.2. Anthropological Perspectives on Trauma and Violence

The current conflict situation in Israel/Palestine presents probably one of the most significant turning points in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As I have discussed in this section, it has caused a tremendous amount of violence and has deeply affected people on both sides of the conflict, seeping into their everyday lives. As Robben and Suárez-Orcozco (2000) argue, it is important to focus on violence and trauma when studying contexts where they are present, pointing to the significant role that trauma takes in violent contexts. To conceptualize how violence and trauma play a role for the Palestinian and Israeli activists I interviewed, I draw primarily on Veena Das’s (2007) work, which I will use in Chapters 4 and 5 to interpret how activists deal with violence and emotions connected to it. Das’s work offers a framework to understand how violent events and trauma influence everyday life. In her book, *Life and Words. Violence and the Decent into the Ordinary*, Das focuses on her fieldwork in post-

partition India, and argues that experiences of violence are not confined to moments of rapture or spectacle. Instead, it attaches itself to the everyday, and “*the events of collective violence continue to shape the intertwining of experiences of community*” (Das 2007: 3). This perspective makes distinguishing between the exceptional nature of violence and the supposed normality of everyday life difficult and shows that experiences of violence influence relationships within groups. Das describes the strong sense of presence of the violence of past events that echoes into the present life of people who experienced it:

Though of the past, it did not have a *feeling* of pastness about it. [...] The sense of the present then was marked by a fearful anticipation. The survivors in the locality were living not only with memories embodied in the walls of houses, on the charred doors, in the little heaps of ashes in the street, but also with threats embodied in words and gestures as the perpetrators of the violence continued to live in the same neighborhoods as the victims (Das 2007: 98).

Das also explores how grief and coping with trauma caused by violent events are both personal and collective processes, visible in public acts of mourning and in more subtle everyday actions that reveal the violence, pain, and loss (Das 2007: 193 ff.). She questions what it means to witness the criminality of societal rules, and highlights the challenge of continuing with life after witnessing violence (Das 2007: 62). In this way, violence becomes embedded into the lives of those mourning, “*as it seeps into the ongoing relationships and becomes a kind of atmosphere that cannot be expelled to an ‘outside’*” (Das 2007: 62). Das’ (2007) observations of how trauma and violence shape people’s everyday lives in post-partition India guide my analysis of how Israeli and Palestinian activists’ realities can be understood in the context of the ongoing conflict, where acts of violence are directed at them, their environment, or activists from the other side they are connected to.

My analysis in Chapter 4 focuses on how Palestinian and Israeli activists respond to this reality in more detail. Understanding these intertwined experiences of violence and collective trauma is therefore crucial to understanding how Palestinian and Israeli activists navigate their work in the current conflict. In the following sections, I discuss some of the aspects that influence Palestinian and Israeli societies in light of the conflict, starting with the sociocultural aspects in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

3.3. Sociocultural Aspects in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is deeply rooted in sociocultural dynamics that influence realities and the political sphere on both sides. To understand how political positions of actors who influence the peace process are formed, it is therefore crucial to consider the sociocultural dimensions. In this section, I highlight two key sociocultural aspects that are relevant for understanding the social dynamics that complicate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. First, I discuss the social segregation based on ethnic and religious background within Israel/Palestine and how existing political fragmentation has deepened since October 7, 2023. Second, I examine the asymmetric structure that shapes the relations between Palestinians and Israelis, along with the realities faced by Palestinian civilians.

3.3.1. Social Segregation and Political Fragmentation

Despite its relatively small size and population, Israel/Palestine exhibits a remarkable degree of diversity, which is evident not only between the Israelis and Palestinians, and other minorities like the Druze, but also within the Israeli population itself. However, Oren Yiftachel (1997) states that there are major gaps and segregation between Israeli citizens based on their ethnicity, arguing that the structure of the Israeli society is firmly based on ethno-class segregation and inequality. Within Israeli society, the wealthy Ashkenazi Jews have a privileged position over the less privileged Mizrahi Jews with backgrounds from the Middle East and North Africa, and ultra-orthodox Haredi Jews, as well as Palestinian Israelis (Yiftachel 1997). The Palestinian Israelis and other non-Jewish citizens are especially marginalized in Israeli society as the nation wants to maintain a Jewish majority, as Hostetter points out: “*Israelis are obsessed with demographics and ethnicity in their effort to maintain a Jewish majority and a ‘Jewish democracy’*” (Hostetter 2023: 33). This is also visible in dynamics of segregation in cities such as Tel Aviv-Jaffa. Hackl (2022) demonstrates that Tel Aviv-Jaffa is a highly exclusive Jewish Israeli city, and Palestinians are made invisible and are excluded. These dynamics show that segregation and marginalization based on ethnicity and religion shape the social life in Israel/Palestine.

The social structures in Israel/Palestine also influence politics and peace-making efforts. As Yiftachel (1997) notes, the peace process is linked to the economic interests of the elites and dominant groups. Thus, ending the occupation of the Palestinian territories is opposed by many citizens who benefit from it, and can influence most public politics (Yiftachel 1997). Uri Ben-

Eliezer (2015) similarly argues based on social dynamics that Israeli civil society, which was interested in building peace, failed to do so because it could not translate its collective representations into meaningful political action. He points to the political fragmentation, as a strong presence of a neo-militarist and right-wing settler *uncivil society* existed, which had no interest in achieving peace and succeeded in advancing its political goals (Ben-Eliezer 2015: 183). These dynamics underscore the deeply divided public sphere and the significance of societal influence in political decision-making (Ben-Eliezer 2015: 182), highlighting the profound interconnection between peacemaking efforts and the unequal social structures and political fragmentation that characterize Israel/Palestine.

The activists I interviewed also mentioned the deep social and political divisions in Israeli society and pointed out the split between radical right and left-wing groups. For instance, Israeli leftist activist Shira said: “There's no left really in Israel/Palestine. There's like the center right wing, and there's the radical left.” (Shira). According to her and other interlocutors, this division has been intensified since October 2023. Israeli leftist activists and political scholars on Israel/Palestine, Kotef & Amir (2024), also noted that “*October 7 has created a split in the reality inhabited by the left*” (Kotef & Amir 2024: 177). In their view, different responses to the events and how to deal with the pain created started to surface and made working in unity among the Israeli left more difficult (Kotef & Amir 2024).

In sum, Israeli society is characterized by deep internal divisions and unequal social structures that shape the political landscape. While these dynamics explain some of the difficulties of peacemaking, they exist within a broader framework of structural asymmetry between Palestinians and Israelis, which I will now turn to.

3.3.2. Asymmetric Structures Between Israelis and Palestinians

Many scholars who critically analyze the sociocultural dynamics in Israel/Palestine point to the unequal structures between Palestinians and Israelis in the ways that “*The policies and practices of the State of Israel demonstrate and enact the structural asymmetry of its relationship with the Palestinian people, both in and beyond the occupied Palestinian territory.*” (al-Orzza & Makhoul 2017: 69). Israel benefits from these uneven power relations and uses mechanisms that facilitate the forced displacement of Palestinians. Gallo & Marzano (2009) also emphasize the legal asymmetry and argue that while Israel is a legal state,

Palestinians have to fight for their rights, recognition as a nation, refugee rights, access to power, and a clear goal.

Structural inequality can also be observed in various aspects of social life. Palestinians, for instance, have limited access to resources and knowledge, poor infrastructure, and restrictions on movement (Gawerc 2012: 56-62). This is also highly relevant in Israeli-Palestinian peace organizations, as the asymmetric structures result in Palestinian members being dependent on Israeli support, and have different needs due to their higher exposure to violence and discrimination in the conflict which only increases in escalating times (Gawerc 2012: 56), which I will discuss in more detail in my analysis of the challenges within the organizations I interacted with in Chapter 5.

Various accounts from my interlocutors often highlighted the asymmetry between Israelis and Palestinians and the difficult situation for Palestinians caused by increasing power imbalances since October 2023. Besides the experienced violence, one example is the bad economic situation that Palestinian activist Yousuf spoke about:

“For like one and a half years, there are no regular salaries for the governmental employees. They get only 70 to 80 percent every month, and they already owe them between eight to ten months’ salary, and we’re talking about around 300.000 jobs or work, I wouldn’t call the job [...]. Israel taxes money, and they have their own excuses for it, [...] We’re trying to live day by day with no expectations.” (Yousef)

Yousef’s explanation is similar to what is said in the literature; the imbalance of power dynamics pushes Palestinians into precarity and insecurity. The conflict cannot be viewed without acknowledging these profound structural imbalances between Israelis and Palestinians, which shape their social lives and make the division between the two sides even more visible. These asymmetries are further reflected in questions of everyday security and militarization, which I discuss in the next section.

3.4. Militarization in Israel/Palestine

In Israel/Palestine and the occupied Palestinian territories, military personnel are almost everywhere (Sánchez & Sellick 2017: 84). Militarization plays a central role for both Israelis and Palestinians, but in very different ways. While Israelis grow up with military doctrine and

join the army, Palestinians encounter soldiers and military control in their daily lives. Below, I discuss the role the military plays for both Israelis and Palestinians.

3.4.1. Everyday Security and Militarization in Israeli Society

In Israeli society, issues of security and militarization have a central role, exerting a profound influence on the nation's values and the everyday lives of its citizens (Furman 1999: 142). After decades of conflict, war has become normalized in Israeli society, and military service is widely perceived as natural (Ben-Ari & Lomski-Feder 1999: 10). This is especially evident in the current situation in the region, as Israeli and Palestinian activists have noted multiple times, and as I have personally observed. The importance of everyday security in the current conflict became clear to me when I visited Tel Aviv-Jaffa in September 2024, as civilians carried weapons in everyday environments, even though locals said they felt like they were in a ‘safety bubble’ surrounded by more tense conflict areas. Yet security measures were everywhere. Ochs (2011) refers to the practice of everyday security in her ethnography of everyday life in Israel/Palestine and argues that security is an integral part of the Israeli culture, where people encountered security “*in homes, cafés, and magazines, spaces of consumption and intimacy.*” (Ochs 2011: 14). She argues that security has become a medium of unending crisis and prompted only resistance to the resolution of conflict (Ochs 2011: 18). My observations in Tel Aviv-Jaffa reveal a similar integration of security into daily life. In every public place I visited, at least one gun was visible, always carried by a civilian. A machine gun casually draped over the back of a restaurant chair, a man carrying a rifle over his shoulders as he bought food at the market—all demonstrated that people were ready to defend themselves and those around them.

The everyday security can be connected to the militarization of Israeli society, which reflects Bickford’s definition of militarization as “*the cultural, symbolic, and material preparation for war; and [...], militarization and the presence of state militaries influences much of the ‘everyday life’ in many societies and cultures around the world, both explicitly and subtly.*” (Bickford 2015: 484). Cathrine Lutz (2007: 320) describes militarization as a process of legitimizing and glorifying military actions. In Israeli society, the army and military play a central role, also in children’s socialization throughout nursery, kindergarten, and school (Furman, 1999), continuing into adulthood, being woven into Israeli life.

The Israeli activists I interviewed all have ties to the military and discussed its influence on their lives. Yaara told me she joined the army because it is required, even though she was concerned that Palestinians would judge her for doing so. Ariel talked about how he spent a few years in the military before becoming more active in his advocacy. Shira, on the other hand, actively refused military service because she did not want to support their actions against Palestinians. In sum, Israelis are socialized in a highly militaristic society where both duty and everyday security normalize the presence of the army in Israeli society.

3.4.2. Checkpoints and Military Presence in Palestinian Territories

The militarization exerts a profound influence not only on Israeli society but also on the Palestinian community, as soldiers and military operations are always present in the occupied Palestinian territories. What Palestinians experience is the other side of the military – the military occupation of their territories. Since Oslo II, the West Bank has been divided into three areas with the Israeli military controlling most of the land (B'Tselem 2013: 12; Harms & Ferry 2017: 155). Therefore, most of the land in the West Bank is controlled by the IDF, and Palestinians regularly have to cross the areas under Israeli control. This territorial division translates into Palestinian checkpoints and military presence in the West Bank, restricting freedom of movement for Palestinian citizens. Even when driving the ambulance, which makes bringing sick or wounded people to a hospital in another area almost impossible, as a Palestinian activist described during an online talk in November 2024. The blockade not only slows Palestinian movement in the West Bank and sometimes even puts lives in danger, but also has far-reaching political implications, as the high level of control over Palestinians prevents the possibility of self-governance in any way (Amir 2013: 231).

My Palestinian interlocutors also highlighted the issue of the military presence in the West Bank and described the high presence of movement-restricting checkpoints in the West Bank, and shared stories of their own and their communities' experiences of facing violent encounters with the military. As Omar pointed out, Palestinians only encounter Israelis as soldiers. Yousef described life under constant insecurity, lacking any sense of security or safety. These accounts underscore how contrary to the heightened everyday safety cultivated in Israeli space, Palestinians experience militarization as restriction, violence, and profound uncertainty. Overall, Palestinian everyday lives are equally shaped by militarization as Israeli lives, but in the form of high uncertainty, of oppression, and experiences of violence.

As I have demonstrated in this section, Palestinians live in constant military occupation, while Israelis are socialized to be soldiers. These asymmetric experiences not only shape the relationship to violence and security but also the attitude towards the “other side”. In the next section, I will discuss the attitudes toward the other and prevailing sentiment regarding collaboration among the Palestinian and Israeli communities.

3.5. Social Perceptions and Narratives in the Conflict

Understanding how Palestinians and Israelis perceive one another is crucial to examining both the persistence of the conflict and the challenges of peacebuilding. Social perceptions are not formed in a vacuum; instead, they are deeply embedded in collective memories, historical traumas, and dominant national narratives. These perceptions often influence how individuals and communities construct meaning around conflict, influence political attitudes, and determine the possibilities and limitations of dialogue and reconciliation. In this section, I discuss the perspectives of Palestinians and Israelis towards the “other side”. I then analyze the dominant narratives that circulate within each society and how they shape collective identities and political imaginaries.

3.5.1. Perceptions of the “Other Side”

In the context of the ongoing conflict in Israel/Palestine, the attitudes towards the other side have been a subject of discussion. These attitudes are widely regarded as one of the issues hindering collaborations between Israelis and Palestinians. The presence of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) in the West Bank influences the ways that Palestinians perceive Israelis. Especially younger generations of Palestinians have troubles regarding Israelis as something other than soldiers. This perception is further solidified by their frequent interactions with soldiers, as my Palestinian interlocutors, Yousef and Omar, described:

“My generation has the opportunity to see both, the Israeli side, on the human level, as people who you meet in the streets, you buy, you sell from them, and of course, at the same time, you see the soldiers in your cities and towns, you see them as an Israeli army. While the generation that came after me does not see Israel. The world was a blockade. Blockade not only a physical, but also a mental blockade between the two people. And the new generations have only seen Israelis in the shape of soldiers, in the uniform of soldiers, riding bulldozers and tanks and

battles, they're fully armed. They've seen them as killers. That's the only thing that they have seen about the Israeli.” (Omar)

Palestinians not only see Israelis as soldiers on the ground but also view them as oppressors. This view is reinforced by the anti-normalization movement, which opposes engagement with Israeli institutions under the belief that such interactions could legitimize the oppression and occupation of Palestinian territories and see this as a reality (Thiessen 2017: 4). Although the anti-normalization movement has already existed for decades the issue has witnessed a rise with the *Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS)* movement. In 2007, the *Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC)*, which leads the movement, defined normalization as the participation:

in any project, initiative or activity local or international, that brings together [...] Palestinians (and/or Arabs) and Israelis (individuals or institutions) and does not meet the following two conditions: The Israeli side publicly recognizes the UN-affirmed inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, [...] and the joint activity constitutes a form of co-resistance against the Israeli regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid (Palestinian BDS National Committee 2022)⁴.

While this definition does not imply that there should be no interactions with Israeli institutions or discourage cooperation between Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, it does strongly suggest that Palestinian rights should be acknowledged, and the occupation should not be normalized (Thiessen 2017: 12). Although anti-normalization movements do not exclude every interaction with Israelis, they do see many Israeli institutions, as well as peace initiatives, as normalizing the occupation and withdraw from the idea of interacting with them (Thiessen 2017: 4). The movement shapes the attitude of the Palestinian society towards collaboration with Israeli institutions. My Palestinian interlocutors have pointed to these understandings in their community and their impact on their activism, which I will discuss later in more detail.

