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## Navigating “Red Lines” and Transcending the Binary: Tensions in the Pedagogical and Political Goals of Peace Education Work

### Abstract

In this article I explore the tensions that arise in the context of educational initiatives implemented by organizations that have both pedagogical and political aspirations. I draw on the work of Sadaka Reut, a veteran Jewish-Palestinian peace education organization, to highlight how the ideological commitments held by an organization working for structural equality can limit possibilities for openness to multiple perspectives and can thus serve as a barrier towards successfully achieving pedagogical aspirations, in particular Sadaka Reut’s goal of educating towards a binational community of Jewish and Palestinian activists working in partnership. I also highlight the tension inherent in working simultaneously to help Jewish and Palestinian participants develop a strong sense of ethno-national identity; *and* to facilitate the development of a transcendent identity as activists in solidarity.

**Keywords:** *peace education, Jewish, Palestinian, political, pedagogical, tensions*

### Author Bio(s)

Karen Ross is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Conflict Resolution, Human Security and Global Governance at UMASS Boston. Her research and professional work focus on questions at the intersection of grassroots peace-building, education, and social activism. She is particularly interested in methodological and conceptual issues related to assessing the impact of endeavors aimed at nonviolent social change.

## **Navigating “Red Lines” and Transcending the Binary: Tensions in the Pedagogical and Political Goals of Peace Education Work**

**Karen Ross**

I address in the following pages, a relatively un-explored area of scholarship in the peace education literature: the internal dynamics of the organizations implementing peace education initiatives. I explore organizational tensions that arise in the context of educational initiatives implemented by organizations that have both aspirations for achieving structural change and more inclusive pedagogical goals. I focus on the work of Sadaka Reut, a veteran peace education organization with goals of educating Jewish and Palestinian youth in Israel (all citizens of the State) about their socio-political environment, developing Jewish-Palestinian solidarity, and motivating activism to address structural inequities in Israeli society. My research explores the tensions that arise in the context of these multiple goals, particularly as they manifest in terms of two issues. First, I speak to the “red line” Sadaka Reut must navigate in terms of helping participants become open to multiple perspectives *and* creating a binational community of activists working for structural change. I also investigate the difficulties inherent in helping participants develop an awareness of ethnonational identity (particularly among Palestinians) even as the organization aims to facilitate the development of a transcendent activist identity among its participants.

I begin this discussion by presenting the narrative articulated to me by Shira (a pseudonym), a young woman who spent three years in Sadaka Reut during what she characterized as the most tumultuous period of her adolescence. While she described herself as “mainstream,” social, and popular at school, Shira nonetheless asserted that during those years she felt most accepted in Sadaka Reut, where she belonged to a group of Jewish and Palestinian youth. Shira spoke of mentoring she received from her group facilitator and of close relationships made with group participants and organization staff, as important aspects of her feeling of community.

Several years later, however, Shira lamented that she no longer felt she had a place within Sadaka Reut. Having served in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and later worked in a pre-military preparatory academy, Shira felt shunned when participating in Sadaka Reut’s facilitation training and during alumni social events. Although she felt that given the critical worldview she had developed in Sadaka Reut, both her military service and post-military endeavors were congruent with the organization’s values, Shira said that the very act of her serving resulted in no longer

feeling accepted. Thus, while she had internalized the central lessons Sadaka Reut wished to impart, Shira's actions put her outside of what the organization deemed politically acceptable.

Shira's story, and others like it, raise a number of questions I address in this manuscript: How do peace education organizations with clear ideological orientations—often considered politicized or “radical” organizations in contrast with more “mainstream” organizations that focus on interpersonal relationships (Ross, 2016)—reconcile tensions between pedagogical and political goals? How do these tensions shape participant perspectives on organizational dynamics? And what relationship do pedagogical practices have to addressing intractable conflicts and facilitating social change? In the following pages, I illuminate the tensions Sadaka Reut faces as an Israeli educational organization committed to embodying and promoting socio-political change, particularly in the form of equality for Palestinian citizens.

### **Review of the Literature**

Two main bodies of scholarship provide a starting point for helping understand the tensions that underlie the work of Sadaka Reut and more broadly of peace education initiatives. First, literature on the relationship between education and social change serves as a framework for exploring the political nature of education *writ large* and the need to frame the goals of education within the broader sociopolitical dynamics in which it is implemented. Second, scholarship in the peacebuilding and conflict resolution fields illustrates the relationship between the sociopolitical context and the individually oriented goals of many peace education initiatives.

### **Education and Social Change**

In the education field, scholars have addressed the tension between education as a tool for maintaining the status quo and as one for changing it in different ways. One strand of literature illustrates the challenges to dominant educational paradigms from civil society groups and organizations that are connected to broader social movements (Fetner & Kush, 2007; Pizmony-Levy & Saraisky, 2016), as well as policy makers. Some of these movements are concerned primarily with the education system itself—e.g., the homeschooling movement (Apple, 2000; Stevens, 2001) or opt out movement (Pizmony-Levy & Saraisky, 2016; Pizmony-Levy & Cosman, 2017). However, others are connected to broader attempts at social transformation: the emergence of school-based Gay-Straight Alliances (Fetner & Kush, 2007), for example, can be understood as part of the broader LGBTQ rights movement.

