

Panel submission - ISA 2016 (Atlanta)

Panel Title – Nonviolent conflict transformation and power asymmetry: The Israeli-Palestinian struggle for justice and peace

Abstract

This panel will explore the journey towards justice and peace in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory through bottom-up transformational strategies inside an asymmetric power system. Conflict management and resolution theories have struggled to engage with the complex dynamics of power asymmetry in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the distinct failures of the Oslo Accords. In response, the papers on this panel propose a theoretical framework for peace practice that relies on the escalation of nonviolent conflict including protest, collective resistance, and nonviolent direct action.

This panel aims to disrupt the discouraging narratives emerging from upper-level peace efforts and proposes that elite actors should be pressured by grassroots level actors to revise their peacebuilding plans towards an end to occupation. This panel weaves together a discussion of fundamental themes such as the relationship of power to nonviolent political action, the transformation of grievance into resistance, the efficacy of cooperation and dialogue, the challenge of transnational civil and political societies, and the barriers facing nonviolent peace action. This panel's analysis benefits from a strong Palestinian voice, which grounds the discussion in current and relevant developments. The panel members hope to demonstrate that viable peace action alternatives exist for bitterly intractable conflicts.

Tags: Israeli-Palestinian peace, conflict transformation, resistance

Chair/Discussant - Mohammed Abu-Nimer

Professor Mohammed Abu-Nimer, of the International Peace and Conflict Resolution program at the American University School of International Service, serves as Director of the Peacebuilding and Development Institute. He is an expert on conflict resolution and dialogue for peace, and has conducted interreligious conflict resolution training and interfaith dialogue workshops in conflict areas around the world, including Palestine, Israel, Egypt, Northern Ireland, the Philippines (Mindanao), and Sri Lanka. In addition to his articles and publications, Dr. Abu-Nimer is the co-founder and co-editor of the Journal of Peacebuilding and Development.

Paper 1 - Iain Atack (Trinity College, University of Dublin)

Cooperative power, nonviolent resistance and social transformation

This conceptual paper explores the relationship between power and nonviolent political action by distinguishing between two types of power - power as domination ('power over') and power as cooperation ('power with'). Power as domination involves structural violence through the systematic and institutionalised denial or frustration of human needs. Power as cooperation explains the efficacy of nonviolent political action as a form of resistance against injustice and oppression, with the aim of achieving social and political reforms or even regime change.

Analysts of strategic nonviolence such as Gene Sharp suggest that it provides a distinctive set of methods of social and political action that can be effective in realizing political objectives. This paper argues that nonviolence also requires and supports more fundamental processes of social and political transformation involving the reduction or elimination of structural violence and 'power as domination'. This is particularly pertinent to protracted and asymmetrical conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This paper concludes that the purpose of nonviolent political action is to provide an effective alternative to direct violence, and to exchange social and political forms of organisation based on 'power as domination' with those aimed at the satisfaction of fundamental human needs.

Tag words: nonviolence, power, social change

Bio

Dr. Iain Atack is Assistant Professor in International Peace Studies and Head of the Confederal

School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology at Trinity College, University of Dublin. He obtained his D.Phil. from the University of Ulster for a thesis on contingent pacifism and moral pluralism. Dr. Atack has authored two books, *Nonviolence and Political Theory* (2012) and *The Ethics of Peace and War* (2005) with Edinburgh University Press. His research interests include the ethics and politics of nonviolent action and dimensions and processes of peacebuilding. He has worked for a number of peace and development NGOs in Canada, Ireland and Sri Lanka.

Paper 2 - Michael Schulz & Stellan Vinthagen (University of Gothenburg)

Grassroots' everyday resistance and peace in Rwanda, Macedonia, and Israel/Palestine

Abstract

This paper examines the role of 'resistance from below' following a top-down peace process where objections are raised by significant portions of the local population. Using Rwanda, Macedonia, and Israel/Palestine as case studies, this paper has two overarching objectives: 1) to empirically investigate how local publics perceive and resist long-term peace processes that have not yet achieved a just and sustainable peace; and 2) to clarify how the dynamics of grassroots everyday grievances against local elites and external 'liberal peace' actors morph into active resistance. Previous research has explored the difficulties in implementing peace agreements, but few empirical studies have theorized and explained the subtleties of grassroots' involvement and resistance.

Based on the results of public opinion questionnaires, this paper concludes that setbacks and implementation problems often cause envisaged short-term interventions to mutate into long-term processes that nurture non-supportive groups and growing public grievance. Key events are identified that cause local expectations to shift and 'quiet grievances' to form, which can escalate to outright violence. Further, this paper argues that many resistance activities in the case studies can be perceived as an expression of ignored peace expectations. Thus, grassroots resistance is an expression of the desired peace.

Tags: Grassroots resistance, peace processes, grievances

Bio

Dr. Michael Schulz is Associate Professor in Peace and Development Research at the School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg. He has previously been Head of Peace and Development Research, and Head of the Department for the Interdisciplinary Study of Human Conditions. Dr. Schulz is currently the coordinator of the EU funded TEMPUS project in Macedonia. He has also served as the coordinator for several capacity-building programmes in Rwanda involving social reconstruction and reconciliation. These projects also included work on Masters and PhD level education with the National University of Rwanda.