In essence, the perception of Israelis as combatants and anti-normalization discourse has led to a hardening of the Palestinian attitude toward the Israeli side, thereby complicating the process of interaction and engagement. This unwillingness to work with people from the other side is also evident among Israelis. Most Israelis do not want to deal with “the other”. For them,

⁴ Definition that is published on the BDS movement's website: <https://bdsmovement.net/news/bds-movement-anti-normalization-guidelines>

Palestinians were already the enemy – or the threat to Israeli life – before October 7 (Butler 2009/2016: xxix). All of my Israeli interlocutors described this. Adi, for example, stated:

“And then you go to the extreme side that doesn't want to see the other and cannot think about solutions, because everything feels like it's threatening to your existence. It's something very strong in society.” (Adi)

The events of October 7, 2023, have contributed to the Israeli anti-position against Palestinians even more. All activists I interacted with mentioned that Israeli society has become more right-wing due to the recent escalations of the war, and is blinded towards the other side.

“I think everyone got a little bit more on the right wing because it's much harder to see the suffering of Palestinians when they also made for you to be in a difficult situation.” (Yaara)

In online seminars, activists also spoke about these issues. In an online talk by Combatants for Peace, an Israeli activist spoke about how October 7 released hatred and racism towards Palestinians, and most Israelis don't care about what happens to Palestinians:

“Any level of violence against Palestinians is common to say in Israel over the last year; there are no innocent people in Gaza. So that's a kind of blanket justification for any act of violence against Palestinians, no matter who.” (Online Talk *Combatants for Peace*)

The described depiction of Palestinians as the threatening enemy reflects what Edward Said (1978/2003) and Judith Butler's interpretations of the construction of “other” or the enemy. Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* offers a framework for understanding how Palestinians are constructed as the “Arab Other” who threatens Western and Israeli existence (Said 1978/2003: 286). Said critically examines how Western societies have historically constructed and perceived the cultures, peoples, and lands of the “Orient,” which refers to the Middle East and Asia. Western societies use the concept of “the Other” to define and contrast themselves against those who are perceived as different, foreign, and inferior. Furthermore, the notion of “the Other” plays a central role in the process of exclusion, marginalization, and domination (Said 1978/2003: 11). Using Said's explorations, therefore, helps unravel such perceptions of the “Palestinian Other” within Israeli society and how they are reflected and dealt with in local peace organizations.

Judith Butler (2009/2016) notes in her book *Frames of War* that the enemy is often depicted in ways that make their lives seem unworthy of grief. These depictions typically justify violence against the dehumanized other (Butler 2009/2016: 93), reinforcing binary oppositions and societal divisions: “*We can see the division of the globe into grievable and ungrievable lives from the perspective of those who wage war in order to defend the lives of certain communities*” (Butler 2009/2016: 38). Applying her concept to the 2008-2009 Gaza war, Butler explains how Israel framed its military actions as self-defense, depicting Palestinians as existential threats to make the civilian casualties and suffering seem justified (Butler 2009/2016: xxix).

Said and Butler demonstrate that portraying Palestinians as the “Other,” which occurs in Israeli society, not only fosters a perception of them as an unwelcome threat to existence (Said 1978/2003) but also serves as a political tool to frame them as *ungrievable*, thereby justifying their deaths (Butler 2009/2016). In Israel/Palestine, these dynamics are a reality. As my Palestinian interlocutors have described how Israelis are often seen only as soldiers and interaction is rejected, Palestinians also construct an “Other” they distance themselves from.

The recent events have increased the reluctance to engage with the other side. For Palestinians, Israelis are often viewed as soldiers and violent actors of the occupation, and they refuse to work with them due to normalization. For Israelis, Palestinians are seen as a threat to their existence, a perception that has only worsened since October 2023. How activists experience and challenge the perception of “the Other” will be examined through the perspectives of Said and Butler in Chapter 4.

3.5.2. Narratives

The perception of the other side is also constructed through narratives that create their own version of history, often portraying their own side as the victim and the other as the aggressor. The conflicting Israeli and Palestinian narratives have not only shaped the collective memory and identity of both societies but have also presented barriers to peace (Bar-Siman-Tov 2014), making them an important aspect to understand the prospects for peace within both societies. In the following, I present the Israeli and Palestinian narratives regarding their predisposition towards taking responsibility in the current conflict situation to achieve a just peace.

3.5.2.1. The Jewish-Israeli Narratives

In Israeli society, different narratives and myths revolve around the legitimization of the State of Israel, the ongoing war, and the position towards Palestinians. In this section, I focus on some of the most prominent and relevant narratives in the context of peacebuilding work in the Israeli context. A key Israeli narrative is the Zionist narrative of the “promised land of Israel,” where Jewish people are urged to return as a redemption of their ancestral land (Badarin 2017: 233). This narrative emphasizes the historical rights of Jewish people to their homeland (Bar-Simon-Tov 2014: 53), and is often used to justify the existence of the State of Israel. At the same time, different narratives deny Palestinian rights and blame them as the perpetrators of the conflict (Bar-Simon-Tov 2014: 47-52). Another narrative is strongly influenced by Jewish history, or more specifically by the suffering of Jewish people throughout history, relating to exile from the homeland, antisemitism, and the Holocaust (Bar-Siman-Tov 2014: 46-47). The Holocaust does not simply present a Jewish-Israeli narrative, but it is a collective trauma (Alexander & Dromi 2011) that is deeply inscribed in the Jewish-Israeli identity (Ram 1998: 227) of the descendants of the six million Jewish people who were tortured and brutally mass-murdered by the Nazi-regime. Not overcoming the trauma of the Holocaust, Israelis see themselves as the victims and justify the oppression of Palestinians (Alexander & Dromi 2011: 113). This victimization, also by the Palestinian people, that is entrenched in Israeli society, is often regarded critically by scholars. Anthropologist Juliana Ochs (2006) shows how the Holocaust discourse gets connected to events that happened in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She observes an association between the Holocaust and the second Intifada, where the rhetoric of the “victims of terror” is extracted from the Holocaust trope through the everyday and the media in political rhetoric. Consequently, experiences of Jewish victims and the Intifada were blurred (Ochs 2006: 356).

This victim-centered narrative has resurfaced powerfully after October 7, 2023, and is repeatedly seen in the discourse surrounding it. Israeli political scientist Assaf David, writing just a week after the events, remarked: “*The current trauma is even heavier. It doesn’t invoke 1973 for us, but the Holocaust, and this time within our own state.*” (David 2024: 65), and expresses concern about developments in right-wing politics that mobilize trauma to push for even harsher measures and increased oppression against Palestinians (David 2024).

In sum, the Israeli narratives are profoundly shaped by historical suffering, a perceived existential threat, and a focus on the Jewish rights to the land. They reflect mainly Jewish rights

and strongly undermine Palestinian perspectives and claims for justice. They foster a sense of victimhood in the conflict that needs to defend itself against the other side, and create a division that makes meeting “the Other” more difficult.

3.5.2.2. The Palestinian Narratives

On the Palestinian side, some narratives are central to their perception of the conflict as well. *“The Palestinian narrative mirrors the Jewish-Zionist narrative as an absolute opposite”* (Badarin 2017: 233). It mainly presents the injustice inflicted on the Palestinians since the arrival of the Jewish-Zionists in the 1880s, and revolves around the *Nakba*, the Palestinian catastrophe of the 1947-1949 war that led to the end of the Palestinian nation and the displacement of many Palestinians from their land, which created the refugee problem. The right of return has, therefore, a central place in the Palestinian narrative (Bar-Siman-Tov 2014: 60-61). The *Nakba* can be understood not only as a narrative, but it also presents a collective trauma of the Palestinian people, believed to be caused by the founding of Israel/Palestine, that inspires the anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish struggles against Zionism and the Israeli state (Alexander & Dromi 2011: 112). The *Nakba* creates a strong Palestinian narrative that is constructed by the memory of a collective trauma that persists today, with central aspects yet to be solved. The *Nakba* and refugee problem are thereby at the core of the conflict for the Palestinians (Schulz & Hammer 2003: 4). The historical narrative reappears in the current debate about the war on Gaza, similar to what I have discussed about the connection between the Holocaust and October 7, as my Palestinian interlocutors and activists in online talks pointed out.

The Palestinian and the Israeli narratives are similarly deep-rooted in historical traumas and stories of suffering, and in nationalist convictions that claim the land of Israel/Palestine as their own and depict the other side as the enemy that is responsible for their own suffering and stands in the way of creating or maintaining the ‘homeland’. In doing so, the opposing narratives construct a gap that stands in the way of building peace with the other side. *“These polarizing, trauma-inspired struggles have fueled the tragic-cum-primordial narratives that prevent peace between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East today.”* (Alexander & Dromi 2011: 112). The opposed narratives not only influence the societies on the political level but have also influenced how individuals see the other side, as it can also shape biographical narratives of Israelis and Palestinians in various ways (Monterescu 2015: 212). I have observed that October 7th and the war on Gaza have hardened persistent narratives even more. For example, in a

seminar by Combatants for Peace, that I attended in December 2024, one of the speakers who is a Palestinian activist and member of the organization stated the constructed connection between October 7 and the Holocaust in the media for Israelis, and connection that is made between the Nakba and the current war on Gaza and the situation in the West Bank:

“The media and the Israeli side call it another Holocaust, [...]. The Palestinian media call what's happening in Gaza also a new Nakba, a new catastrophe, so the collective trauma is activated very strongly until now. I can tell you, even where I live in the West Bank, there is a lot of fear of being kicked out of people's houses, like this fear really exists, and there is a reason for that aside from the historical collective trauma.” (Online Talk *Combatants for Peace*)

As with the perceptions of the other side, these conflicting historical narratives make it even more challenging to bridge the gap that has been created and present obstacles for Palestinians and Israelis who are seeking common ground, reflecting how the creation of a perceived enemy is produced through public discourse, media, and knowledge production based on racist beliefs (Said 1978/2003). I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5.

The conflict in Israel/Palestine has profoundly affected and separated the Israeli and Palestinian societies. The events since October 2023 that led to escalating violence, pain, and loss on both sides have strengthened aspects like militarism, political diversity, narratives of justice and injustice, and unwillingness to meet the other side even more. In the following two chapters, I present my analysis of Palestinian and Israeli activists and how they manage to work together and resist the occupation in the backdrop of the conflict.

4. The Peacebuilding Community after October 2023

By the time I began my online research in September 2024, the conflict situation that had taken a turn on October 7 had been ongoing for almost a year. There was still considerable tension in the peacebuilding environment, as well as in society as a whole, with attacks and injuries on both sides, as I experienced during my visit to Tel Aviv-Jaffa and as I demonstrated in the previous chapter. I began exploring the work of various joint organizations and movements by following them on social media, reading their websites and newsletters, and joining their WhatsApp and Telegram groups. I also participated in online talks and other events hosted by these organizations, which provided me with insights into their work on the ground and their perspectives. The Palestinian-Israeli community and addressing the current conflict situation were key themes that frequently arose. This was also reflected in the interviews that I conducted with Palestinian and Israeli activists. In the aftermath of October 7, 2023, and the devastating military response in Gaza, peacebuilding efforts in Israel/Palestine have entered a new phase of urgency, complexity, and emotional intensity. In this chapter, I examine how grassroots organizations comprising both Israeli and Palestinian activists have responded to this shifting landscape. I analyze how activists continue to foster cooperation across entrenched lines of conflict in the current moment of intensified violence and political polarization.

I focus on a few Israeli-Palestinian peace organizations and their members. *Windows – Channels for Communication*, founded in 1994, is structured like a triangle, representing Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, Israeli Jews, and Palestinians within Israel, and runs youth educational programs. *Combatants for Peace*, established in 2006 by former fighters and Israeli soldiers, promotes nonviolence and joint resistance to the occupation. *Standing Together*, founded in 2015, is a large-scale Israeli-Palestinian grassroots movement engaged in nationwide campaigns to end the occupation and achieve equality for all citizens. I also include *Standing Together Vienna*, a Jewish-Arab alliance for peace, established in Austria in October 2023, which supports peace in Israel/Palestine.

In the following sections, I analyze how peacebuilding organizations have continued to collaborate since October 2023, with a focus on several key themes based on how the Israeli and Palestinian peace activists I engaged with described their shared work and interaction. First, I discuss how Palestinian and Israeli activists foster a sense of community through shared struggle and mutual recognition, while keeping in mind that these connections are not free of

tension. I then present activists' approaches to peace, focusing on forms of activism and everyday resistance. Lastly, I examine the role of emotions in activism that also create challenges and tensions within the group. These sections provide a grounded perspective on how Palestinian and Israeli activists persist in their efforts under the shadow of war, striving to create fragile connections amidst deepened violence and fragmentation.

4.1. The Community

Despite historical and political divisions, a very small number of Palestinian and Israeli activists engage in joint work and find common ground in their shared vision for peace. All activists I interviewed expressed the centrality of working with people from the other side in their activism. One of the central questions that guided my research was what held the activists working together, despite the difficulties and tensions that have long divided the groups. Now, with the recent conflict escalation, even more so. In this section, I explore how a sense of community emerges between activists across political, cultural, and national borders that separate Israel/Palestine, the occupied Palestinian Territories, and Gaza. I also discuss how Palestinian and Israeli activists' sense of shared struggle, common visions and goals, and acts of mutual recognition create bonds that go beyond the typical narratives of division between Israeli and Palestinian members of the peace organizations I engaged with. Rather than assuming harmony and equality, my analysis considers how solidarity is constructed and sustained in a context shaped by asymmetry, trauma, and uncertainty during times of conflict, which I will explore in more detail in Chapter 5. In the following, I begin by examining how activists describe and experience a sense of community within their organization that is not free from tensions, the importance of sharing similar visions and goals, and how this forms the basis for collaboration across divides. Additionally, I consider the role of mutual recognition of the “Other” and empathy to maintain these forms of connection and a sense of community.

4.1.1. Sense of Community

In a context marked by ongoing conflict, activists strive to cultivate a sense of community that transcends the dominant logics of separation between groups. This sense of community is not simply given – it is constantly produced through everyday interactions and experiences of working across lines of division. Israeli and Palestinian activists frequently engage in shared activities and allocate time together, not solely to act politically and engage in peacebuilding, but also for the sake of personal interaction and to find a sense of belonging in each other. All

members of *Windows*, *Standing Together Vienna*, and those of other organizations whose online talks and seminars I attended expressed a sense of community that exists between activists. The importance it holds for activists was mentioned multiple times by Israeli and Palestinian activists from *Windows*. Israeli activist Shira, for instance, spoke about the friendship and camaraderie she gains from her engagement in peacebuilding, indicating a strong sense of community and support within the group:

“The amazing friendship and the camaraderie that I've gained by being part of this struggle and vocal about it are spiritually enlightening.” (Shira)

Shira further described peacebuilding as “co-resistance” between Israeli and Palestinian activists, emphasizing that for her, it is a collective effort where activists are deeply involved in each other’s struggle and future. Palestinian activist Omar similarly stressed importance of the community and described that he engages in meetings with members specifically to keep the group together:

“Sometimes you go, and you meet them for the sake of meeting them. For the sake of keeping them together. For the sake of keeping our community together rather than lose it all.” (Omar)

However, the group is more than just a community for some activists. Israeli activist Hadar described that the members of her organization are her friends and even feel like family. She expressed her close connection to the people she works with during our conversation, when she said: “We're friends. We love each other dearly. We feel like family.” (Hadar). Israeli activist Adi similarly described how the community holds significant meaning for her activism:

“I think that all the people who are involved can breathe, like can actually feel they're not alone, that somebody hear them that we're together that we also do something for the community to support somehow in the community [...] sometimes when something exists in the world you can imagine it because it's already there so you can imagine what it can do in the reality. So, I think that even the fact that it exists gives strength – gives power to people to be a part of something – to believe that things can change.” (Adi).

This statement shows that Adi’s perspective on the community's role is twofold. Firstly, it provides a sense of security and facilitates communal engagement. Secondly, it fosters an environment where members can ‘imagine’ the potential for transformative change and be

strengthened in their activism. This view is also shared by Israeli activist Yaara, who told me that a community based on people with the same opinion makes peacebuilding more possible.

The meaning of the community for activists' engagement in peacebuilding also plays a role for members of other organizations. Israeli activist Aviv from *Standing Together Vienna* described the core group's activities as often resembling those of a family or social circle during our interview, which also creates a sense of community:

“We have to have conversations so it will be in a more personal – how do you say it in German... ‘Stammtisch’ [a table reserved for regulars], just, for example, having dinners together, celebrating holidays together, the core group, the people that are daily active.” (Aviv).