Scholarship in this area provides important insights into the interaction of socio-political

issues with the institution of education (Meyer, 1977) and lends support to Gal Levy's (2013) argument that the so-called depoliticization of education reflects a refusal to acknowledge the explicitly political nature of the educational sphere. It thus highlights the importance of examining educational initiatives within the broader socio-political context in which they take place. However, this literature is still limited in several respects. First, it has focused primarily on formal schooling, despite the many out-of-school arenas where education takes place. Second, existing literature mostly explores the interactions *between* educational institutions and their challengers, treating these two entities as separate. One exception is Rebecca Tarlau's (2015) exploration of educational institutions developed by the Brazil Landless Workers Movement (MST), which illustrates the movement's process of taking control of rural Brazilian public schools in areas it occupies. Tarlau's analysis is unique in that it highlights the *integration* of social movement and educational spheres, and thus illustrates the tensions between political and educational goals embodied in a single entity. I suggest that further research is necessary to explore these kinds of tensions, particularly as they emerge in the context of hybrid organizations (Minkoff, 2002) that have both educational and political missions. In particular, this is necessary in the context of peace education initiatives in intractable conflict regions such as in the Israeli/Palestinian context, where peace education is implemented largely by non-governmental organizations (Bar-Tal, 2009), rather than in formal school settings that serve as the focus of most peace education literature (e.g., Bickmore & Parker, 2014; Hantzopoulos, 2011).

### **Peace Education, Conflict, and Structural Inequities**

Within the peacebuilding and conflict resolution literature, many studies explore educational initiatives bringing together individuals from conflict groups, often referred to as contact or encounter initiatives. This scholarship has primarily focused on possibilities for achieving individual level change through participation in peace education and encounters (Ross & Lazarus, 2015; Ohanyan & Lewis, 2005; Schroeder & Rosen, 2016). In the social psychology literature, moreover, decades of research have assessed Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, exploring whether, and under what conditions, its premises hold true (see, e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Paluck, Green, & Green, 2017), or in contrast, what a Social Identity Theory framework (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) can offer encounter initiatives (Abu-Nimer, 1999; Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004). While these two sets of literature suggest that encounters can shift individual attitudes and even participant behaviors, little empirical research has examined the connection between

individual transformation and the potential for broader societal change (for exceptions, see Cromwell, 2019; Lazarus, 2011; Ross, 2017).

Within both fields of study, however, scholars have begun to critique encounters for their primarily interpersonal rather than structural emphasis, and their lack of focus on power imbalances (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005; Dixon, Durrheim, Kerr, & Thomae, 2013; Thiessen & Darweish, 2018). For instance, recent studies have explored relationships and tensions between intergroup contact and engaging in collective action for social change. While some of this literature suggests that contact can lead to greater support for social change engagement, especially among dominant group members (Selvanathan, Techakesari, Tropp, & Barlow, 2017), other studies indicate that contact and collective action exist in contradiction: contact with the “Other” can lead to a greater sense of intergroup harmony and decrease the sense of urgency for changing the status quo (Durrheim & Dixon, 2018; Saguy, 2017).

This emerging strand of research provides important insights into the links between initiatives aimed at individuals and broader structural issues. However, this literature has not closely examined how possibilities for inter-group interactions are shaped by the substance of these initiatives or by the sociopolitical context outside of the program itself. Nor has it addressed the internal dynamics of organizations that explicitly aim to use peace education as a tool for promoting social change engagement, or how these dynamics might shape the experiences of participants. In other words, program processes and outcomes have been a focus of academic research; however, to a large degree, dynamics of the organizations implementing them have not. I address that issue here, building on my exploration in Ross (2017a).

### **Sadaka Reut and the Socio-Political Context of Encounters in Israel**

To address this gap, I focus on Sadaka Reut, a Palestinian-Jewish non-governmental organization in Israel focused on binational partnership and youth empowerment through education. Founded in 1982, Sadaka Reut brings together Jewish and Palestinian youth in Israel to counter dominant societal narratives, foster partnership for social change, and empower participants to be active agents of that change. The organization implements two primary programs: a weekly, year-long after-school program for junior and senior high school programs, Building a Culture of Peace (*BCP*); and Community in Action (*CiA*), a year-long, 3 day/week program for recent high school graduates. In recent years, Sadaka Reut has also established several university-based groups focused on Jewish-Palestinian dialogue and activism on campuses around

the country. Through a combination of uni-national and bi-national work, in each of these programs Sadaka Reut facilitators guide participants through a process of developing awareness of ethno-national identity and its significance; understanding systems of oppression, including as these manifest in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; creating a sense of binational partnership as foundational for change; and developing tools to address inequities in their local communities (Sadaka Reut, 2014).

In its early years, Sadaka Reut's primary emphasis was on inter-personal relationship building. However, in the years since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000, it has shifted to raising awareness about systemic injustices in Israel and developing a cadre of binational activists who focus on Jewish-Palestinian partnership to that end. In the last decade, Sadaka Reut has also primarily recruited participants from marginalized Jewish and Palestinian communities within Israel, to engage young people who do not belong to groups traditionally most active in peace-building activities (Helman, 1999).