Dr. Stellan Vinthagen is Associate Professor of Sociology in the Department of Social and Behavioural Studies, University of Gothenburg. He is scholar-activist, and serves as co-leader of the Resistance Studies Group at the University of Gothenburg, where his research has focused on resistance, power, social movements, nonviolent action, conflict transformation and social change. He has written or edited eight books and numerous articles, including 'Nonviolent Resistance and Culture' (2012) (with M. Sørensen) in *Peace & Change*, and *Tackling Trident* (edited with J. Kenrick and K. Mason). Dr. Vinthagen was recently appointed as the Inaugural Endowed Chair in the Study of Nonviolent Direct Action and Civil Resistance at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Paper 3 - Chuck Thiessen (Coventry University)

Is cooperation and dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians leading to peace? Mapping the perceptions of a divided peace community

Abstract

This paper examines competing conceptions within the Israeli and Palestinian peace communities of what the journey towards peace should look like inside the distinct power asymmetry of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Divergence of opinion and practice centres on contentious peace initiatives that require cooperation and dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis. Proponents argue that these initiatives are able to reconstruct individual and group identities, and are prerequisite to peaceful relations. Detractors argue that these initiatives contribute to processes of 'normalization' and are trapped in a revolving door of short-term gains that cannot challenge occupation and ensure human

rights. Instead, they propose escalating nonviolent conflict and resistance including boycotts, divestment, and sanctions against Israel.

This paper bases its findings upon face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 40 leaders of peace organizations in Israel and the West Bank that either support or resist cooperation and dialogue initiatives. Situating its analysis in the debate between the two sides, this paper explores how perceptions of these initiatives can be interpreted for the future of peace work in Israel-Palestine. This paper proposes a novel theoretical construct that can aid peace actors in deciding whether dialogue is a constructive conflict resolution tool in contexts with significant power asymmetry.

Tags: Israel/Palestine, cooperation, dialogue

Bio

Dr. Chuck Thiessen is a Research Fellow in Peacebuilding at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University in the UK. Dr. Thiessen's research has focused on the ethics of internationally-supported conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes in Palestine, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Northern Ireland. He has published a variety of books and articles related to external interventions in conflict zones, and is the co-principle investigator for a EU-Marie Curie project 'Perspectives of Conflict Transformation from the Middle East and Europe' (CTMEE) that supports joint research activities between researchers in Palestine, Turkey, and the UK. Dr. Thiessen has consulted for the UN and a variety of peacebuilding NGOs in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Paper 4 – Mufid Qassoum (Arab American University in Jenin, West Bank)

Transnational political and civil societies and their role in the transformation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Abstract

This paper critically explores the status of Palestinian civil society and its resistance roles in relation to transnational political and civil societies. I argue that transnational political and civil societies have undermined the movement towards justice and peace for Palestinians. Central to this argument is the pernicious use of the Oslo Accords and subsequent peace processes to suppress popular nonviolent Palestinian resistance, end the Arab boycott against Israel, and enable Israel to deeply integrate into the emerging global neo-liberal economy.

Based on a critical examination of the literature, this paper proposes that the invalidation of Palestinian civil society was achieved by commissioning global civil society to extend a matrix of controls and external influence over its Palestinian counterpart including debilitating dependence on donors. The bustling and vivid Palestinian civil society of the 1970s and 1980s has been largely dismantled, pacified, and de-politicized, with many leaders coopted by superficial concerns. A state of anomie, fragmentation and mistrust is the new Palestinian currency in the post-Oslo era. In conclusion, I propose renewed critical thinking about global civil society in Palestine and the manner in which new forms of pressure can be exerted on the transnational political class to push for conflict transformation.

Tags: civil society, transnational political society, Oslo Accords

Bio

Dr. Mufid Qassoum is Assistant Professor of International Development and Vice President for International Relations at the Arab American University of Jenin (AAUJ) in the West Bank. He obtained his Ph.D. in urban planning, public policy and international development at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). Previous to his current position Dr. Qassoum worked as the General Director of the Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies (Madar) in Ramallah and taught international development at UIC. He is currently spearheading the development of a MA in Conflict Resolution and Development at AAUJ. He has recently published a co-authored book, *The Political Economy of Israel's High Tech and its Spatial Implications* (2014), with the Institute Of Palestine Studies.

Paper 5 - Marwan Darweish (Coventry University, UK)

Popular protest in Palestine: The history and uncertain future of unarmed resistance

Abstract

Using the case study of the Palestinian unarmed popular resistance movement against the construction of the Separation Wall and Israeli settlements in the West Bank, this paper explores the efficacy of nonviolence as a value system to resist injustice and oppression, and struggle for peace and justice. Nonviolent strategies have proven effective since domination and oppression are partially dependent on the willing or forced cooperation of the oppressed. It is necessary for civil resisters to identify and actively undermine key pillars of support for an oppressive regime by raising the costs of repressive policies and muting the impact of violence.

Based on more than 100 in-depth interviews and an opinion poll in Israel/West Bank/Gaza Strip, this paper explores the necessary conditions and infrastructure for collective resistance and nonviolent action, including the roles of Israeli and international solidarity movement actors. It presents a typology of resistance in Palestine and Israel, and highlights key challenges facing these movements. This paper concludes that a crisis of leadership, political fractures, inadequate strategy and coordination, low participation, a lack of substantive achievements, and an apparent inability to motivate transformation of Israeli society are key barriers to overcome before just peace is realized for Palestinians.

Tags: unarmed resistance, Occupied Palestinian Territories, nonviolence

Bio

Dr. Marwan Darweish is a Principal Lecturer at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University. He is the director of the Post Graduate Certificate Course in Conflict Resolution Skills, and was previously the academic director of the MA in Peace and Reconciliation Studies. His current research focuses on peace processes, conflict transformation and nonviolence. Dr. Darweish carries extensive experience across the Middle East region and has a special interest in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. He recently led a team of researchers to implement a survey on the nonviolent movement in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the roles of Israeli and international peace actors. He has considerable international experience in leading training courses in conflict transformation and peacebuilding, and in undertaking consultancies in strategy development to intervene and transform conflict. His is the co-author of *Popular Protest in Palestine: The History and Uncertain Future of Unarmed Resistance* with Pluto Press (2015).