Similar to what the activists I interviewed told me, the importance of an Israeli and Palestinian community was especially brought up frequently in the online seminars and talks I attended. For instance, one of the Palestinian activists of *Combatants for Peace* described that the community is a great support for members to deal with their pain and support each other:

“Having the community really helps us to stay strong, and this is a big lesson for us because we think of like the individualism versus like community. I think this is a big lesson: if we are a community, we don't need to hold all this pain, all this trauma as individuals, so we can support each other.” (Online Talk *Combatants for Peace*)

This centrality of the community was also expressed by other Palestinian and Israeli members of the organization in this and other talks, as well as in a documentary⁵ about their work produced by *Combatants for Peace*. One member of *Standing Together* emphasized the importance of having a sense of community between Palestinians and Israelis who are part of the movement as well:

“First, community. We have Jewish and Palestinian communities that eat together, celebrate holidays, speak about the fears, about the political ideas, and so just groups that meet each other and become a community.” (Online Seminar *Standing Together*)

Lastly, activists from *Windows* and *Standing Together Vienna* emphasized the organization's anti-hierarchical structure. In *Windows*, Omar and other activists I spoke with described the

⁵ Documentary “There is Another Way” by Combatants for Peace: <https://thereisanotherwayfilm.com/>

organizational structure as a triangle: “*Windows* is an organization that is built on a triangle: Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, Israeli Jews, and Palestinians living inside Israel.” (Omar). This emphasizes the importance of establishing the idea of equality among members, with Palestinian and Israeli activists playing key roles within the organization, which does not necessarily have to reflect the actual structure, which I will return to later.

The statements I presented here show that building a strong sense of community is crucial for the Palestinian and Israeli activists I interacted with. Building personal connections, celebrating holidays together, and supporting one another during difficult times help sustain the movement and prevent individuals from feeling isolated in their struggles. The peace community gives activists a sense of belonging, motivation, and the belief that change is possible. Activists maintain regular contact, both online and in-person, to keep the community together and prevent it from falling apart, even during the most challenging periods. As activists have pointed out, the camaraderie and friendship fostered within the community are central to activists’ work.

Initially, this community, described by many of the Palestinian and Israeli activists I interviewed and by activists in seminars, reminded me of Victor Turner’s (1969) concept of *communitas*. Based on his fieldwork among the Ndembu people of Zambia in 1950, Turner presents *communitas* as an anti-structural moment, a space where social hierarchies are temporarily suspended, allowing individuals to experience a profound sense of equality and shared humanity, and “*develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism*” (Turner 1969: 95), usually during liminal phases of transition, where participants are outside of structure, stripped of status, and temporary equal to one another. He distinguishes *communitas* from human interrelatedness in a society that is structured and hierarchically organized, and points out that “*communitas emerges where social structure is not.*” (Turner 1967/2018: 126). Not limiting his work on the Ndembu, Turner applies his concept to other social phenomena and societies, such as religious movements, the Hippies of the 1960s, or biker gangs. He shows that *communitas* can arise in any society as an anti-structure to the existing systems and norms it opposes, with members’ roles reversed or erased, at least for its duration. With its liminal character, *communitas* often arises in times of radical social transition when society itself seems to be moving from one fixed state to another (Turner 1969: 131-133).

From the activists’ perspective, the ongoing conflict and recent escalations could themselves be understood as a liminal phase, as it can be seen as a prolonged period of instability that

transforms everyday life, which activists seek to overcome to establish a structure of equality. This was reflected in activists' shared motivation to change the situation. In this context, it is possible to see how a form of *communitas* as an anti-structure to the structure of division and oppression in Israel/Palestine might emerge between Palestinians and Israelis who seek to transcend division and structures of oppression.

However, Turner's *communitas* falls short in capturing the complexity of these activist communities. All of the activists I spoke with emphasized their continuing ties to their own Palestinian or Jewish Israeli society. Their participation in peace activism does not negate these identities but rather exists alongside them. Activists, then, embody a form of dual belonging, one to their own society and one to the activist movement. There are internal tensions that *communitas* (Turner 1969), in its ideal form, tends to overlook. Not all activists expressed the same intensity of a sense of community and egalitarian feeling towards activists from the other side, and disagreements and negotiations that are often rooted in different political and social perspectives challenge the idea of a purely egalitarian space where social hierarchies are suspended, as described by Turner (1969). These tensions, together with complexities presented by the conflict situation, must be addressed and managed to maintain the sense of community that many activists still value, as I have shown in this section. I will discuss these internal challenges in greater detail in Chapter 5.

To better account for this complexity, Anthony Cohen (1985/1993) offers a more nuanced understanding of community. Anthony Cohen challenges Turner's idea of *communitas* as absolute unity himself (Cohen 1985/1993: 55). Instead, he observes diversity within communality (Cohen 1985/1993: 20), something that can easily be overlooked in Turner's concept of *communitas*. In his own work on community, Anthony Cohen (1985/1993) emphasizes the symbolic construction of community and boundary-making:

The quintessential referent of community is that its members make, or believe they make, a similar sense of things either generally or with respect to specific and significant interests, and, further, that they think that that sense may differ from one made elsewhere (Cohen 1985/1993: 16).

For him, it is through symbols that individuals establish a shared bond and create boundaries between their own group and others. Despite the central role of symbols as a unifying force in communities, Cohen stresses that members do not have to share the exact meaning of these

symbols. He argues that a symbol “‘*express*’ other things in ways which allow their common form to be retained and shared among the members of a group, whilst not imposing upon these people the constraints of uniform meaning.” (Cohen 1985/1993: 18). From this perspective, the Israeli-Palestinian community functions less as a *communitas* and more as a symbolically constructed space where Israeli-Palestinian friendship becomes possible while still holding differences. This symbolic space is expressed through shared values and goals that help to give the community its meaning, which I will discuss in the next section.

4.1.2. Shared Values and Goals

As both Palestinian and Israeli activists described to me, it is important to ground their work in a shared struggle and similar visions and goals. These shared visions range from principles of ending the occupation and ensuring equality and justice for Palestinians to more immediate goals like ending the war on Gaza and protecting Palestinians in the West Bank against settler violence. All my interlocutors vocalized these fundamental principles and goals. Through interviews with *Windows* and *Standing Together Vienna* members, as well as online seminars, I found that the shared alignment of visions, dreams, and principles is the fundamental element fostering collaboration among Palestinian and Israeli activists. Most of my interviewees highlighted the importance of sharing similar visions and goals when explaining what motivates Palestinian and Israeli activists to work together. This was particularly important for the Palestinian members of *Windows*, who frequently emphasized this point. According to Palestinian activist Omar, shared visions and dreams keep activists from both sides working together, which is necessary when working with Jewish members of the organization:

“Despite all the sorrows and wars and agonies, and the sadness, we still hold tight to our visions on both sides; otherwise, we wouldn’t have stayed. We could have been stopped, but knowing that what keeps us together is our vision, our dreams, and we still believe that we still struggle and fight together. That’s what keeps us together.” (Omar)

Palestinian activist Amal further elaborated on this perspective, asserting that shared visions and values are essential when working with Jewish members of the organization. She also acknowledged, however, that not all activists share the same values and beliefs, but instead agree on core principles and values:

“Partnership does not necessarily require the other group or individual to fully agree with or align with your ideas and beliefs. I lean toward the idea of finding core commonalities.” (Amal)

Similarly, some Israeli activists have emphasized the importance of sharing similar goals and visions. Shira and Ariel emphasized, while not discussing a shared vision specifically, the importance of a shared struggle to resist oppression and injustice. Adi mentioned that shared goals are essential for the group:

“I also think that we have like a goal, and like in life, that you can feel really lonely with your thoughts and dreams and stuff, so like people gather through those shared goals, and it's something important.” (Adi)

This indicates that mutual understanding and shared objectives are essential for Israeli and Palestinian activists to collaborate effectively. These observations are supported by the remarks made by members of the seminars I attended, and my interview with Aviv, the Israeli activist from *Standing Together Vienna*, who stated: “We have these fundamental principles that really help us to work together as a group” (Aviv), showing the importance of shared values.

The activists I interviewed and those I observed in seminars described remarkably similar visions of equality, justice for Palestinians, and ultimately, peace in the region. Some emphasized the importance of sharing these same goals to work together. Despite structural inequalities and political differences, the Israeli and Palestinian activists I engaged with articulated a shared commitment to a just and equal future. Victor Turner (1969: 132) describes how members of *ideological communitas* align with the same utopian models of society and organize themselves to reach those goals. This partly applies to the expressions of the activists, whose visions reflected such shared orientations.

However, political differences and disagreements are still inevitable and can also lead to internal tensions, and there are different interpretations of the shared visions and goals, as I will discuss in Chapter 5. As Amal pointed out, activists don't have to agree on every aspect to make their cooperation work. It's more about the common values they agree on. Based on Anthony Cohen, the shared values and goals can be understood as a “*commonality*” (Cohen 1985/1993: 20) that bonds the community of activists. This communality is not grounded in uniformity, but instead its meaning can vary among members (Cohen 1985/1993: 21). Cohen argues: “*The reality of community in people's experience thus inheres in their attachment or*

commitment to a common body of symbols.” (Cohen 1985/1993: 16). The shared ethical orientation can thus be understood as a shared imagined moral horizon—a vision of a just and equal society—that acts as a binding force and symbolically constructs community. This horizon enables a form of community grounded not in national identity or political agreement, but in ethical alignment.

4.1.3. Mutual Recognition and Solidarity

Building on the sense of community and shared values and goals, mutual recognition adds another layer of connection between Israeli and Palestinian activists. It can be understood as a political and ethical act of acknowledging the “Other”, and involves recognizing the pain and trauma across the divide, listening to their story, and validating their experience of suffering, even when it challenges one’s own narratives. In this section, I examine the role that such mutual recognition plays in the peace organizations I observed, to promote solidarity and foster ideas of Israeli-Palestinian coexistence. For most of my interviewees from *Windows*, mutual recognition was one of the most central aspects that keeps Israeli and Palestinian activists working together. Activists from both backgrounds have described how they work with the other side by recognizing them. Palestinian activist Yousef spoke about how he began working with Israelis after he started seeing ‘humanity’ in them:

“We’ve seen it on a daily basis that the only kind of Israelis they’re interacting with are soldiers, and that’s the only face we know, and we interact with in our daily life and our whole life, but I saw beyond that; I didn’t interact only with soldiers. I interact with humans. I interact with activists.” (Yousef)

As I discussed in Chapter 3, Palestinians in the occupied territories only interact with Israeli soldiers and settlers, who often impose restrictions and pose a threat to their lives. For Yousef, this was also the case. To trust and work with Israelis, he had to look past that and recognize that some Israelis aren’t like the soldiers who threaten his existence in the West Bank. Israeli activist Ariel stated that for him, mutual recognition is the driving force that enables the collaborative activism of Israelis and Palestinians. He believes that seeing each other’s suffering is both helpful and supportive, especially during these times:

“I think that mutual recognition is maybe the main thing that has been keeping me going, and also keeps things going, in my opinion. And it’s also been very heartwarming and supportive

to see it from Palestinian partners, some on a personal level, some on a more organizational level.” (Ariel)

Similar to Ariel’s account, Aviv from *Standing Together Vienna* discussed mutual recognition. When I asked her what ‘coexistence’ means, she responded that it involves Palestinians and Israelis acknowledging and understanding each other realities:

“And what does it mean – coexistence? So, it's acknowledging the other person, understanding that, for example, the reality of where I grew up and where my partner grew up, which is only like twenty minutes from each other, are completely different universes.” (Aviv)

For the Israeli activists I interviewed, mutual recognition does not only mean simply recognizing the Palestinian “Other”, but also recognizing their suffering under Israeli oppression. As Wright (2016a) describes in her ethnography of the Israeli radical left, many Israeli activists engaged in mourning the Palestinian “Others” loss as a central part of their political identity. I similarly observed that the Israeli activists I engaged with mourn the loss and the suffering of Palestinians, which also impacts their personal involvement in their activism. Israeli activists Adi, Hadar, Ariel, Shira, and Yaara from *Windows* and Aviv from *Standing Together Vienna* all mentioned that they see the suffering of Palestinians. Ariel described how he began to engage in peace activism after realizing “that there were people on the other side who were being denied their basic human rights” (Ariel) years before the current escalations. After the Israeli offensive on Gaza took its toll and became one of the most destructive attacks on civilian lives in history, Israelis again had to show up for Palestinians and see their suffering, something that most of Israeli society refuses to do. Sincere recognition of Palestinian suffering after the recent attacks on Gaza began in October 2023 was very important for all of my Israeli interviewees. Shira even criticized other left-wing Israelis for not caring enough about Palestinians. For her, just saying that you don’t hate Palestinians is not enough. She expects other Israelis actually to stand up for them. Since October 2023, she has been in contact with friends from Gaza and has witnessed the violence perpetrated against them by the Israeli military, which causes her a deep sense of emotional distress:

“I have a couple of good friends in Gaza that I help, and so I get a lot of the news and what's happening. [...] I've witnessed starvation, bombardment, a house being completely demolished, and then rebuilt.” (Shira)

Another example of mutual recognition is the annual Joint Memorial Ceremony, which is organized by *Combatants for Peace*, in which Palestinians and Israelis come together to remember the victims of the Holocaust and the Nakba. These ceremonies intentionally bring together communities that are divided by collective trauma created by the conflict, and create a space to deal with their own and others' emotions. Aviv from *Standing Together Vienna* also joins these ceremonies online and organizes screenings of the events. This shows that mutual recognition becomes not only visible in the recognition of others' suffering but also in their public work to mourn the other. In this way, collectively recognizing the "Others" suffering becomes a central aspect of activism and resistance.

As I have shown, mutual recognition is important for both Israeli and Palestinian activists I interviewed. This involves not only acknowledging the "Other" but also seeing their pain and suffering, even when such recognition contrasts with prevailing societal attitudes that often deny or diminish the suffering of the other side. In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler (2009/2016) discusses how state and media "frames" determine whose lives are grievable and whose are not. These frames often serve to justify violence against the dehumanized "Other", reinforcing binaries and division of populations (Butler 2009/2016: 38). In the context of the war on Gaza in 2008-2009, Butler explains how the Israeli state framed its military operation as self-defense, portraying Palestinians as a threat to life, rendering the significant number of civilian victims and human suffering seemingly justifiable (Butler 2009/2016: xxix). Similarly, Edward Said argues that Palestinians are depicted as disruptors of Israel's and the West's existence (Said 1978/2003: 286). These doctrines are proven to be more than prevailing in the recent war on Gaza, when considering the framing of the conflict in the news and accounts of the activists I talked to who recounted stories of Israelis justifying the violence against Palestinians based on stigmas of threat, which is evident in statements such as by Aviv: "[...] A friend from Israel wrote to me, 'How do you want to make peace with those baby killers and bus exploders?'" (Aviv). The Israeli peace activists I interviewed, however, refuse these dominant narratives and perceptions of the "Other". By mourning for lives lost, including those of the perceived enemy, and recognizing shared suffering, they perform a political act that contests the dominant perspective of the "Other", and reframe whose lives and deaths matter. In that way, mutual recognition enables trust and collaboration between Palestinian and Israeli activists. For them, recognizing each other's suffering is not only a condition for cooperation but also a political act to disrupt the structural dehumanization perpetuated by the ongoing conflict. This is

especially important for the Israeli side, as Israeli media and state narratives have created a very hostile environment for Palestinians.

In this section, I explored how Israeli and Palestinian activists create and sustain a shared sense of community beyond the divide. They describe their work as a collective struggle for justice and coexistence, thereby symbolically constructing a community (Cohen 1993) that creates communality while allowing diversity and dual belonging among the members. This also fits the idea that members share a moral horizon based on the concept of shared values and goals of equality that do not exist in the surrounding society. While activists proposed varied approaches in the interviews I conducted, a common thread runs through them: the vision for a future where Palestinians and Israelis can coexist peacefully and equally. The Israeli and Palestinian peace activists I interviewed demonstrate a complex interplay of community, tension, and dual belonging. The strength of their shared vision and personal relationships is constantly tested by internal disagreements, external pressures, and emotions triggered by violent events of the conflict, which I will discuss in more detail later. Additionally, mutual recognition and resistance to dominant framing of the “Other” (Butler 2009; Said 1978/2003) form a crucial foundation for Palestinian-Israeli activist cooperation. While a shared sense of community and mutual recognition sustain these organizations, it is through concrete activist practices that the visions and goals are achieved, and the shared values and community are shaped. These practices are the focus of the next section.