Sadaka Reut's approach is characterized by several elements, including drawing on the personal experiences of participants, and building links between personal experiences and structural issues, with an emphasis on developing practical experience engaging in binational social activism. The organization's approach has motivated participants to engage in social change endeavors (Ross, 2017, 2019); however, it also has led to some frustration among both participants and staff. These frustrations are particularly noticeable when they highlight tensions between the organization's educational aims of promoting critical awareness and motivation to engage in social change, and the political goals and ideological commitments adopted at the organizational level.

These issues must be examined within the broader context of the socio-political environment within which Sadaka Reut functions and ongoing tensions between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel. While these tensions are related to the broader conflict between Israel and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, they are also distinct, reflecting the status of Palestinian citizens in Israel and the overt as well as implicit discrimination this group experiences (Coursen-Neff, 2004; Ghanem & Ozacky-Lazar, 2003; Rabinowitz, 2001; Rouhana, 1997). Discrimination is expressed not only institutionally, e.g., through eligibility for certain employment opportunities (Ben-Porat, 2003), but also in the form of anti-Arab sentiment, including in the form of vandalism and physical violence. To address this, various forms of inter-group encounters or peace education initiatives have brought Jewish and Palestinian citizens

together since the 1980s (Abu-Nimer, 1999); these programs include initiatives supported by the Israeli Ministry of Education as programs implemented through local and international NGOs, and span a continuum from initiatives focusing on inter-personal relationships to those like Sadaka Reut with an orientation towards using the encounter as a basis for confronting and possibly changing structural inequities in Israeli society.

Politically, or rather ideologically, Sadaka Reut's goals are largely aligned with the Israeli "peace camp" or "peace movement" (Hall-Cathala, 1987). Although this movement has traditionally focused on challenging Israeli government policy vis-a-vis occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, parts of the movement have adopted in recent years an alternative frame emphasizing justice and equality and the unequal treatment of disadvantaged groups within Israel (Fleischmann, 2016; Hallward, 2009; Hermann, 2009). A particularly contentious issue within the movement is service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), an issue that has in fact been central to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a whole.

Within Israel's Jewish community, conscription to the IDF is mandatory for both men and women, with some exceptions; moreover, military service has historically played a central role in shaping the construction of full Israeli citizenship (see, e.g., Helman, 1999a). Within the context of hostile relationships with neighboring countries, the IDF and its symbolism in the Israeli Jewish community as a "melting pot" characterized by egalitarianism has been described by Yagil Levy (1998) as a "sacred cow": an institution about which criticism is outside the realm of legitimate public discussion. For Jewish Israelis, the military is a central part of civilian life, not a separate sphere; exemplifying this, schools explicitly act to cultivate citizens who see defense of the state as a desirous role (Ben-Porath, 2006). For Jewish youth, therefore, the decision not to enlist is momentous, both because it constitutes, as Lazarus (2011) puts it, "a radical break with dominant norms" (p.241), and because of the resultant consequences it can have economically and socially. Even within much of Israel's peacebuilding community, military service is considered *du rigueur*, and alumni of many peace education initiatives go on to complete their IDF service, including in combat roles (Lazarus, 2011).

In contrast, the IDF serves as an anathema for the Palestinian community in the context of the lived realities they experience as part of ongoing conflict and occupation, including interacting with soldiers when crossing checkpoints, in the context of home demolitions, or (in the West Bank and Gaza) in the direct context of military operations. Although in the early years of Israel's

occupation of the West Bank and Gaza the IDF remained quite distant from the Palestinian population, this changed in the wake of the Oslo process, leading to a daily experience of occupation that had not been previously felt and continues to intensify (Rabinowitz & Abu-Baker, 2005). For Palestinian citizens of Israel, many of whom share familial ties—as well as a national sense of identity—with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, it is therefore no surprise that the IDF is viewed with suspicion, all the more so given that Palestinian citizens (with a few exceptions) do not serve in the military and as a result are unable to access certain benefits provided only to those who have served (Yiftachel, 2009). In this context, for many Palestinians (including those involved in binational initiatives), IDF service is perceived as immoral. Indeed, the very legitimacy of the military is subject to question (Kanaaneh, 2003).

Given the centrality of the IDF as an institution for both Jewish and Palestinian citizens (albeit in different ways), questions about its legitimacy and the morality of military service serve as a focal point for addressing the broader issue within binational organizations about how Jewish-Palestinian solidarity should and does manifest. For Sadaka Reut, this issue is exacerbated by its focus in recent years on recruiting participants from marginalized or peripheral communities, where refusal to serve (for Jews) is an even greater departure from dominant norms than it is in wealthier, European Jewish communities (e.g., Levy & Sasson-Levy, 2008). As I discuss below, Sadaka Reut faces a tension between the way it addresses the IDF in relation to solidarity from a political perspective, and the way it approaches the question of solidarity in its pedagogical work.

### **Methodology**

This article draws on data from research with Sadaka Reut dating back to 2010. My initial research from 2010 through 2013 focused on Sadaka Reut's long-term impact on former participants. Findings from that study, consisting of over 100 life history interviews with staff and alumni of Sadaka Reut and a second organization, as well as observation of the two organizations' programs, illustrated the salience of Sadaka Reut's role in helping participants develop a critical awareness of their socio-political environment, as well as the positive impact of participation in Sadaka Reut's initiatives for the continued engagement in peace-building and social change initiatives (Ross, 2013, 2017; Ross & Lazarus, 2015).

Results of that study led to additional fieldwork in 2015-2018 to better understand two key *organizational* elements of Sadaka Reut's work. First, drawing on my understanding of Sadaka Reut's success in motivating participants to be socio-politically active, this additional research

addressed the mechanisms of Sadaka Reut's approach in order to explore what about its pedagogy and structure allowed for this (Ross, 2019). Second, I was interested in the significance of Sadaka Reut's work as an organization committed to Jewish-Palestinian partnership in terms of its staffing choices and organizational dynamics. The analysis in this article draws primarily from fieldwork in 2015-2016, which emphasized the mechanisms of Sadaka Reut's work. This focus on organizational structure and pedagogy in tandem brought to light many congruencies salient for shaping participants, but also several of the organizational tensions Sadaka Reut faces—which I discuss here.

My 2015-2016 interviews, with seventeen (17) former participants in Sadaka Reut programs and with eight (8) staff members, focused on specific experiences in Sadaka Reut that shaped their continued social change engagement (for participants), and on goals and implementation of Sadaka Reut programs (for staff). In my analysis, I also draw upon interviews with nine (9) staff members and seven (7) board members conducted in 2018, which addressed the dynamics of Jewish-Palestinian partnership within Sadaka Reut and implications of the organization's binational emphasis. All interviews ranged from approximately 40 minutes to 1.5 hours; they were conducted in Hebrew, recorded using an audio recorder and transcribed verbatim. Translation occurred only for the purposes of quotation.

I analyzed these data using reconstructive hermeneutic analysis (Carspecken, 2007), a set of techniques that emphasize reconstructing meaning and experience as these are understood by participants, specifically by making explicit participants' implicit understandings. Within this framework, I examined my data holistically, reading transcripts in full and writing initial memos discussing potential angles for exploration. I then coded my data inductively, generating new codes and sub-codes as needed as I went through each transcript. Further analysis focused on refinement of codes and categories as broad thematic issues emerged. My discussion here focuses primarily on interview data that addresses tensions arising as a result of Sadaka Reut's educational and political areas of focus.

I utilized several techniques to support the interpretations emerging from this analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These included prolonged engagement in the field, through my nine years of work with Sadaka Reut; triangulation of interview data with data collected via other sources, such as monitoring reports and participation in staff retreats; and member checking in the form of discussions with Sadaka Reut staff and participants based on preliminary analyses.

## **Pedagogical and Political Tensions**

Below, I discuss two issues where the intersection between Sadaka Reut's educational and political missions create tensions. First, I address the tension inherent in creating an educational space open to reflection and learning within an organization with ideological "red lines," particularly related to service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Second, I discuss the complexity of Sadaka Reut's mission of educating for Jewish-Palestinian solidarity in activism for social change as an organization committed to the empowerment of Palestinians in Israel.

### **(Limiting) Opportunities for Expressing and Hearing Divergent Perspectives**

As an educational organization, Sadaka Reut prides itself on fostering an environment where participants can raise questions about multiple issues. The organization emphasizes a process of connecting personal experiences to structural issues in order to enable development of political literacy, that is, in the words of one of the organization's co-directors, "the political understanding of power dynamics in society, of the systems that are at work within society, oppression, the different systems of oppression." Indeed, many alumni affirmed Sadaka Reut's commitment to encouraging open discussions that enabled participants to develop a more complex understanding of the socio-political reality within which they live. For instance, Ilona, a Jewish participant in the *CiA* program, told me that for her, Sadaka Reut was a place where she could talk about anything:

It always made me happy that we could talk about [challenging things], all of the difficult things...I could always trust that the other side would understand. I mean, that you wouldn't have to apologize all the time, and also that you could place yourself within a system, that is something that Sadaka really trains people to be able to do.

As part of our conversation, Ilona also explained that particularly memorable about her time in Sadaka Reut was the confidence she felt in not having to leave out part of her identity or background when engaging with others. For her, Sadaka Reut epitomized an organization where all perspectives and identities were welcome:

That was one of the strongest experiences in Sadaka Reut, was having the confidence that it doesn't matter who you are or what you are, you can take part and change reality...and you don't have to feel guilty about the place you were born, you can change things out of

awareness, in a way that allows for real partnership. No person can demand of me to erase pieces of me.

Other participants reaffirmed Ilona's perspective. For instance, Maya, another Jewish *CiA* participant, said, "I always felt like a weird kid in school, not totally...able to express myself, and in Sadaka I felt that I was valued." Likewise, Tzipporah told me, "For me, Sadaka was like a protected container, where I could say anything I was thinking, and it would be accepted." Jamal, a Palestinian *CiA* participant, noted that the ability to say anything was a starting point for building relationships, as well as for discussing and grappling with socio-political issues in more concrete and complex ways. He further stated,

Both sides come and pour, excuse my expression, all of the shit they are carrying against one another out, and I think that after somebody states what's really inside him, then the connections are created, OK? That means that you see all of the reality out there... and then when we came to talk about the issues, we already know the reality of the other side.