4.2. Forms of Activism – Protests vs. Everyday Resistance

In her ethnographic work on the war in Mozambique, Carolyn Nordstrom (1997) writes about the many creative ways in which civilians found to resist violence and conflict in nonviolent ways. Teachers, traders, healers, and orphaned street children constructed social order out of chaos, thereby contributing to the peace process outside of political institutions through nonviolent acts of rebuilding towns and their citizenry (Nordstrom 1997: 204-220). While I do not draw a direct comparison between the case in Mozambique and Israeli and Palestinian resistance, given that it is a different war story with distinct social dynamics, I do see some similarities in the creativity of the approach to unmaking violence and building peace within the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which I also focused on in my analysis of the various forms of activism that activists engage in. In my interviews, I spoke with a teacher, a therapist, an engineer, an artist, politically engaged university students, and a coordinator of an international welfare organization, all of whom come from diverse backgrounds. Not everyone

participates full-time, but all bring the skills and perspectives from their everyday lives and professions into their activism and peacebuilding efforts. These forms of activism include joint workshops, public protests, and quieter, everyday actions that raise societal awareness or support Palestinian communities. While each activist's focus is slightly different, their efforts are interconnected and form the basis of their shared sense of community. In the following, I examine these oftentimes ritualistic forms of activism in which activists are primarily engaged and explore how they build and sustain relationships between Israeli and Palestinian activists.

4.2.1. Building Connections in Workshops and Seminars

One central aspect of the peace activism of the organizations I engaged with is the implementation of workshops and seminars, which take different forms and offer a platform for exchange, communication, and interaction, varying depending on the organization's approach and goals. *Windows* takes an educational approach. Therefore, the activists I interviewed from *Windows* talked about the workshops they organize to educate people about the conflict and to meet perspectives from the other side. Although it has become less active in recent years, it is still operational. For example, at the beginning of 2025, *Windows* organized a seminar series aimed at reaching Israelis outside the organization to present Palestinian perspectives and alternative information to what is published in the media. The members I interviewed see these seminars as important to meet misconceptions and trauma-infused distancing in Israeli society from the "Other" after October 7.

Activists have also shared information about the centrality of workshops and seminars that bring together Israelis and Palestinians from within the peacebuilding environment, but most importantly, also from outside of it. Establishing a connection with the other side was viewed as a key form of activism, and it was discussed by members of all the organizations I interacted with. Personal stories of meeting the other side in these workshops were also shared. In *Windows*, Activists organize meetings for Palestinian and Israeli youth to educate them about different narratives and to provide a platform where they can meet each other. Some of the former youth participants in such seminars are now members of *Windows* themselves, such as Israeli Yaara and Palestinian Yousef, who joined the organization when he was 12-13 years old. Palestinian activist Omar told me that the workshops aim to educate young Israelis and Palestinians about each other's realities and narratives and to bring them together by doing so. Israeli activist Shira further emphasized that understanding each other's perspectives and promoting communication between Israelis and Palestinians serves as a form of resistance

against division, highlighting that meeting the other side is a powerful tool for peace activism:

“So, in *Windows* we are learning, and we have different tools of like communication with each other, like sharing, doing different things, like learning, going inside each other's narratives. I think it's a resistance to being broken apart or like being isolated from each other.” (Shira)

With the ongoing conflict and the separation between Palestinians and Israelis, building connections to the other side is not always easy and brings its difficulties. Omar expressed some of the challenges he and his co-activists have faced when they organize workshops with Israeli and Palestinian youth:

“It can be difficult not for us as a board member, but for people from our beneficiaries who are young people, and they're asked to meet with the other side. I understand how difficult it is for them, those who lost their families, their relatives. And then you're asking them to meet. For them, it's difficult to overcome that sadness and struggle and see the other side, because [...] this young generation only sees the soldiers. They don't see normal Israeli people, especially those who hold peace visions.” (Omar)

With this statement, Omar emphasized that Palestinians struggle to see Israelis as anything other than soldiers, which fuels their mistrust. To foster a more comfortable environment for Israeli and Palestinian youth to meet, Omar and other activists plan to organize workshops outside of Israel/Palestine “in a neutral land” (Omar), allowing participants to interact beyond the constraints of the region.

Furthermore, meeting with the other side is a form of activism itself for members of the organization, especially since October 2023. Ariel expressed that he felt a change in the meaning of meetings between Palestinians and Israelis. While he has a close connection to Palestinians in his personal life, in his activism, it is a form of showing that change is possible:

“Having the meetings within *Windows*, just meeting, is already a kind of activist step of a sort. In my previous life I wouldn't consider it that because I mean, I'm married to a Palestinian woman inside of Israel and I obviously don't consider that activism, and I have many Palestinian friends, but sadly with the situation in the past year and a half our meeting is a way of social activism of showing what we're doing and what is possible.” (Ariel)

This aspect of their peace work, which involves creating space to meet the other side, relates to my discussion of the sense of community in the previous section. By offering workshops where Israelis and Palestinians can meet, the organization aims to create what Victor Turner (1969: 95) conceptualized as phases of liminality in *rites de passage*, often found in ritual, “*to refer to any condition outside or on the peripheries of everyday life*” (Turner 1974: 47), where participants step outside the everyday societal structures, thereby opening spaces for reflection and transformation, allowing participants to reimagine relationships beyond the division constructed by the conflict. Following Turner, such encounters are intended to produce *communitas* (Turner 1969: 96), which is a temporary yet intense experience of human connection and solidarity, where individuals are in unity. While the intention behind these workshops might align with Turner’s (1969) understanding of *communitas*, in practice, they remain embedded in the large structural context of the Israeli occupation. The workshops may foster experiences of genuine connection, but these are still inherent in the very structure activists seek to overcome. While they may transform their relationship, participants still live in an unequal reality, defined by structural asymmetry that shapes their lives. Many of my interlocutors are aware of this reality, a tension I will explore in greater depth in Chapter 5. This challenges Turner’s understanding of the transformative potential of rituals (Turner 1969). In this case, the structure is not suspended or transformed, but it remains omnipresent in the workshops.

I, therefore, return to Cohen’s (1985/1993) interpretation of community. He states that community is symbolically constructed through rituals, as these moments offer occasions to reinforce the community, its boundaries, and its sense of meaning-making (Cohen 1985/1993: 50). Workshops can thereby be understood as rituals that establish and sustain the sense of community among members of the peace organizations. To account for the symbolic, rather than transformative, power of these workshops as rituals, it is helpful to also draw on the work of Edmund Leach (1964) and Seligman et al. (2008). Leach argues that ritual is not confined to the sacred but also appears in the mundane and can be understood as a form of “*symbolic statement about the social order*” (Leach 1964: 14). It reflects how people interpret and communicate social structures of power. Likewise, Seligman et al. propose that ritual is to be understood as “*framing of action*” (Seligman et al. 2008: 5) that enables individuals to sustain social relationships and imagined shared worlds. Seligman et al. (2008), consider rituals not in terms of their meaning or specific form, as discussed above, but shifts focus to what they are *doing*. They argue that ritual is understood as a framing of experience, action, and

understanding, and they point out that “*Each ritual rebuilds the world “as if” it were so*” (Seligman et al. 2008: 11). Thus, rituals negotiate our experience in the world (Seligman et al. 2008: 7-8), where alternative forms of relationships can be enacted, even if they remain aspirational. From this perspective, the workshops are better understood not as fully liminal and transformative rites in Turner’s sense but as ritualized performances of coexistence. They do not suspend the structures of inequality that surround them, but they symbolically assert an alternative social vision and relationship, even if only temporarily.

4.2.2. Protests, Demonstrations, and Direct Action

Demonstrations are another central component of activism in Israel/Palestine. During my research, activists shared photos and videos of demonstrations across Israel/Palestine, offering insight into the events and their participation. In interviews, I asked activists about their involvement in demonstrations, how they perceived them, and how they connected these protests to their activism. All activists reported participating in a range of demonstrations in Israeli contexts as well as in the West Bank. The Israeli activists I interviewed participated in similar demonstrations to the one I joined in September 2024 (see Chapter 3) against the war and discussed these events, which they viewed as an integral part of their activism, both before and after October 7, 2023. Israeli activist Adi, for example, discussed the protests against the government that started even before the recent war escalations and carried on through demonstrations calling to bring back the hostages and end the war. She explained that a big wave of large-scale protests had already taken place between January and October 2023, which was initiated to stop the Israeli juridical reform that threatened democracy in the region. With the start of the recent war in October 2023, the focus of the protests shifted, and demonstrators now called for a ceasefire to release the hostages held by Hamas, making peace efforts more urgent for Israeli society to recover the hostages. Adi also emphasized the importance of meetings for activists and speaking out against the government, which shows that, for her, the community also plays a significant role in her public engagement activism:

“I think it's important for activists to meet each other, to give each other strength, and to be together. And I think that's also an important voice that needs to be heard; it's important that there are people who are doing this activity to demonstrate.” (Adi)

In Jerusalem, Yaara also regularly participates in demonstrations against the war and in support of the return of the hostages, which became, as she said, “kind of a routine of every day”

(Yaara). Moreover, although Yaara doubts the effectiveness of those ritualized demonstrations, for her, they serve as a meeting ground for activists to connect and show solidarity with the families of the hostages, which highlights their communal and symbolic significance:

“Every week in the evening of Saturday evening, there is a regular demonstration. It's the same people, it's the same talking. And I don't really think it has a lot of effect. Now it's also to have solidarity with the family of the hostages. So, I think it's important for the solidarity, but I'm not really sure it has a real impact on what the government does.” (Yaara)

Ariel, while still participating in these demonstrations, said that he hopes for more protests in Israel/Palestine that focus on human rights in Gaza. My own observations confirm this, as there seems to be a noticeably lower frequency of reports about demonstrations for Palestinian rights in Israel/Palestine compared to those focused on hostages. Ariel attends the demonstrations for the hostage deals because he wants to reach the Israeli public:

“I try to join the demonstrations for the hostages still because I think it's the only thing that can speak to the Israeli public, and I'm saying that sadly because I wish I could go. There are also protests about Gaza and for human rights in Gaza, it's usually a few dozen of us.” (Ariel)

The statements by the Israeli activists I interviewed demonstrate that the Israeli activist community plays a significant role in their public protests, indicating that, similar to my observations during the demonstration in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, protests occur when a diverse group of Israeli activists gather to support common goals, primarily with an Israeli agenda. Therefore, demonstrations serve as an important meeting point for activists.

There are also protests and demonstrations in the West Bank, which are different from the ones in Israel/Palestine, as they have a Palestinian agenda, are smaller, and more related to events like a reaction to concrete acts and violence by settlers and the military against Palestinian villages. Although Palestinian activist Yousef didn't attend protests frequently, protests against the occupation and military are important to him. He discussed the protests, saying: “In the West Bank, it's such a big thing and it's connecting people” (Yousef). This shows that for Yousef, connecting to other individuals is a central aspect of protest in the West Bank.

Israeli activists Ariel, Adi, and Shira also mentioned that they join demonstrations in the West Bank to protest against the oppression of Palestinian civilians. Although Ariel has joined these protests less since October 2023, he still goes there and supports Palestinians:

“I would go to protests in villages that were facing land confiscations, and I've done that a couple of times since I have been in the West Bank this past year and a half. But I would say I've been three or four times, whereas you know usually I would go fifteen to twenty times a year, maybe.” (Ariel)

In the occupied Palestinian territories, protests, particularly those involving Palestinian and Israeli activists, demonstrate how demonstrations serve as deliberate spaces for community building that transcend national and political boundaries. The protests are not only sites of resistance against the occupation but also moments of solidarity where Palestinian and Israeli activists build connections.

The protests, as described by activists and as I have observed, can be understood as rituals that closely reflect features of rituals defined by anthropologists such as Rappaport (1999), with their specific stylized forms, regular repetition, relative invariance, their central feature of performance, and formality. As such, protests serve as spaces of connection for both Palestinian and Israeli activists. This is particularly evident in the West Bank, where joint demonstrations against the military occupation and settler violence create moments of solidarity and connection. These can be seen as rituals, where the act of coming together holds significance beyond the immediate political goals. While the agendas of the protests clearly call for transformation, resembling Turner's (1969) vision of *communitas*, many activists are skeptical of its effectiveness, questioning if it changes the social and political structure in Israel/Palestine. This aligns with Cohen's observation of political activists “*who often justify their apparently fruitless or hopeless demonstrations by pointing to the effect they have of 'raising consciousness' among participants*” (Cohen 1985/1993: 50). In the context of the protest the activists I engaged with participate in, symbolic opposition to state politics, heightens their awareness and sensitivity within the activist community, while allowing each individual to maintain their unique perspective. In that sense, Israelis and Palestinians create a community through their joint protest with pro-Palestinian agendas, which are given different meanings based on the activists' background and perspective. To understand the disjuncture between intention and outcome, it is helpful to also include Seligman et al.'s framing of ritual as creating a subjunctive “*as if*” (Seligman et al. 2008: 7) universe. Therefore, from these theoretical perspectives, protests do not need to succeed in transforming structure to be valuable, but rather function as a symbolic expression of shared visions for ending the war and the occupation, underlining the performative aspect of ritual (Seligman et al. 2008: 12), even

when such goals feel out of reach. Protests allow activists not only to resist state structures but also to imagine the kinds of relationships they hope to see realized in the future. In this sense, the importance of protests is less about causing change and more about their capacity to build connections and express resistance.

4.2.3. Everyday Forms of Activism

Beyond more formal activities like workshops and demonstrations, Palestinian and Israeli activists additionally engage in everyday acts that, while subtle, carry deep political significance. During seminars I attended and in interviews, both Israeli and Palestinian activists shared how they participate in everyday activities such as the olive harvest. Other activities in which Palestinian activists engage, sometimes alongside Israelis, include constructing infrastructure such as schools or cinemas. They noted that many organizations in the West Bank engage in this kind of nonviolent work, with some Israeli activists offering their support. Palestinian activist Yousef shared how he helps families himself and connects Israeli activists to help them with the olive harvest:

“I have a pretty good connection around in the country and outside. So, if I know a family member, for example, they need to do some olive harvest and they have settlers attacking them, I can connect them. If I cannot be an activist myself and go protect them, I can connect them to Israeli friends or organizations to help them with that.” (Yousef)

For my Israeli interlocutors, being present in the occupied Palestinian territories and participating in these daily tasks was an essential part of their activism. Adi shared that she regularly visits shepherds and farmers in the West Bank and supports them in their work:

“We'll be going there. We walk with them, with the shepherds, so nobody will annoy them or work in the olive fields, do whatever is needed.” (Adi)

Ariel also shared that his activism involved supporting Palestinians with their daily tasks and building infrastructure:

“It would usually be direct action works, so kind of being there on the ground, and supporting the Palestinians, whether it's supporting them when they're farming or a protective presence. That's something I've done a couple of times: organizing work days. Building something, or

maybe usually working in the field, working on something agricultural. That's what most of it is. But sometimes it's also going around with shepherds – protecting their flock.” (Ariel)

Although farming or rebuilding infrastructure might not conventionally be labeled as peacebuilding, in the context of the West Bank, such acts challenge the occupation directly and are frequently met with military interference and arrests, as several activists reported. By engaging in daily practices in the West Bank, Palestinian activists resist structures of occupation, and Israeli activists support them in doing so. These practices are rooted in the Palestinian tradition of *sumud*, which can be translated as both resistance and steadfastness (Schiocchet 2022: 160). It presents a form of Palestinian resistance grounded in non-violence and endurance and is not only expressed through protest but also through daily perseverance to remain on one's land, and to rebuild and sustain life under occupation (Rijke & Teeffelen 2014: 91). The example of harvesting olives presents a strong symbol that can be assigned to *sumud*, as portrayed by Palestinian lawyer, human rights activist and writer Raja Shehadeh who describes the olive tree as a symbol of the Palestinian struggle:

Sometimes, when I am walking in the hills, say Batn el-Hawa [...] I find myself looking at an olive tree, and as I am looking at it, it transforms itself before my eyes into a symbol of the *samidin*, of our struggle, of our loss. And at that very moment, I am robbed of the tree; instead, there is a hollow space into which anger and pain flow. (Shehadeh 1982: 87)

In this light, continuing the olive harvest in the face of Israeli military disruptions becomes an act of protecting Palestinian identity and resistance against the structures of occupation. These acts of everyday resistance connect with the personal experiences shared by activists I interviewed, who participate in such everyday activities or support Palestinian families in rebuilding, farming, or herding sheep as part of their activism.