Among many individuals who spoke about the openness encouraged within Sadaka Reut, several specifically noted the organization's educational approach as providing the foundation for this. For instance, Taleb, a Palestinian *CiA* participant I interviewed in 2011, told me:

*Tachles*, if you sit together and think and don't just start yelling at one another and defending one another, but [thinking] together what each one of us needs in order to get to a certain understanding, that's what I'm talking about—how it's possible to succeed to do something at the end. That is, that we will succeed in getting to a certain point where we can build and create together.

Hiba, another Palestinian who had been both a *CiA* participant and a staff member, similarly spoke to the significance of Sadaka Reut's pedagogical approach. She noted,

The funniest thing about it is...ask everyone, I don't think someone will be able to define [partnership] precisely...Or what exactly needs to be done in order for partnership to exist. But somehow in the process we went through, what characterizes it is that there's no conceding. You don't give in to anyone on anything, for instance, if someone says something to you and it seems to you, if there's amplification there of something that's not

right, or it's not clear, you have to sit with that person until he understands what he is saying and why he said it.

Key about Hiba's comment is the importance of the openness to criticism as a foundation for partnership, and the implication that it is the *lack* of a shared ideology that is necessary in order for partnership to occur—that is, that developing an understanding of multiple perspectives is central to creating partnership. Reinforcing this, Yana, another Palestinian *CiA* participant, distinguished between Sadaka Reut's approach and the approaches used by other organizations engaged in political activity. Yana specifically referenced the space Sadaka Reut creates for developing informed perspectives, rather than taking a stand immediately: "Nobody pressured me, like, now say things like this and now like that. It's something that came from us." She continued,

I think that's also part of the reason that, say, it was easier for me to come into Sadaka than into, say, an activity of some Parliamentary party. Because when you talk about party activity you need to come with a set, explicit opinion at the outset...What the party dictates—that's what there is. And [in Sadaka Reut], the differences among [people's perspectives] were quite wide.

Later in the interview Yana also distinguished Sadaka Reut's approach from other educational situations, noting, "It wasn't like a teacher who is present and trying to set the boundaries of the conversation." Carmel, a Jewish *CiA* participant, seconded this:

...they did [things] the right way, that is, an educational process that isn't directed towards a certain outcome. Because most of the educational processes that we in Israeli society are exposed to, are very directed in terms of their objectives.

The perspectives of these alumni highlight the degree to which many participants perceived Sadaka Reut to be a space for learning, and for using that learning process as the basis for developing a sense of partnership and solidarity. However, this perspective was not universally shared. Several former participants, particularly Jewish alumni, suggested that openness to discussing anything was the case only so long as perspectives fell within a certain range of views. In particular, discussion related to the IDF or enlistment, was a "no go" topic: an issue that was beyond the lines of what was acceptable for Sadaka Reut, as illustrated by Shira, the *BCP*

participant whose story I recounted at the start of the manuscript, who told me, “I really feel like, from the moment I enlisted, I lost my place in the organization.” Shira’s comment underscores the line that she and several others felt was drawn between what was open for discussion and what was not. As she put it, “The period during which I was in Sadaka Reut was exactly the time when I needed to make a decision about enlistment and how I do it.” However, Shira noted that she was unable to receive support in thinking through the decision, because, “I mean, the whole topic of service and soldiers, of the army, I felt like it was always outside of the boundaries [of what was acceptable to discuss].” Indeed, this feeling was reinforced after Shira finished her military service and returned to Sadaka Reut to participate in the organization’s facilitator training:

I remember that at the first meeting [of the facilitator course], we did this activity where everyone takes out their keys and says something about their keychain. So everyone took out their keychains and it was my turn, and I had this picture of my [army] unit, with us all in uniform, and, until the moment when I took it out, I was full of belonging to [my unit] and felt as though I had done a good job in my role, and suddenly, I arrived [at the facilitation training], and while I was speaking about [the picture] I started to cry, and then, a Palestinian woman started to ask me, how did I even enlist? And then when we went out during the break she asked me again, and I barely was able to stay through the rest of that meeting...I don’t know how it works but...in the end, there was this issue that I was a soldier, both in that first meeting, and in the last meeting [of the course] we spoke about indicators of success and whether it’s possible that there will be an alumnus who enlists and who is still an alumnus who is considered a success?

Shira’s statements are the most explicit among those who felt that discussion of the IDF within the organization was problematic, but she was far from the only one who highlighted this issue. Roni, who participated in *CiA* in the mid-2000s and did not enlist afterwards, told me that mentioning anything related to the IDF was problematic within Sadaka Reut. She said,

The year after [my *CiA* participation] a lot of my friends were still in the army, and...when I came to [visit Sadaka Reut] I spoke from the place I was at, which was surrounded by people who were all in the army aside from myself and whoever was with me in Sadaka

Reut...I felt like I was really insulted, like, every time I mentioned [the army], every year they would remind me that I had friends in the army, there was a big “anti” to that.

Even Adina, a Jewish woman with whom I spoke in 2010 and who overall had very positive perspectives of Sadaka Reut, spoke about the challenges inherent in what she perceived as a lack of legitimacy accorded to all perspectives about the IDF. Adina, who spent most of the year she was in *CiA* going through the process of obtaining conscientious objector status, told me about an argument she had with one of the Palestinian members of her *CiA* group, stemming from his anger at Jewish participants discussing military service:

I told [name of friend]...I said, these are topics that exist in Israeli society and I can't erase what's part of my life. The army is part of my life. I didn't go to the army, but it is something that I had to deal with for a long long time, and it's something that I'm required to do...it's something that exists. And like...so then the question is, do I need to erase or not, or not give expression to something that is part of the public space, say, on the street. Because on the street, the street is full of, exploding with Jewish identity. And in [Sadaka Reut], we are trying to do something different. So, in order to atone for what's happening on the street, in order to create some balance, I need to erase myself.

As these comments highlight, discussion of the IDF and military service seems to be a red line for Sadaka Reut in terms of acceptable discourse, at least according to some Jewish participants. However, even among staff, there is no clear consensus on whether this ideological line is warranted. On the one hand, Yaniv, a Jewish staff member, emphasized that the ideological line is important:

It actually sharpens, it enables, you know, moving forward, apparently with fewer people, but in a stronger and refined way. Also, one of the things that happens here, is that we want a community of activists to develop, who are motivated by working in binational partnership.

He continued, “It has advantages and disadvantages. And the obvious disadvantage of our ideological emphasis is that there are a lot of people outside [of it].”

Likewise, Reham, a Palestinian staff member and former *CiA* and *BCP* participant, pointed

out that in her eyes, opposing IDF enlistment is the foundation for Sadaka Reut's work. In other words, the decision not to enlist was not something that Reham thought Jewish participants might come to through their education in Sadaka Reut, but a clear ideological line that she believed should be the starting point for participating in Sadaka Reut's programming. As she put it, "From my personal perspective, I'm not willing to work with someone who thinks that the IDF is a legitimate army."

However, other staff members found the existence of a clear "line" to be problematic for an educational organization. For example, Orit, a former (Jewish) staff member, described to me a conversation she had with another (Palestinian) staff member. In this conversation, the Palestinian staff member told Orit that if she did not educate her Jewish participants *not* to enlist in the IDF, she would be betraying her Palestinian partners. Orit suggested that this was a problematic perspective for an organization that was primarily educational, adding, "If you stray [from the line], you're a traitor. That's a dangerous discourse."

Orit's comment suggests that views different from the dominant perspective within the organization (that is, views corresponding to the delegitimization of the IDF) are considered a betrayal to the ideology of Sadaka Reut as part of a broader movement. However, for Sadaka Reut as an organization that aims to educate participants, suggesting that the starting point is one that already is so far removed from the mainstream narrative in Jewish Israeli society limits possibilities for bringing in individuals who might believe in what is truly foundational to the organization: a shared belief in the equality of all citizens, and a need to model that equality through its own actions. In other words, it is certainly legitimate for the organization to draw lines in terms of its ideology, within a framework of centering the Palestinian perspective—or at least working to create a sense of equality for Jewish and Palestinian participants. Yet, this clear ideological line does not easily fit with Sadaka Reut's educational mission of helping participants develop a critical awareness of social reality through discussion of issues relevant to them. Indeed, it raises the question of whether Sadaka Reut actually undermines its own educational approach if it declares something that is so central to the Jewish community a red line.

### **Emphasizing Ethnonational Identity or Building a Collective Community of Activists?**

A second tension inherent in Sadaka Reut's work is reflected in its attempt to balance educating participants within the framework of separate Jewish-Palestinian identity claims, on the one hand, and creating a superordinate, collective identity as activists, on the other. Yasmin, a

Palestinian former staff member, spoke about the importance of creating awareness of identity issues, but also the potential challenges in doing so. She noted, “Sometimes, you know...two collectives are created in the room, Jews and Palestinians. We have an objective of creating something like that.” Immediately following this, however, Yasmin continued, “But today, I’m not sure I stand behind that anymore.” She continued,

The educational process creates polarization. It creates two collectives, out of the assumption that the moment you identify yourself with that collective, the Palestinian or the Jewish collective, you’ll want to take responsibility. I think that’s bullshit. I mean... it’s important to identify which side you’re on. But... it creates a “we” and a “them.” And when it comes to activism, you want that they’ll act out of solidarity, out of understanding...out of a place of standing behind the message with you...not just because “I’m a Jew and I understand that I’m the oppressor,” but because “I believe in this message.”

Yasmin’s comments suggest a tension between needing to address participants’ collective identity and their acknowledgment of belonging to oppressed and privileged groups, and simultaneously working to help them develop a sense of solidarity and activism that is not based just on this identity. The tension, in other words, lies in Sadaka Reut both embodying and educating towards a certain understanding of the relationship between identity groups as fixed in terms of a clear power dynamic between oppressor and oppressed, and attempting to transcend this very relationship in order to encourage joint action and solidarity.