With the increasing violence experienced in the West Bank, these activities have become even more central for Palestinian and Israeli activists. As James Scott argues, such acts of everyday resistance are, while often overlooked, powerful tools aimed at the same objectives as the public resistance I presented in the previous section. According to Scott, its strength lies in its ability to bypass the conventions of the state by being covert and embedded in everyday life while focusing on immediate gains and encompassing subtle actions such as food dragging, sabotage, or theft (Scott 1985: 33 ff.). In his later work, James Scott refers to more covert forms

of resistance as *hidden transcripts*, which are characterized as the “*discourse that takes place ‘offstage’, beyond direct observation by powerholders*” (Scott 1990: 4). This framework applies closely to the everyday acts activists perform in the occupied Palestinian territories. By building schools, harvesting olives, and herding sheep, activists resist oppression. These acts of resistance are less visible but should not be undermined or forgotten, as they contribute to changing persistent power structures (Scott 1985: 36). The Israeli-Palestinian case brings another nuance to the everyday forms of resistance, as Israelis support Palestinians in these subtle forms of resistance in solidarity.

Beyond their practical role of supporting Palestinians, these everyday acts also take on a ritual-like quality according to Rappaport (1999), as they are often repeated in similar ways, gradually gaining symbolic meaning through their connection to land, resistance, and solidarity, inspired by concepts like *sumud*. They can be seen as performances of resistance and solidarity. In this way, they serve as meeting points for activists and foster a sense of community, perhaps not in a transformative manner like Turner’s (1969) *communitas*, but by echoing the symbolic function described by Cohen (1985/1993) and Seligman et al. (2008: 11-12) as relational acts with great significance because they enable those involved to symbolically reinforce a collective vision of ending the occupation in the Palestinian Territories.

As I have demonstrated in this section, Palestinian and Israeli activists frequently engage in diverse forms of activism to pursue both immediate and long-term goals. These actions can be understood as forms of resistance as they reflect resistance in various ways “*in which people organise themselves to challenge systems of inequality and oppression.*” (Wright 2016b: 1). Some of the most central forms of activism range from public to more private and everyday spheres. These forms of activism can be understood as forms of ritual that help create a sense of community. In workshops, activists intentionally create spaces similar to Turner’s (1969) *communitas*, where Israeli and Palestinian youth can meet and challenge state logics of divisions, which, when successful, transform them from enemies to partners. Yet, the structure of the conflict and asymmetry persists, requiring a shift to alternative interpretations of ritual to clarify the symbolic and relational values of the workshops. This may not be a transformational process, but rather, as Cohen (1985/1993) suggests, the workshop symbolically constructs community. Public protests can similarly be understood as rituals, in which activists not only perform resistance and solidarity but also create valuable meeting points for connection. While protests remain a central form of resistance, some activists

question their effectiveness, highlighting instead their symbolic power. Lastly, engaging in conversations, assisting Palestinian farmers, and disrupting restrictions through daily activities exemplify how resistance can take quieter yet impactful forms (Scott 1985). These everyday acts can be understood as rituals that, especially when they repeatedly serve as a meeting point between Israelis and Palestinians, carry symbolic meaning and contribute to the symbolic construction of community (Cohen 1985/1993). The forms of activism are not mutually exclusive but often intertwine and support each other. Taken together, these practices demonstrate how the Palestinian and Israeli activists I engaged with create ritualized moments that, although temporary, create “*a subjunctive, an ‘as if’ or ‘could be,’ universe*” (Seligman et al. 2008: 11), enabling participants to connect and imagine visions of justice and peace.

I want to highlight the role of ritual as a connector here. Whether through shared experiences in liminality, the symbolic declaration of community boundaries and togetherness, or the framing of actions that allow negotiation of common frameworks, its main function is to connect members of a community. In the context of Israeli-Palestinian activism, we can already see that rituals may not transform the broader political structures, but they establish symbolic connections, allow for moments of shared meaning, and sustain the bonds of the community.

4.3. Emotions in Activism

The current conflict situation has triggered a lot of emotions on both sides. Israeli and Palestinian activists are not only confronted with feelings of loss, grief, fear, and trauma within their society, but also deal with their emotional reactions to the tragic recent violence. As Veena Das (2007) argues, the event of violence “*attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary*” (Das 2007: 1). In peace activism, this means that emotions tied to recent events in the ongoing conflict are not left at the door of political work, but are instead carried into it. As I have discussed earlier, recognizing and grieving for the other side is a key political commitment for activists. When I participated in the demonstration in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, emotions played a central role as well. With the shakiness of the speaker’s voice and the intensity of the crowd, the emotional intensity of the demonstration was deeply felt, and the connection of personal grief and political activism was a defining feature of the night. I learned then that emotions connected to the current events are central to peace activism in Israel/Palestine. This would later resonate in my interviews with Palestinian and Israeli activists and in online seminars, where feelings of grief and loss shaped the work and interactions of activists. In this section, I focus on emotions within the peace organization

itself and how they serve both as a resource and a challenge for the activists I interacted with. I first discuss how they can generate solidarity and feelings of community when addressed collectively, before I explore how they can also present a challenge to their work when feelings of grief and other emotions build barriers between activists across the divide.

4.3.1. Emotional Support in the Peacebuilding Community

During the online seminars I attended, Israeli and Palestinian activists shared how they are affected by their emotions. They also agreed that dealing with emotions is a part of the activist community. Activists understand that to connect with individuals beyond their own community, as Adi highlighted, it is essential “to take into consideration the trauma that people come with” (Adi). This involves creating safe environments where individuals can express and deal with their emotions, while also providing opportunities for healing work. Israeli activist Aviv shared that *Standing Together Vienna* organizes weekly public vigils, where people are invited to gather and mourn the victims on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides. She explained how the group intentionally avoided using flags or signs that could alienate members of either community. Instead, they created a space to allow people from both sides to come together in grief without the discomfort of visible political symbols.

The recent events have also evoked strong feelings among activists themselves. This became evident to me when activists shared their reactions to the recent events and how they shaped their daily lives. All Palestinian and Israeli activists that I interviewed expressed various emotions such as feelings of fear, trauma, pain, helplessness, or anger, to name some of the most recurring ones described to me. Palestinian activist Amal shared with me that she felt powerless about the situation in Gaza, which deeply affected her emotionally and changed her life due to the brutality of the attacks on Gaza, making continuing activities a challenge:

“It is important to note and distinguish life into two phases: before and after the recent war. The massacre, the horrors, the killing, the bloodshed, the brutality, and the savagery we witnessed and watched live, just kilometers away, were some of the greatest challenges for anyone to continue their usual activities.” (Amal)

Palestinian activist Yousef shared a similar account of the emotional toll the situation has taken. After I asked him about the most significant challenges he faced following the events of October 2023, he provided the following response:

“The first challenge we had was not to lose our minds because it was beyond – not was, still is – it's beyond any human capacity to see and understand what's going on. That was the very first challenge, and it was a very hard challenge. The second challenge is how to overcome the feeling of helplessness. And the feeling of guilt, and it takes years to be able to function and do our daily life. Do you know we couldn't? I kept watching the news 24/7, and it was affecting me physically too, not only emotionally.” (Yousef)

As Yousef described, witnessing the attacks against Palestinians that unfolded in front of their eyes, and not being able to help, evoked a lot of feelings that affected him and the people around him in their daily lives. Violence and the triggered emotions influence the worlds of activists. Therefore, after the escalations since October 2023, recognizing each other's pain and expressing empathy toward the “Other” and understanding their emotions became an even more crucial and complex component of sustaining cooperation across the divide.

The activists I interviewed and in seminars and talks I joined shared stories about how they dealt with their emotional reactions to October 7 and the attacks on Gaza in their organization, making healing work one of their priorities. As a Palestinian activist from *Combatants for Peace* described during an online seminar, the dynamics of empathy initially shifted. Before this day, it was mainly Israeli activists who expressed empathy with Palestinian suffering. With the attacks on October 7 and the trauma experienced by the Israeli society, including peace activists, this suddenly shifted. Palestinians in peace activism faced the challenge of showing empathy to their Israeli counterparts and acknowledging their pain and trauma. For Palestinian activists, this position was difficult, given their own historical and ongoing experience of violence. A Palestinian member of *Combatants for Peace* shared the emotional difficulty of showing empathy for the Israeli partners in these times:

“We have to put on another hat, which is actually showing empathy to our Israeli partners and friends. And so, that was like a strange psychological turn. It was hard for even Palestinians to turn this hat [...] It's not simple to turn into the savior in our empathy. Definitely, this was the strongest, powerful test that we had.” (Online Talk *Combatants for Peace*)

The IDF's counterattacks on Gaza also impacted Palestinian activists emotionally, which they had to cope with and did so within the group. This was stated, for instance, by Yousef, who talked about how it was important to him and other activists to come together and support each other in their loss, pain, and trauma in the aftermath of the events:

“People could really deal with it, and my way was to analyze my feelings. And in the beginning, I couldn't; in the beginning, I was very depressed. I'm not doing anything. I used to have video calls with people, a half-hour video call. We don't say a word; we just look at each other and cry, literally.” (Yousef)

For Amal, it was important to meet with Israeli members of the organization and to understand how they are feeling since the recent war started. Israeli activist Adi also stated that talking about emotions and sharing them with Israeli and Palestinian members is essential not only to understand and support each other, but also to create a safe space for the peace community to share how they feel without being exposed to possible danger:

“You have so much anger and pain, and it's not always that easy. But I think that the fact that we're able to talk about it, because there are not that many spaces where you actually can say it in your community. Palestinians cannot feel free to say whatever they want. And also me, as a leftist, I have more freedom and privilege, and I have more freedom to express myself, not afraid that someone will hurt me or something. And they do, but even from me, it's not that easy because people aren't open to hearing.” (Adi)

As I have observed during my research, activists' worlds are affected by violence and the emotions it triggers. In the context of the violence and the connected feelings during and after the Indian partition, Veena Das (2007) describes how witnesses have to inhabit the world again after experiences of loss and violence. The experience of violence moves beyond the events, *“as it seeps into the ongoing relationships and becomes a kind of atmosphere that cannot be expelled to an ‘outside.’”* (Das 2007: 62). Here, Das argues that trauma from violent events becomes part of everyday life after it occurs and shapes relationships between members of the community. Similarly, for Israeli and Palestinian peace activists who experienced the immediate violence on October 7, and for Palestinian activists who witnessed the ongoing violence against themselves and those around them, especially now in the aftermath of the War in Gaza, the world has changed. This also impacts their relationships, as their emotions cannot be separated from their work; instead, they shape and influence it. The collaboration between Palestinian and Israeli activists in expressing their shared feelings of loss, pain, or trauma equally during these challenging times demonstrates that addressing emotions collectively fosters a sense of community among members.

4.3.2. Emotions as a Challenge

Despite the collective dealing within peace organizations and the incorporation of emotions into activism, emotions triggered by events connected to the ongoing conflict can also present challenges for these organizations. The activists from *Windows* that I interviewed shared that after October 2023, tensions in the group have been a challenge because of activists' reaction to the violence experienced on both sides. People are less open to meeting the other side, resulting in the loss of members and participants. Committed members of the organization also expressed difficulties in staying engaged in joint work after the recent war started. This was described by both Palestinian and Israeli interlocutors, as well as discussed during online talks. Israeli activist Yaara, for instance, said that October 7 triggered feelings of hopelessness that influenced her activism, making it more challenging to continue her work and to have a clear agenda. Furthermore, Omar, Yaara, Yousef, Amal, and Ariel from *Windows* all described the distance that was created by the events of October 7, and the ongoing violent attacks on Palestinians in Gaza and in the West Bank as one of the most challenging tasks within their community. Palestinian activist Omar described how the horrific images from Gaza created a psychological barrier between him and Israeli activists, including those he trusts:

“When you see the news from Gaza, the situation in Gaza, you see it on the screen, you see the little children, [...] the pictures are horrific. It's so sad. So you start to think that I don't want to see an Israeli. I don't want to meet with anyone. I mean, you start to think that they're all the same, though inside you know that there are people who are not. But that creates a psychological barrier, and I cannot meet in this situation. Some of the group whom, if the war ends, I will be able to meet. Other than that, it's going to be difficult for me psychologically. The horrific events in Gaza have created that barrier. The barrier is always there, but it just [...] enlarged it and made it more enhanced inside us. It has always been there because even before Gaza, the Israelis killed in the West Bank.” (Omar)

Omar's description here shows that, against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict, activists are not immune to psychological barriers that lead to distancing between Palestinian and Israeli group members. As Yousef reflected, reconnecting with the Israeli activists after the events unfolded from October 2023 onwards was difficult for him as well:

“To reconnect was another challenge, and it took us time, taking a lot of energy to be able to start to reconnect with – individually, not as groups – with the other side.” (Yousef).

Overall, emotions play a central role in the work of the activists from *Windows* that I interviewed. Emotions are not only central to the group bond, as a collective dealing with emotions, but also considered in activists' work to reach outsiders. This emotional dimension was also evident in the talks and seminars I attended, as well as in the expressions of my Israeli interview partner, Aviv from *Standing Together Vienna*, who discussed dealing with each other's emotions and simultaneously engaging in healing work as part of their activism. This demonstrates that peace work is not only a matter of politics; it also requires emotional labor, highlighting the importance of safe spaces to express grief and frustration without judgment. The examples of emotional engagement, either in public events or more privately between activists, show how activism can foster moments of community where Israelis and Palestinians temporarily share their feelings of loss, pain, or trauma. In these spaces, emotions are not just a reaction to violence that seeps into activists' everyday lives (Das 2007), but they are also a resource for building fragile yet powerful bonds between group members. As my interlocutors expressed, however, the emotional response to ongoing violence can be challenging to reconnect within the group. Thus, while emotions can build powerful moments of connection, they can also surface tensions within the group, making emotional labor both a resource and a challenge for Israeli and Palestinian organizations.

4.4. Summary

In this chapter, I discussed how Palestinian and Israeli activists I engaged with create and sustain a community through shared values, activist practices, and emotional engagement. Despite structural asymmetry and the broader context of ongoing violence, most intensely experienced by Palestinians, the activists repeatedly emphasized their commitment to justice, mutual recognition, and the idea of living side by side. These commitments are expressed through various forms of activism, such as workshops, public protests, or everyday activities, that are often overlooked yet powerful tools of resistance, as James Scott (1985) argues. I drew on Cohen (1985/1993) and Seligman et al. (2008) to argue that these forms of activism can be understood as ritual practices that, together with symbolic ideas of shared values and goals, connect Palestinians and Israelis and help to construct a sense of community among activists. Emotions also play a central role in the activist community. Feelings of pain, sorrow, or trauma are not only reactions to violence but are also actively dealt with by activists. Although this chapter has highlighted the potential of the Israeli-Palestinian community, tensions, disagreements, and violent incidents are still problematic and frequently disrupt the

relationships that activists seek to build. In the following chapter, I turn to these tensions and challenges activists face, demonstrating that working toward peace involves not only building community but also navigating internal difficulties, disagreements, and external pressures, as described by the activists I interviewed.

5. Tension and Challenges

The peace organizations I engaged with are not free from conflict, as I have already mentioned throughout the previous chapter on the Israeli-Palestinian peace community. Activists must constantly manage internal tensions and political disagreements, as well as external pressure from their respective societies. The organizations are often faced with the challenges of ongoing violence, structural inequalities, and shifting political landscapes.

In this chapter, I explore some of the key challenges faced by activists in their daily work. First, I examine internal tensions within organizations, including disagreements over strategy, language, and political disputes involved in working across divides. Here, I also consider the asymmetric relationships between Israeli and Palestinian activists and how they manage them. These tensions are not only obstacles but also part of the process of building and maintaining relationships in a deeply divided and militarized context, revealing the complexities within organizations. Second, I look at how Palestinian and Israeli activists navigate their activism in the context of the post-October 2023 situation and the war on Gaza, characterized by violence and safety concerns, as well as societal pressure due to radicalization and mistrust towards the other side. Finally, I examine how activists themselves conceptualize peace, justice, and equality. While shared values are central to the organization's vision, I highlight in this chapter how different understandings of what peace means shape the activists' understanding of the term and create tensions in the overall peace community.

In tracing these tensions, this chapter does not aim to undermine the work of the organizations but rather to offer a more grounded understanding of the complexities of Palestinian-Israeli activism in a profoundly unequal and asymmetric context.

5.1. Internal Tensions in Activist Groups

While Israeli and Palestinian peace activists often work together in shared struggles and community building, these relationships are not without tension. These tensions are rooted in diverse sources and internal disagreements, and present challenges that must be addressed if activists are to sustain their collaboration. The complexities of these groups reflect broader societal fractures, encompassing political and emotional tensions, conflicting narratives, and disputes over strategy that activists must navigate. Moreover, the backdrop against which the activists operate is one of profound asymmetry, which is marked by military occupation and

oppression. It shapes not only their activism but also their organizational structure and interactions with one another. In the following discussion, I present some ways in which internal frictions manifest within the peace organizations I interacted with, how activists negotiate them, and how they challenge and shape the Israeli-Palestinian peace organizations. These challenges reveal the complexities of maintaining solidarity between individuals that exist within highly asymmetric power dynamics. I also explore how the structural asymmetry between Palestinians and Israelis becomes a source of tension, influencing their relationship and approach in the community.

5.1.1. Internal Tensions and Political Disagreements

Within peace organizations such as *Windows*, *Standing Together*, and *Combatants for Peace*, internal disagreements about the past and present, the organizations' strategies, and political positions pose a challenge. Palestinian and Israeli members have different perspectives and needs, and balancing them within the group creates tensions. This has not become less difficult with the current conflict situation, where understandings of what is happening, terminology, and political views must be discussed.

In *Windows*, this can be observed in the fact that articulating a statement about the current situation for their website poses a great challenge. More than 1.5 years after October 2023, its members could not agree on a statement to put on their website. Israeli activist Hadar from *Windows* spoke about this issue, emphasizing both its importance and the lengthy nature of discussions about the situation in the region. These discussions include formulating public statements, disagreements over terminology, and political positioning. For example, there are different opinions on the term “genocide”, which creates tension not only between Israelis and Palestinians but also between different Israeli group members. Hadar described the discussion about the term “genocide” during our conversation:

“We can't say we don't think it's a genocide because we don't agree. Some people say it is, some people say it's not. Everybody agrees that it's a horrific war crime. Everybody agrees that it's a terrible crime against humanity. It's very difficult for Israeli Jews to say genocide because the connotation we have is the Holocaust. And people say this is not the Holocaust. It's terrible, but it's not the Holocaust. And Israel doesn't want to destroy it. A minority wants to destroy it, not all of us. Anyway, so we can say, just to give you an example of how we deal with things, that

some leaders call to commit a genocide. Everything is a discussion. So you can imagine how many hours and hours of discussions will be about the content of the war.” (Hadar)

This highlights the internal struggles that activists face. While some Israeli activists have difficulties with the term “genocide”, others, such as Shira, use it openly as a matter of fact. At the same time, from the Palestinian perspective, there should be no doubt in calling the ongoing oppression a genocide, which was emphasized by Palestinian activist Amal multiple times.

Beyond disagreements on internal terminology and views, there are also differing expectations and limits on the extent of public criticism. Activists told me that some express radical views, while others see this as problematic because it pushes people away and prevents the message from reaching beyond the organization. Therefore, conflicts over strategies and public positioning, which are also connected to individual and national narratives, create tensions between group members. Israeli activist Adi from *Windows* also discussed the challenges the group faces with balancing the needs of different members and their Israeli and Palestinian society:

“I think it's a big challenge to understand what actually can be done in reality, like what is relevant to the needs of each society. We work in a structure of a triangle 48, 67, and Jews, so the challenge is to understand what can be done in each society, what are the needs, how can we actually do something and be relevant for the needs, and not to create the opposite.” (Adi)

Israeli activist Aviv from Standing Together Vienna reported similar internal tensions and saw difficulties in the contradictory narratives of the present and the past that exist among members of her peace movement. She emphasized that these issues need to be discussed and acknowledged in order to work together effectively. Moreover, from her outside perspective, Aviv viewed some weaknesses in organizations that are operating within Israel/Palestine:

“It is easier for Palestinians and Jewish Israelis to work together without agreeing on basics like the right of return in the future, in a way to get reconciliation. So, those are things that in Israel and Palestine, I think, it's impossible to discuss. And here [in Europe] we have to discuss these things because of the polarization, because we are not automatically aligned with each other. We wouldn't automatically join each other because this is a different situation. And in Israel and Palestine, it is more about ‘the house is on fire’. They have to work together no matter what, in order to change the situation. And we have this privilege of not living in a

burning house, burning land. So it's not as easy for us to stand together. So, we had to agree on the basics before aligning.” (Aviv)

With this statement, Aviv reveals an interesting aspect from her perspective as an Israeli activist living abroad. She admits that activists in Israel/Palestine don't have the capacity or the need to agree on fundamental principles to work together because they operate within a setting of urgency and conflict. These circumstances certainly do not apply equally to all organizations and activists, but they confirm the existence of underlying internal tensions within peace organizations.

Furthermore, for the activists I interacted with, internal conflict posed a challenge not only due to disagreements over terms, narratives, and strategies, but also because of the actions people took in response to their position and reactions to the escalations. In a documentary produced by *Combatants for Peace* (2025), one of the Palestinian members and peace activists described how he lost Israeli partners and friends because they decided to join the army again after October 7, which was a 'red line' for him. One of the Israeli activists he referred to stated, however, that while he believes in peace, he acknowledges that Israel needs a strong army. By returning to the army and participating in violence against Palestinians, the Israeli activist failed the Palestinian activist.

Overall, within Israeli-Palestinian activist organizations, internal tensions frequently arise around competing narratives, political terminology, and strategies that are reflective of the broader social and historical fault lines. Ortner notes that resistance groups frequently experience ambiguities due to differences, resulting in internal conflicts which should not be overlooked when analyzing dynamics within activist groups (Ortner 1995: 177). Narratives here play a central role in understanding these ambiguities. As Nordstrom states, “*Narrative domesticates experience*” (Nordstrom 1997: 22), highlighting how narratives are not raw reflections but processed representations that help individuals make sense of their experience. This is especially true in the context of war and violence, where the narrator processes an experience to make living in danger bearable or make sense of the situation. Narratives are therefore culturally constructed (Nordstrom 1997: 20-22). Building on this, in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, narratives do more than process individual trauma. They are also central to creating memories of violence, war, and collective trauma (Alexander & Dromi, 2011). There are strong national and historical narratives on both sides that also influence Israeli and Palestinian activists in their perception and narration of the situation. These tensions

unveil the difficulties in naming the violence, resonating with Veena Das's work on violence and trauma. She argues that this process is a complex struggle that reflects serious political and legal struggles (Das 2007: 206).

These dynamics became evident in my research, for example, in the discomfort some Israelis express when the war in Gaza is referred to as a 'genocide', due in part to their Jewish identity and the deep historical resonance of the Holocaust in the Israeli collective trauma. For Palestinians, however, it is clear that the atrocities committed against their relatives in Gaza constitute 'genocide', and denying the term can feel like denying the validity of their lived experience. Narratives also diverge when activists struggle to acknowledge their own nation's wrongdoing, feeling the need to defend themselves, which was evident, for instance, in Hadar's statement, "Israel doesn't want to destroy it. A minority wants to destroy it, not all of us." (Hadar). Diverging narratives and the construction of conflict realities create tensions within the peace communities, which need to be acknowledged and discussed within the groups.

To navigate these tensions, strategies such as dialogue, discussion, and compromise are employed, which are necessary elements of peace activists' work. George Simmel (1904) and later anthropologists Evans-Pritchard (1969: 161) and Max Gluckman (1954: 18) highlight the constructive potential of conflict because it maintains social order and relationships between different groups and creates peace between them. Accordingly, tensions and conflicts between group members in the peace organizations can reinforce solidarity by reaffirming shared values and boundaries, which is evident in the organizations that I interacted with.

The tension within activist groups and conflict over different narratives and perspectives show the complexities within organizations composed of diverse actors. This creates tensions that challenge the relationships between Palestinian and Israeli activists with different backgrounds. The continued collaboration between Israeli and Palestinian, despite diverse backgrounds and beliefs, demonstrates, as Cohen would argue, that "*people can participate within the 'same' ritual yet find quite different meanings for it*" (Cohen 1985/1993: 55). Working through tensions created by the conflict environment may be central, although not always perfect, to sustain the group, and reflects broader societal dynamics. It thereby illuminates the opportunities for a peace process that requires confronting uncomfortable truths, navigating divergent narratives, and finding a shared way forward. This also requires acknowledging and addressing asymmetric relations between Israelis and Palestinians, which I explore in the following section.

5.1.2. Asymmetric Relations

Many researchers have shown in the past that the conflict in Israel/Palestine is characterized by asymmetry and inequalities between Israelis and Palestinians, as the policies and practices of the State of Israel enact the structural asymmetry of its relationship with Palestinians (Al-Orzza & Makhoul 2017: 69). This also influences the peacebuilding environment as it creates different needs and has caused reflections of material, symbolic, or institutional asymmetry in the structures of joint peace organizations (Gawerc 2012; Maoz 2004; Aggestam & Strömbom 2013). Throughout my research, asymmetry repeatedly appeared as a theme in my data. With the heightened violence, tensions in the West Bank, and absolute destruction in Gaza, the war has created a heavy toll on Palestinian everyday lives. While both sides face challenges, Palestinian activists have more difficulties and other needs due to the ongoing occupation. For them, activism is not only about confrontation, but also about surviving within structures of oppression, and activists in Gaza are unable to participate because they are being bombarded and starved by the Israeli military. My Israeli interlocutors are aware of these uneven power balances along with their privileges and rights, and they view them very critically. Members of *Windows*, *Standing Together*, *Combatants for Peace*, and *Standing Together Vienna* stated that recognizing asymmetry is essential for collaborative work and that peace activism requires sensitivity to power dynamics. They also criticized organizations that do not adopt this approach, which must be discussed and agreed upon within the groups. For instance, Hadar expressed that it is problematic for her to bring Israelis and Palestinians together without addressing the situation in Israel/Palestine:

“Bringing together Israelis and Palestinians now without talking openly and seriously about what is going on is problematic for me. Either you don’t meet until you’re ready to talk about things, or... but that is an attitude and approach. Other organizations feel differently, and they probably have good reasons to think so. We don’t believe in that.” (Hadar)

Similarly to Hadar’s criticism, Ariel views that not addressing inequalities in Israeli-Palestinian initiatives as “problematic”. Shira, who stressed the power imbalances between Palestinians and Israelis multiple times, also expressed criticism against other Israeli leftists or peace organizations that do not acknowledge the asymmetric structures:

“The depth of the injustice that we are living right now. I really also don't feel like people understand it, even the so-called leftist ones.” (Shira)

At the same time, maintaining power dynamics balanced within the organization and avoiding the reproduction of asymmetric structures are challenges that activists negotiate in their group. The Palestinian activist Omar from *Windows* emphasized the significance of addressing asymmetrical issues like violence against Palestinians and oppression:

“So, it's important to also address the issues, the violence and the oppression, and everything, and inequality that is going on.” (Omar)

Israeli activist Aviv from *Standing Together Vienna* explained to me that she usually doesn't give interviews without her Palestinian partners because they do not want to affirm the power imbalances between Palestinians and Israelis. She attended our interview alone because her partner was unable to attend due to personal reasons. For her, it was important to highlight how her initiative deals with such issues and negotiates them:

“I'm sorry that my partners from Palestine aren't here. That would be like the major thing that I want to talk about, but it's funny to say it now. It's just because it was very hard to plan this meeting, but we usually never do these things. We don't give just one perspective. We always give two perspectives. We always come as a couple, and because of the power imbalance in Israel-Palestine, we never do this, what I'm doing right now. And we're always keeping the power in balance between us.” (Aviv)

Overall, the activists that I interviewed expressed that acknowledging and discussing the asymmetric relationship between Israelis and Palestinians is an important part of their collaboration. As Veena Das notes, “*Community is constituted through agreements and hence can also be torn apart by the refusal to acknowledge some part of the community (e.g., women or minorities) as an integral part of it.*” (Das 2007: 9). In line with this, acknowledging asymmetry is essential in sustaining the Israeli-Palestinian organizations. Members of the organizations I interacted with make efforts to recognize all parts of their community, particularly Palestinian voices and perspectives. However, while the activists I interviewed emphasized the importance of acknowledging and not reproducing asymmetric structures of oppression and inequality, their criticism of other peace initiatives and activists suggests that the peace community is not immune to asymmetry. This can lead to unequal dynamics within Palestinian-Israeli organizations and also provoke tension among members. The asymmetry also becomes visible in their work, as Palestinian activists have to deal with other preconditions of oppression, more violence, have less access to resources, and have specific needs. They face

more risks when confronting Israeli entities, and some, particularly in Gaza, are not able to continue their work due to military operations and other factors. This underscores that good intentions alone cannot undo deeply embedded structures of inequality, even when groups actively strive for justice. Thus, despite the group's intentions and efforts, asymmetry persists and shapes the relationships within the peace movement.

As I have discussed in this section, the Israeli-Palestinian organizations I interacted with have had disagreements over political perspectives, terminology, and conflicting narratives of the past and present. This indicates that, like in other resistance groups (Ortner 1995: 177), Palestinian-Israeli communities are not free from ambiguities and internal conflict. As Ortner points out, there is an “*ambiguity of resistance*” (Ortner 1995: 175) that must be considered when analyzing resistance groups, and subordinate groups are often divided by many forms of difference, such as age or gender, which leads to internal conflicts within the resisting group. Thus, many resistance movements have internal conflicts or ambivalences that must be taken into account and analyzed to understand the overall dynamics of a resistance movement (Ortner 1995: 177-179). The organizations I engaged with are composed of many actors who are very different from one another, in terms of religion, ethnicity, or positioning within the current conflict situation, creating an excellent potential for ambiguity and conflict within the groups.

For several of the activists I spoke to, the escalations since October 2023 have added even more challenges to connecting with the other side due to tensions and political disagreements over the content of the recent war. It takes time and work for activists and participants of different backgrounds to build agreements and navigate tensions and disagreements. Asymmetry further challenges the relationships within peace organizations. The activists I interviewed highlighted the need to acknowledge and negotiate these dynamics. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Cohen (1985/1993: 20) argues that shared participation and the use of symbols, often in the form of ideas, don't necessarily imply shared meaning. To add to this, he also points out that members of the same community need to feel that they share the same symbols and are more alike each other than members of other communities to keep the community together (Cohen 1985/1993: 21). This can be seen in their internal tensions, as Palestinian and Israeli activists negotiate perspectives to align around shared symbols, although their meanings may differ. Following this perspective and my observation presented in this section, I conclude that unity amid difference is both a challenge and a strength of these groups.

5.2. Navigating Activism in the Context of the Post-October 2023 War

The recent conflict situation has had a direct impact on the peace organizations I engaged with. The ongoing political situation shapes activists' work by limiting their mobility, increasing fear, and reinforcing divisions within both societies. While there are certainly many more aspects that impact the Israeli-Palestinian peace organizations I have dealt with, two factors have repeatedly emerged as main challenges in discussions with activists. First, a pressing challenge arises from violence and safety issues in the form of military activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the tense situation in Israel/Palestine. Second, the pressure from activists' own society presents a challenge to both Palestinian and Israeli activists, experienced as radicalization within Israeli society, and anti-normalization discourse in Palestinian communities, which makes working with the other side more difficult. Although these issues did not emerge only after October 2023, they have intensified since then and will be the focus of the following discussion.

5.2.1. Violence and Safety Issues

As I have addressed throughout my thesis, violence and safety issues are present and shape the reality and everyday lives of Palestinians and Israelis. During my time in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, I was always aware of the nearest shelter. Wherever I went, I noticed civilians carrying guns, prepared to defend themselves and others against *perceived* threats. Considerably more pressing are the violence and safety concerns in the occupied Palestinian territories. Palestinian activists have shared stories about heightened violence from settlers and the military in the West Bank and stories about facing restrictions on movement through checkpoints between areas A, B, and C, which affect all Palestinian civilians who live in the region. This was also a concern for the Israeli activists who sought to support Palestinian members. In interviews and online talks by peace organizations, activists emphasized how the experiences of violence and safety issues shape the peace organizations and their work on the ground in the ongoing conflict. They shared how their approach, focus, and activities have shifted since the war started in October 2023, highlighting the direct restrictions on joint efforts, as activism does not exist in a vacuum. Palestinian activist Omar pointed out that the high level of violence that Palestinians witness in the West Bank and Gaza makes it difficult to convince Palestinians to participate in activities: "It's difficult to even talk and convince, while that level of violence in Gaza." (Omar). There are not only psychological barriers to meet the other side in the light of

the conflict, but also “physical blockades”, as Omar put it, that make meetings between Palestinian and Israeli activists difficult. Amal also mentioned these issues and stated:

“It was difficult to travel and meet with Palestinians in the West Bank and Israelis at the same time and place.” (Amal).