Not all Sadaka Reut participants viewed this as a tension. For example, Maryam (a Palestinian participant) noted that while identity groupings were an important aspect of her *CiA* experience, she felt that the organization’s focus on solidarity and partnership transcended this. Maryam noted ongoing discussions about different struggles within Israeli society and how at different points, different groups should either lead, or be in solidarity with those leading, these struggles. She said:

[Solidarity] was a topic that we spoke about often...we would always speak about our place in the struggle, where we place ourselves in the struggle and who is leading the struggle. For instance we went to a demonstration in support of a [Jewish] conscientious

objector, and when I was there I didn't stand in the front lines, I was there in solidarity...and also for the Jews when there is an issue that is central to Palestinians or that speaks more to the Palestinian population, [the Jews] don't come from up above and say, "you need to do like this and this and this," instead they come, they hear what needs to be done, what the Palestinians want and how cooperation should happen with them.

For some Jewish participants, however, achieving a balance between emphasizing ethnonational identity and striving towards partnership was perceived as less successful. For instance, Karin noted that while a participant in the *CiA* program, she and another Jewish individual started meeting with a group of young (Palestinian) women in the Jaffa neighborhood where they lived. She said that after the program ended,

We wanted to keep working with [those girls] and we started a group...basically we were two Jewish women who facilitated a group of five girls who were all Palestinian, and that's something that we received a lot of criticism about.

*Karen (researcher):* You mean, because you two were Jewish?

Karin: Yes, two Jewish facilitators, because it reconstructs the power dynamics in society...if I had planned it on paper, I would have thought the model that Sadaka Reut uses is correct, the insistence that everything always be balanced—but in reality it doesn't always work; it's not always like that. I mean, there are all kinds of conditions, all kinds of things you have to work within, and most of all, the understanding that how things look from the outside aren't always the same as how they look from the inside.

Karin's statement voices the perspective that in modeling and promoting a certain form of Jewish-Palestinian equality (one explicitly highlighting ethnonational identity) as the way to promote change, Sadaka Reut placed constraints on what was perceived as "correct" activism in which participants and alumni may engage.

Dror's discussion of Sadaka Reut also addressed this issue. In particular, Dror, a Jewish alumnus of *CiA*, expressed frustration with the sense he received from Sadaka Reut that solidarity is only possible for those with privilege. He indicated that he saw the organization as emphasizing

differences between the identity groups rather than focusing on creating a collective sense of responsibility for change:

I think that a large part of my difficulty was in relation to the issue of the relationship between the experience of the oppressor and the oppressed, and the solidarity that it is possible to express...this idea that, whoever has more privilege...has the ability to be more in solidarity. The higher you are in the hierarchy, so to speak, you have the ability to be more in solidarity, which is something that in a certain way situates you in a singular way in the hierarchy. In other words, whoever is, in quotes, “lower” in the hierarchy can’t be in solidarity with me. So even if I have social challenges that emanate from, I don’t know, from a racist society, from capitalism...nobody can be in solidarity with me, within this framework. That’s something that I felt really uncomfortable with at a certain point, like, that it was some sort of contempt also for things that were hard for me. I mean, at a personal level people were always supportive. But at the political level, the need to create change around these things [that were difficult for me] was totally insignificant. And at the end of the day, it’s not just me, it’s the entire society that has difficulties. And it’s an entire country where most of the people are in a tough spot.

Dror was troubled by the sense he received in Sadaka Reut that as a Jewish male from a relatively comfortable socio-economic background, his struggles were less significant than those of other participants who were his partners in creating sociopolitical change. Maya spoke to this as well, addressing the way that Sadaka Reut’s work emphasized the empowerment of Palestinians without addressing the needs of Jews within the group, identity-wise. Of Sadaka Reut’s focus on explicitly discussing collective identity, she said,

So the feeling was always that basically, we [Jews] need to create an alternative [identity], but I always had a certain level of anger about this, of, is the alternative to create a Palestinian identity and take apart the Zionist identity, I mean, is that the only path for creating partnership? I mean, as a Jew do I need to find a new identity?

Indeed, this issue arose not only among participants, but in discussions with staff members as well. A Palestinian member of the organization’s board told me, “Sometimes I feel as though there’s a type of dismissal of Jewish identity because of over-identification here with Palestinian

identity...like sometimes things go too far to the other extreme.” A former Jewish director of the organization also explained that the tension between partnership and differences in collective identity was a central issue occupying Sadaka Reut:

[This issue] has been accompanying us for a long time...Because on the one hand, it's clear to us that things are not symmetrical. But there are a lot of consequences, too, like for example, Jews in this partnership, they are on the one hand part of a strong collective, and the societal power dynamics are in our favor. And on the other hand, I [as a Jew] come to this partnership, and from my society I deviate from the norm. And one way to think about it is, for Jews [to come to this partnership] requires different things [than Palestinians]. Like, it requires them to actively move outside the [societal] consensus. And that raises challenges related to social alienation. And those are things that are hard to deal with.

These comments are particularly important because they highlight the challenges faced by Jewish individuals affiliated with the organization outside of Sadaka Reut's four walls, specifically in terms of their ostracization by a society that has become increasingly right-wing in recent years. Given this, it is important to consider how Sadaka Reut's emphasis on collective identity and oppressor/oppressed dynamics stands in tension with its desire to foster a sense of solidarity among all participants.