For my Palestinian interlocutors, it is not only difficult to meet due to restrictions on movement, but also because they are living in an increasingly hostile environment. Yousef spoke about difficulties in meeting physically with other Palestinian activists due to violent attacks against them, which makes working together in the face of conflict more difficult:

“I cannot do anything. We've been Palestinian only. We've been trying to meet for the last four weeks. And every time we're trying to do so, there is something happening. There is an attack here, or there's a closure there, or there was an airstrike, or an assassination of Palestinians. There's always a... I mean, we cannot meet – even between ourselves.” (Yousef)

Sometimes activists are also directly threatened, not only because of the situation but also because of their work itself. Palestinian and Israeli members of *Combatants for Peace*, who are very actively working in the West Bank to resist settler and military violence, have conveyed in online talks how escalating violence and lack of safety have a profound impact on the ability to carry out their nonviolent resistance and solidarity work. Protecting shepherds and farmers puts activists at personal risk, with Israeli authorities confiscating cameras and arresting activists. During the time of my research, I was informed that Palestinian activists connected to these organizations were also arrested for their activism in the West Bank. Despite risks and challenges presented to the activists, they continue their work in an environment of violence and safety issues, as they have to react to the reality on the ground. Israeli activist Ariel also mentioned that the military violence often interrupts their joint activism in the West Bank and destroys Palestinian villages:

“There's a challenge of like the military is going to come in and stop our joint olive picking, or the military is going to come in and try to destroy parts of this village.” (Ariel)

My research has shown that Israeli and Palestinian activists experience violence that shapes their activism. As Veena Das (2007: 98) describes, violence does not merely exist in spectacular moments of conflict but infiltrates the everyday, which shapes social interactions, movement, and emotional responses. In line with Veena Das' analysis, I illustrated in this section that

violence is not limited to events such as October 7 or the attacks on Gaza; it is rather a constant presence in the daily lives of Palestinian and Israeli activists. The occurrence of violence is an ongoing event that continues to worsen with the escalating war situation. This ongoing condition profoundly shapes the activists' work. It not only demands a response to repeated acts of violence and attacks against Palestinians, but also impacts the connection between Israelis and Palestinians as it prevents them from meeting. As Omar pointed out, this could potentially widen the gap between the two sides, as they might each view the other as responsible for violence and safety issues, which also creates tension and rupture within the group.

Additionally, activists experience violence differently, which shapes their understanding of their own and others' realities. As Nordstrom & Robben observe, "*Violence is also an intricately layered phenomenon. Each participant, each witness to violence, brings his or her own perspective.*" (Nordstrom & Robben 2000: 5). They highlight that there are many realities of violence, like political, military, intellectual, psychological, and especially sociopolitical realities, occurring within civilian populations, social processes, and cultural life (Nordstrom & Robben 1995: 5). All these realities shape how violence is experienced and made sense of. This also reflects in Israeli and Palestinian interviews. While Israeli activists often witness violence inflicted upon Palestinians, Palestinian activists live through it, experiencing direct harm to themselves and their community creating different Israeli and Palestinian experiences of violence.

In short, activists I spoke with describe how their peace work is constantly shaped by ongoing violence, from movement restrictions to psychological trauma. Direct violence, checkpoints, and other developments in the region, especially in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, have a direct impact on collaborations. For the activists that I interacted with, their work is not only a form of resistance, but also a response to the violence that infiltrates and shapes their everyday life.

5.2.2. Pressure from One's Own Society

Activists from both Palestinian and Israeli communities often face strong opposition and pressure from their own society, not only from broader political decision-makers but also from family members, friends, or co-workers. These pressures reflect broader social and political dynamics, from anti-normalization discourses in the Palestinian community to growing

radicalization within Israeli society. In the following, I examine how these aspects impact the Palestinian and Israeli activists I interacted with in their work.

5.2.2.1. Radicalization in Israeli Society

My Palestinian and Israeli interlocutors and other activists have observed that the events of October 7, 2023, have led to a radicalization within Israeli society, with many moving toward more nationalistic and securitized discourses that are settled in right-wing politics and separating themselves from the ‘Palestinian enemy’ even more. The Israeli activists I interviewed and those in seminars reported that they face increasing political polarization in their daily lives, whether in their families, at work, or on the streets. Hearing hateful remarks directed against Palestinians affects Israeli activists deeply, as they describe their discomfort and moments of emotional difficulty. At the same time, they are unable to confront their Israeli counterparts because they can’t convince them and don’t want to listen to their alternative, pro-Palestinian arguments and information, as Adi stated:

“Generally, we see that specifically in this period, it’s harder to talk about peace. And there are more and more people who go to the right-wing point of view, or belief point of view.” (Adi)

Therefore, the radicalization in their society has also impacted their activism, as activists have had to adjust their strategies to reach people and operate in a more right-wing environment. Ariel expressed that he doesn’t believe in the effectiveness of informing Israelis about the immorality of the war in Gaza, as they are not willing to listen to him:

“The extreme brainwashing that society here has right now is affecting what I see as politically possible or not. And I’ve always been somewhat of a pragmatist, so I’m sad to say this, but I don’t feel that there’s any anything pragmatic in going out and telling the entire Israeli public that the war in Gaza is bad and immoral because there’s no one listening to that, and it’s a very hard case to make.” (Ariel)

Furthermore, Israeli activists also experienced losing connection to friends and family and are confronted with a lack of understanding and hostility in their personal lives. This was shared by all Israeli interlocutors and at seminars and talks. Shira, Ariel, Hadar, and Yaara have all reported that even other activists or Israelis with a politically left-leaning orientation have been less open to meeting the other side. This led to a decline in members and participants of the organizations, some of which were temporary, as some activists returned after overcoming the

initial shock of October 7. At the same time, depending on their social environment, Israeli activists have to deal with rising radicalization that leads to disagreements about the situation in their personal relationships outside of their activism. While Ariel and Yaara said that their families and friends are themselves more leftist and have similar views to them, they struggle with radicalization in their work environment. Others struggle with radicalization in their surroundings. Aviv from *Standing Together Vienna* mentioned that her friends and family shifted their support towards more right-wing beliefs and politicians such as Ben Gvir, who is the Israeli far-right minister of national security and who represents policies that Aviv strongly disagrees with, as she states:

“On the night when they returned the dead bodies of the Bibas kids, a friend from Israel wrote to me, 'How do you want to make peace with those baby killers and bus exploders because it was just also another bus, another tale in Israel and it started difficult and the conversation got much more difficult and this is a person that used to vote for like let's say for the center and he told me that he will next time vote for whoever promises him security. So, I asked who that was, and he said Ben Gvir. That's a complete shift, [...] he's such a great person, but this world completely shifted him, and this is just one example. I can say it about my sister and about my brother-in-law, about my sister-in-law and about my cousin and aunt, and friends from childhood. I can say it's basically about almost everyone that I know from there.’ (Aviv)

This and similar accounts of activists demonstrate that opposition to such political positions and a shift toward right-wing politics has resulted in activists losing friends and family members. Shira described her opposition to Israeli state practices and perspectives as a sacrifice, as she is losing friends and family over it:

“The concept of sacrifice – I had a lot of incredible friendships that unfortunately stopped being, or connections with family members, unfortunately stopped because, you know, because we see the world differently. Because we live on different planets.” (Shira)

To counter the rising right-wing orientation within Israeli society, activists engage in conversations with people they meet in daily interactions to raise awareness about current events and share their perspective, aiming to convince others to adopt their viewpoint or present alternative information to that presented in the media. Ariel, who is a schoolteacher and often confronted by radical views, attempts to have conversations with people and raise awareness about the situation despite the hardening of opinions in Israeli society:

“I definitely do talk with people and I try to get them change their mind and it's something that I haven't done enough actively in the past year and a half, but I definitely do it regularly and I usually try to bring it up in conversations and with people, whether it's with my family or with other groups, not only people that are really like my activists.” (Ariel)

While the activists aim to raise awareness, Adi is also concerned that this is not always easy to achieve. Dealing with the people around them, countering their right-wing arguments, and trying to convince them of the opposite opinion is exhausting for her:

“It's very, very challenging. It's not something that I do that easily, and I choose when I do it or not, but it's not that every time that I have the chance, I'm doing it. It's exhausting mentally.” (Adi)

In summary, the Israeli activists I interacted with face intense emotional and mental exhaustion, as well as social exclusion from their activism, because they are constantly confronted with radicalization not only within broader Israeli society but also within their personal social surroundings.

5.2.2.2. Anti-Normalization Discourse in the Palestinian Community

Palestinians also face pressure from their society related to their involvement in Israeli-Palestinian peace organizations. It can be even harder for them, as they often have to operate in secrecy to avoid attacks and exclusion from their community. I observed this as well while conducting my interviews, as it was significantly more challenging to find Palestinian interlocutors, and the ones that were willing to speak to me had much greater concerns about anonymity and sharing personal information. When I asked Palestinian activist Yousef if he experienced pressure from his society, he answered:

“Maybe this is why I'm talking to you in my room with a closed door. Here's the thing: even in normal days, which we didn't have ever, that wasn't accepted by many people, and we usually used to avoid saying anything. And even we need to lie if we're going to a seminar or traveling here and there about the purpose of our travel or trip.” (Yousef)

Having to work in secret and hide cooperation with Israelis is linked to “normalization” concerns among the Palestinian public, as pointed out by Omar. Most Palestinians reject any form of collaboration with Israelis, and do so for valid reasons, considering the shared history

of asymmetry, inequality, and broken promises by the Israeli government. As a reaction to the longstanding conflict and injustice against Palestinians, the BDS has established the anti-normalization movement. As discussed in Chapter 3, the concept of anti-normalization shapes societal attitudes toward the engagement of Palestinians with Israelis. The Palestinian and Israeli activists I interviewed highlighted the importance of the anti-normalization movement. For them, it is important not to cater to the normalization of the oppression and occupation of the Palestinian territories. Speaking about oppression and the right of return has to be at the base of any joint work between Israelis and Palestinians, and must be agreed upon. However, the anti-normalization movement also created some difficulties, as many Palestinians refrain from any interaction with Israelis due to normalization accusations. Omar explained to me that this makes work involving Israelis impossible and leads to pressure from their community if they decide to reach out to the other side. This has direct implications for Palestinian peace activists, who often face criticism and pressure from within their own communities for participating in initiatives with Israelis. One problem identified by Omar is that there are no exact definitions for normalization:

“It's a big issue, it's one of the biggest issues actually. And I think that there is no right definition or let's say a fair definition or even a smart definition of normalization.” (Omar)

When he discussed the difficulties he faced with the rejections of his work with Israelis, he emphasized that there has to be a solution established to allow organizations to work together, as he stated: “They need to create a system that allows organizations and legitimize them to work together.” (Omar). The Palestinian activist Yousef also spoke about the challenges he faces in the Palestinian community when meeting the other side, as people perceive any form of meeting as a form of normalization:

“Normalization has a very specific definition by the BDS, which is any meeting between a Palestinian and an Israeli that doesn't talk about the Palestinian constant in Jerusalem borders return back right, and all of that, and kind of meeting that doesn't have those is considered normalization, and because I know the details of our meeting and that's part of the things we're talking about or serving, I know and I trust what I'm doing is not normalization but, I don't have the time or the capacity to explain it to anyone because anyway I'll be misunderstood at the end of the day.” (Yousef)

Yousef and Omar both expressed that they cannot work openly with Israelis because of the pressure of the Palestinian community. Yousef described how he has to lie about his meetings with Israelis and has to hide those interactions even from close friends, which demonstrates that he must work in secrecy to avoid backlash from the Palestinian community. Therefore, it can be said that the Palestinian activists I interviewed face pressure from their society, which they must navigate. At the same time, they need to justify meeting Israeli activists without normalizing the occupation, which makes their joint work more challenging.

As Veena Das describes in her work on post-partition India: “*the events of collective violence continue to shape the intertwining of experiences of community*” (Das 2007: 3). It is, therefore, crucial to understand activists’ work and relationships in the light of the conflict situation of extreme violence, as it significantly shapes their reality and their communities, both within the activism context and their personal environment. In the context of the post-October 2023 escalations in Israel/Palestine, both Palestinian and Israeli activists operate in a challenging environment characterized by high and constant levels of violence and safety issues, which highlights the interconnectedness of violence and communities’ everyday lives. The pressure from their own societies presents different but no less challenging difficulties that Palestinian and Israeli activists have to deal with. Israeli activists often experience social isolation and strong disagreements from their surroundings for expressing solidarity with Palestinians during a time of national trauma after October 7, 2023. For Palestinian activists, on the other hand, cooperating with Israelis can entail serious moral dilemmas, and at times, threats or mistrust from their own communities. These personal risks and social costs underline the deep polarization that defines the broader environment in which peace activists operate.

Referring back to my earlier analysis of the community, I want to recap that Victor Turner emphasizes a dialectic between structure and anti-structure. He argues, “*both structure and communitas are necessary*” (Turner 1974/2018: 52). In Turner’s view, the return from *communitas* to structure is desired in every society. In the context of Israeli-Palestinian activism, however, we see that this dialectic is disrupted. Activists remain deeply tied to their own society, reality, and experiences, and the return, in this case, is not renewal but reabsorption into an unchanged structure of conflict and asymmetry that is neither transformed nor desired. Das’s (2007) acknowledgment of the presence of violence in everyday life highlights this limitation. There is no dialectic between the structure of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and

anti-structure, but rather a constant presence of violence and conflict, which has, in that case, become the structure in which the activists live.

These experiences of violence, safety issues, and pressure from society shape activists' perspectives, the way they give meaning to their work, and their relationship to the other side. Yet, despite these tensions, activists continue to build a community across those differences through symbolic ideas of shared visions and goals of changing the situation, which relates to Cohen's (1985/1993) description of community creation. Building on my earlier discussion about shared visions and goals as indicators of a Palestinian-Israeli community in Chapter 4, and reflecting on how different perspectives are shaped by individual experiences of the conflict in this chapter, I will explore how activists understand peace within the Israeli-Palestinian context in the following.

5.3. Perspectives on Peace

In this closing section to my analysis of Palestinian-Israeli activism after October 2023, I discuss how the activists I interviewed view the term peace and its connection to their work. While Israeli and Palestinian activists have expressed ambivalences about the idea of peace, it is often referred to on websites and presentations connected to their activism online. During my research, it became clear to me that the complexity surrounding the term "peace". Some avoid or reject it altogether, others have difficulty incorporating it into their work, and some use the term in connection with their work. The question of what peace means was often discussed and left open in my interactions with activists. I begin by discussing critical views on peace from both Palestinian and Israeli activists I interviewed, then discuss some of the alternative concepts, such as liberation and equality, before examining how these different perspectives on peace can be interpreted within the Israeli-Palestinian peace organizations I engaged with.

5.3.1. Critique of the Term "Peace"

Historically, in Israel/Palestine, the term peace has been disputed, especially since the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, which were not a genuine peace process. Instead, Israeli historian Ilan Pappé very critically stated, "*the Oslo process was not a fair and equal pursuit of peace, but a compromise agreed to by a defeated, colonized people*" (Pappé 2024: 101), referring to the Palestinians who had to compromise on land rights, military control in Palestinian territories

and the refugee issue in the context of the peace process in the 1990s (Pappe 2024: 98-105). Yousef and Omar, two of the Palestinian activists I interviewed, shared similar perspectives on the Oslo Accords. As Omar recalled, the agreement felt less like a step towards liberation and more like a trap and demonization of Palestinians, which shows how the failure of the process deeply shattered his and others' trust towards the Israeli peace efforts:

“After the Oslo Accords, which was ridiculous, and I think it was just a trap for the Palestinians rather than making a real peace. And it showed that the Israeli governments after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin never wanted peace, and they were not ready to create peace with the Palestinians. So, they demonized Palestinians. Instead of creating a peace partner, they demonized the peace partner in front of the Palestinian community so that they don't have credibility at all. And people will then not follow.” (Omar)

Omar was an activist during the first Intifada and experienced the Oslo Accords. He has a very critical view of the whole process and sees it as having failed to deliver on the promise of peace and the rights of Palestinians:

“I was an activist in the first intifada, and then we ended up in Oslo Accords, you know, as a vision of peace, which made us happy, made us feel that we have achieved, at least started to achieve the minimum rights of the Palestinian people, which didn't work.” (Omar)

As a consequence of his experiences with past events, Omar refrains from the idea of signing papers as a solution to peace. Instead, he wishes for actions that guarantee the prosperity of all communities, economically and psychologically. However, he still considers his involvement to be peace activism, but with a more reflective and critical perspective. Palestinian activists Amal and Yousef, on the other hand, were more critical of the term “peace“. Amal stated that she completely rejects the term in connection with her activism:

“When I heard the term ‘building peace,’ I was disturbed by the expression. I know the final goal is peace, but this word has been abandoned by us for many years. We do not aspire to peace; we aspire to liberation. Peace comes when we are all equal and can negotiate and sit at the table of discussions. However, at this moment in human history, Palestinians are under oppression and have gone through genocide and some of the most brutal acts in the history of modern wars. Therefore, peace is a clichéd word, empty of meaning, and I prefer to use the term liberation, not peace. One can be a slave and still create peace.” (Amal)

Similarly, the Israeli activists Hadar, Ariel, Adi, Shira, Yaara, and Aviv had their difficulties with the term. I asked them about their perspectives on peace and whether they consider themselves peace activists, and I received different answers. Ariel explained to me that the Israeli activist community shied away from using the term peace before the war and even described it as a “taboo word” as it seemed out of reach for many years. He also noted that the loose definition of the word makes it difficult to understand its intended meaning. However, Ariel observed that since October 2023, the word “peace” has been used more often and has experienced a “renaissance” as people recognize the need for peace to end the current conflict situation in the region. He described:

“Peace activism is an interesting point. I mean, even before the war, I think there was a lot of talk within Israeli society and activist circles about the word 'peace'. I think we shied away from it for many years because it seems so unreachable, and it's actually having this renaissance ever since the war, because people are understanding: okay, it's either peace or continuing this. When they say 'peace', I think they mean a real peace and a just peace, not you know something that's kind of a flimsy agreement or something that's made to pacify the Palestinians” (Ariel)

Similarly, Yaara spoke about peace from her perspective and described that she and other activists have difficulty believing in peace because it is too far away at these times:

“It became very hard today to say the word ‘peace’. I hope it will be a little bit more common, but I think it's like a word people even think about anymore as an option. It's more about what we have now and not about what we want to have. Like, peace is about something we want to have in the future. And now we're like, deal with what we want to stop in the current moment to change.” (Yaara)

Shira, on the other hand, said that she believes in peace but views the application of the term critically, implying that it can be abused for the wrong goals:

“I believe in peace; I want peace, sure, I really do. There's like the end goal, but a lot of the time I feel like the word peace is kind of like whitewash.” (Shira)

Based on the interviews I conducted with Palestinian and Israeli activists, it can be said that they have difficulties using the term “peace”. For Palestinians, peace does not equal freedom and the end of oppression, which many Israeli activists also pointed out. For both sides, the conflict has lasted so long that they no longer believe a just peace is reachable.

5.3.2. Alternatives to Peace

The recent events have impacted this, making belief in peace even further out of reach for some, in light of the violence and conflict, while others return to it out of desperation for change. The Palestinian and Israeli activists I interacted with have different goals and visions for the future of their “homeland” than peace. Throughout the interviews I conducted, seminars I participated in, and other materials published by the organizations, activists repeatedly emphasized equality, which entails human rights, freedom of movement, safety, justice, and liberation for Palestinians, as the ultimate goal. Yousef stated that peace alone is not the solution and advocated for the liberation of the Palestinian people:

“I’m not saying that we don’t want peace. But peace alone is not really the answer. Again, I can be a peaceful slave. But what’s even more important is liberation. To have an actual country, an actual border, an actual right. To be liberated. Then peace will have an actual, meaningful value.” (Yousef)

The Israeli activists voiced the same opinions, asserting that equality, human rights, and liberation for Palestinians form the foundation of everything. Only then can peace emerge. This was, for instance, stated by Ariel:

“I would say that granting Palestinians full human rights and also making sure that we have a good life and equality here inside of Israel between Jews and Palestinians is the top of the agenda, and I think that could solve a lot of other things.” (Ariel)

For the Palestinian and Israeli activists I interviewed, peace goes beyond the absence of war. It encompasses equality, justice, mutual recognition, and the end of occupation.

In exploring the perspectives of both Israelis and Palestinians regarding the prospects for peace, one encounters a landscape of sharply divergent views. Among Palestinians, individual voices reveal a spectrum of attitudes: Yousef regards his work as a matter of securing existence while withdrawing from the term peace, while Amal rejects the very notion of peace completely, and Omar remains an advocate for it, although viewing the history of the peace process in Israel/Palestine critically. Most of the Israeli activists, meanwhile, believe in the potential for peace yet remain critical of how the term peace is employed, particularly by pro-Israeli institutions, which serve to undermine Palestinian rights, or, as Shira argued, are used to “whitewash” the conflict. This ambivalence is further reflected in Ariel’s observations,

highlighting how the term “peace” has become somewhat taboo within certain peace communities. These differing perspectives underscore ambivalence and tension both within the broader Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding community and within individual organizations.

Despite its contested definition and rejection by many of the activists I interviewed, the concept of peace remains a key theme that activists use to describe their goals and self-understanding. This reveals the complexities of the concept of peace within the Israeli-Palestinian community. The activists of *Windows* and Aviv of *Standing Together Vienna* have expressed that peace is often dismissed when it implies a superficial harmony that overlooks the systemic inequality of Palestinians. This shared belief that social justice for Palestinians must come first can also be viewed as central to the cohesion of the community. Turner’s concept of “*ideological communitas*” (Turner 1969: 132) refers to communities bound by a shared utopian vision, such as just peace. Accordingly, it is this ideological commitment to equality and justice that can be identified as a central binding force, holding the Palestinian-Israeli community together. However, what Turner’s concept doesn’t illuminate is the personal perspective of each individual in the group. While Palestinian and Israeli activists may be united by a shared idea of a utopian model of peace and equality, their motivations and perspectives on peace vary substantially based on their individual backgrounds and lived experiences. It is here that Turner’s concept falls short. It can help explain how activists’ visions of peace foster a sense of community, but not the tensions and complexities within it. While Turner helps explain the unifying ideals, Cohen (1985/1993: 21) is more aware of the different interpretations of ideas by different individuals within the same community. As I have shown, activists are aware of the difficulty of defining the concept of peace; therefore, they agree on more universal principles of justice, equality, and liberation, while giving meaning to it in ways shaped by their personal realities. For the Israeli activists I interviewed, making peace and standing for Palestinian rights is often framed as a responsibility. For Palestinian activists, by contrast, it is about the urgent necessity of survival in a system of oppression, where peace can feel too distant to be relevant. This asymmetry fundamentally shapes how each group approaches the concept of peace, yet they stay united through common ideas of a theory of change.

5.4. Summary

In this chapter, I examined the internal tensions and external challenges that Palestinian and Israeli activists face after October 7, 2023, and during the ongoing war on Gaza. Within organizations, tensions arise around conflicting narratives, terminology, and political positions.

These disagreements reflect broader historical and social divisions, and activists work to address them through dialogue. Additionally, the asymmetry between Palestinians and Israelis continues to shape relationships within the organizations. At the same time, violence, safety issues, and social pressure heavily influence activists' realities and their capacity to participate in their resistance work. Palestinian activists face settler violence, military restrictions, and rejection from their society due to normalization claims. In contrast, Israeli activists seek to support Palestinians in this situation but often face social exclusion or backlash for opposing narratives. Thereby, the conflict shapes activists' realities and consequently their perspective on their work. While "peace" remains a central reference point, many activists express discomfort with the term, questioning its applicability and the meaning of harmony that fails to address justice. Most activists frame their goal instead in terms of liberation, equality, and justice. While these are shared visions, meanings differ across personal and political contexts. Ultimately, despite the deep asymmetry and tensions, activists continue to build connections across the divide. As Cohen (1985/1993) suggests, community can be symbolically constructed even when meanings differ. It is this shared symbolic framework, built on visions of equality and change, that sustains the Palestinian-Israeli community, even in light of a reality of violence and division.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored how Palestinian and Israeli activists create and maintain a community in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and how they make sense of the events since October 2023 in Israel/Palestine. Through ethnographic online research, I have shown how questions of trauma, violence, and division are lived and contested in specific ways in Israeli-Palestinian peace organizations. The preceding chapters have traced these dynamics through distinct lenses, first by examining the relationships and practices of the organizations, then by considering the internal and external tensions and challenges they are facing. By doing so, they have highlighted that the Palestinian-Israeli community in the context of the conflict is not defined by unity, but by a set of shared values and goals that are differently interpreted and constantly tested by realities of violence and conflict. In this conclusion, I reflect on what these findings reveal about my research questions and consider their broader implications on anthropological debates on conflict and community. In the following, I first briefly summarize my main findings, and then return to my research questions posed in the introduction to discuss how they may be answered or challenged based on my collected data. Next, I open a discussion of the contribution to anthropological theory that my analysis offers, before ending this chapter with a reflection on limitations and future directions.

6.1. Creating a Sense of Community Shaped by Violence and Conflict

Throughout my interviews, activists described how they create a community through shared symbols, in the form of similar values, goals, and principles, despite different backgrounds. They build their community through various activism practices, such as seminars, protests, and everyday activities. I analyzed these practices as ritual practices to explain how their activism can be understood as a way to symbolically construct community. Palestinian and Israeli activists highlighted the connecting power of their activities. In light of recent violent escalations, activists face emotional challenges of pain, trauma, and helplessness, as they have shared with me. They often deal with these emotions within the group, but such emotions can also create barriers between activists and strain their relationships.

However, notwithstanding their impressions of a shared sense of community, Israeli-Palestinian organizations are not without tensions. The Palestinian and Israeli activists I engaged with have diverse perspectives and views due to their different backgrounds. This leads to internal disagreements over politics, strategies, or terminology. Moreover, the organizations are not free

of the asymmetric structures they seek to overcome. Instead, they often reflect them, which they have to deal with as activists acknowledged. Moreover, through exploring how activists navigate their activism in post-October 2023 Israel/Palestine, I have demonstrated how the current escalations intensify existing challenges for activists. Realities of violence and safety issues, and suspicions from one's own society due to rejection of interacting with the other side, have not only an impact on activist practices, but also shape activists' experiences of violence and their perspectives and lived realities. While Israeli activists who support Palestinians in the West Bank and in Gaza witness violence inflicted against the other, Palestinians experience violence against themselves. This also shapes their positionality and perspectives on peace. For Palestinians, their work is about fighting for existence and justice, while peace itself is no longer, or only limitedly, believed in. Israelis hold onto the term much more. Being in solidarity with the Palestinian other, they seek to get justice for them in order to live together.

Overall, despite increasing violence and asymmetry, Israeli and Palestinian peace activists find ways to cooperate and sustain connections across the divide. Their activism is shaped not only by their political goals but also by their emotional responses to trauma, mutual recognition, and the structural forces of the occupation. The idea of a sense of community, then, must be understood twofold: constructed by shared purpose, but continuously tested by political, emotional, and structural realities.

6.2. Answering My Research Questions

Through the analysis of my collected data, I have aimed to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of my research process. While I have already presented key aspects relevant to answering these questions, I now return to them to discuss them more explicitly. I therefore present the questions here and discuss them based on my findings. My first question was related to the work of activists in the context of the conflict environment after October 2023, asking:

How do Palestinian and Israeli activists in Israel/Palestine engage in peacebuilding activism following the escalation of the conflict since October 2023?

My findings indicate that activism after October 2023 is both reactive and adaptive. The escalations have heightened the challenges activists face. Palestinian and Israeli activists respond directly to acts of violence through protests focused on issues like ending the war in Gaza, returning hostages, and ending the occupation. They also engage in everyday activities

such as farming or herding sheep in the West Bank to support Palestinian civilians most affected by the violent escalations. This demonstrates that, following the escalations since October 2023, activists have continued their work in response to the ongoing violence in the region.

My second question related to the Palestinian-Israeli organizations and how they create and maintain their community despite a high level of division between the two groups:

How do Palestinian and Israeli activists from diverse backgrounds maintain collaboration across divides, and how does this play out in practice post-October 2023?

As my findings suggest, activists' bond is created through practices such as shared meetings, demonstrations, and everyday resistance in the West Bank that I discussed earlier. In their engagement in activist practices, they create spaces of connection and meaning-making to negotiate a symbolic repertoire of common aims and commitments that maintain their community.

Having presented my main findings and how they relate to my research questions in the previous sections, I now move on to the theoretical implications of my analysis and how my work connects to the anthropological discussion of community in the context of conflict, violence, and division.

6.3. Combining Anthropological Theories of Conflict and Community

I have based my analysis on a theoretical framework that has integrated theories on violence and resistance, as well as theories on community and ritual. This has enabled me to interpret activists' practices and their connections in a way that has revealed their community as deeply intertwined with the conflict's reality, rather than isolated from it.

Turner's (1969) concept of *communitas* has guided me in the beginning, as it initially seems to fit perfectly the descriptions of my interlocutors of creating a sense of community and unity among members, and building spaces for Palestinian-Israeli encounters outside of the logic of division between the two people. I have then realized that it cannot describe how activists build community because it romanticizes unity, excludes the influence of structures by assuming that these moments of connection exist outside of hierarchy, and expects a transition as the outcome of *communitas*. The concept has helped to orient the explanations of my interlocutors, but it

has lacked acknowledgment of their differences due to the divisive and violent nature of the conflict structure.

To make up for this gap of diversity in my analysis, I turned to Cohen's (1985/1993) approach, which emphasizes communality over unity and offers a perspective on the symbolic construction of community to reflect on how Palestinian and Israeli activists build community without unity. Accordingly, their connection can be understood as symbolically constructed through symbols of shared values and goals. The community is created through practices that can be understood as symbols themselves, which are, however, not interpreted the same way by every activist. Instead, they are given different meanings by each individual, allowing connections despite differing perspectives. My findings, therefore, show that their community ties cannot be described as a collective identity (Gawerc 2017), which implies a sense of unity, but are instead based on a diversity of identities unified through shared symbols. This understanding shows the complexity of group bonds across differences. My findings further demonstrate why Turner's notion fails to capture these dynamics, as the Israeli-Palestinian activist community is sustained not through a transformative process outside of structure, but is instead deeply intertwined with it.

To capture not only how activists make sense of the current violent escalations, but also of how these different perspectives and interpretations of symbols are formed, theories of violence and conflict have been essential for my analysis. Especially Veena Das's (2007) account of the descent of violent events in everyday life has helped me to focus my attention on how activists deal with their experiences and feelings of it, not only in their day-to-day life but also in their relationships with other activists. Alongside Nordstrom's (1997) descriptions of how different groups work together to make peace in Mozambique and the idea that different perspectives make for other experiences of violence (Nordstrom & Robben 2000: 5), I conclude that the conflict creates a different reality for Palestinian and Israeli activists that has to be considered and was described in detail in my analysis. Early anthropological contributions by Evans-Pritchard (1969) and Gluckman (1940/1991) highlight the potential of internal group conflict to maintain inner peace. Although this has been helping to view activists' negotiation as a means to create their group bond, my account also shows that we have to think of community further than as ties between family or otherwise related individuals.

By bringing together Cohen's (1985/1993) symbolic construction and Das's (2007) account of violence in everyday life, my analysis suggests that Palestinian-Israeli activist communities

can persist across differences by negotiating perspectives under structures of asymmetry. This may not be a transformative process, yet it has the potential to imagine transformation through practices (Seligman et al. 2008) and thereby adds value after all. My thesis, thus, not only offers new insights into how Israeli and Palestinian activists deal with the pressure of the current post-October 2023 conflict, but also contributes to an anthropological discussion of community in the context of logics of separation and heightened conflict.

6.4. Reflections, Limitations, and Future Directions

My thesis has focused on a small number of Israeli-Palestinian activist organizations, providing insights into collaboration under extreme conditions. Due to the online research I have implemented in response to recent regional insecurities, there have been limitations in collecting data. While this approach has limited my ability to observe everyday practices directly, it has also allowed me to access international activist networks and conversations through my online participation that might have been missed on-site. To deepen the anthropological understanding of community building among Palestinian and Israeli activists, conducting ethnographic fieldwork on-site could contribute to capturing a more nuanced view of everyday practices and how they translate into community creation among activists. Furthermore, the diversity of activism in the region makes it interesting to analyze other organizations as well, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how activists negotiate the realities of occupation and conflict and work towards a connection with the other side.

To conclude, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that while the reality of conflict poses challenges to the persistence of Israeli-Palestinian peace organizations, these groups continue to find ways to build relationships beyond their differences through activism. To close my discussion of the dynamics of Israeli-Palestinian community building, I return to the words of Palestinian activist Amal, which capture the essence of what their collaborative work is for her:

“When a group of people comes together to convey a humanitarian message, it transcends all borders and all barriers.” (Amal)

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