### **Discussion**

The analysis above illustrates tensions Sadaka Reut faces in reconciling pedagogical and ideological goals, tensions resulting primarily from the way that Sadaka Reut defines itself: as a Jewish-Palestinian educational organization working for Jewish-Palestinian equality. While from the perspective of Sadaka Reut's work as an educational organization the existence of an ideological “red line” can be problematic, as an ideologically oriented organization, the red line makes sense. And while the organization's ideological goals focus on centering and prioritizing Palestinian perspectives, as an educational organization, Sadaka Reut must find ways to address the needs of Jewish participants, as well.

A former staff member at Sadaka Reut told me, “There's no order in the world. But political movements must create some sort of order. It's part of their DNA.” Sadaka Reut, as part of a broader movement for change in Israeli society, plays a role in creating that order, in terms of its ideological focus. Yet from an educational point of view, greater emphasis needs to be placed on

bringing people to that ideology, rather than expecting that personal socio-political beliefs will align from the outset with those that Sadaka Reut espouses organizationally. In other words, as an educational organization, Sadaka Reut can't expect that participants will all have reached the same level of political awareness (or share the same political beliefs) when they first become engaged with its programs. Moreover, in emphasizing its ideological commitments, Sadaka Reut increasingly is unable to communicate with most of Israeli society, the Jewish community in particular, as the population as a whole moves further to the right. The organization is therefore placed in a position of reinforcing its own marginalization and diminishing the possibility of creating change, not least through difficulty in recruiting new participants.

Related to this is a disjuncture in the way that the ideological/pedagogical tension manifests with respect to each of the two central issues discussed. On the one hand, Sadaka Reut's ideological goals limit what topics can be discussed, and simultaneously create openings for moving beyond identity divisions. On the other hand, its educational goals emphasize creating openings for conversation, but reify identity characteristics. Ultimately, what this suggests is that Sadaka Reut might *either* emphasize ideological goals, while maintaining a smaller participant base, *or* emphasize educational goals, with the understanding that this may lead to a less focused social change campaign.

In either circumstance, where this plays out most crucially is in the place Jewish participants and staff hold in the organization. Both staff and participants acknowledge that aspects of Sadaka Reut's approach have antagonized this group of individuals, even as a central emphasis of the organization's work is on promoting a sense of solidarity and partnership as the basis for social change. Thus, a key question is, how might Sadaka Reut create space that enables Jews to be a part of a partnership centering Palestinians, in a way that enables them to authentically claim their own identity? It seems that this is a requirement for moving beyond the educational/ideological tensions that Sadaka Reut faces.

One possibility can be seen in scholarship that emphasizes the need to move beyond the binary perspective of critical pedagogy. As this literature highlights, in conflict and post-conflict contexts, the dichotomous reading of the world suggested by critical pedagogy is limited in its capacity for creating a sense of common identity or, as Jansen (2009) notes, for "making sense of troubled knowledge and transforming those who carry the burden of such knowledge" (p. 256). Instead, practices that work towards subverting these dichotomies are crucial for disrupting fear

and hatred (see Bekerman, 2016). Jansen terms this a *post-conflict pedagogy*, “a pedagogical reciprocity in which both sides are prepared to move towards each other” (Jansen, 2009, p. 268), which requires critical engagement and reflection upon the received knowledge of *both* hegemonic and oppressed groups and enables educational spaces to serve as sites for individual and collective transformation (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016). Further, as Zembylas (2013) suggests, such an approach requires pedagogies of compassion, based on the idea of a common vulnerability, moving “beyond dichotomies that single out the self or the other as victims” (p. 512). Bozalek, Carolissen, & Leibowitz (2013) alternately suggest that what is necessary is a pedagogy of discomfort, in which all participants can critique assumptions and “destabilize their views of themselves and their worlds” (p. 41).

All of this indicates that Sadaka Reut may not be best served by a black and white, binary framing of social issues and identity; instead, the organization might look to emphasize the points of solidarity that transcend dichotomous collective identities. Such an approach has the potential to further Sadaka Reut’s commitment to using binational, Jewish-Palestinian education as a platform for social change, by enabling the organization to embody an alternative to *both* the inequality and the ethnonational differentiation prevalent in Israeli society. Practically, such an approach may also offer opportunities for enlarging the number of individuals who participate in Sadaka Reut’s activities as well as for partnering with more mainstream educational organizations and institutions.

Ultimately, this article illustrates that disjunctures in Sadaka Reut’s pedagogical and ideological commitments have created tensions that shape the organization’s work and its potential for drawing in participants. Decisions about how Sadaka Reut balances these commitments have important implications for how it is received in Israeli society as well as its potential to create a cadre of Jewish and Palestinian youth committed to binational partnership for social change within the framework of each of their own ethno-national groups. An approach that emphasizes solidarity as it transcends the identity binary may broaden Sadaka Reut’s sphere of influence in the Israeli context and thus enable it to contribute in more significant ways to a transformation of the sociopolitical sphere.

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