

Pieces of Peace: Transpersonal Approaches in Israeli-Palestinian Peace-Building Events: An Exploratory Grounded Theory Investigation

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This article presents a research study in which Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilding events embedded in a transpersonal container were examined. It explored the lived experience of four Israelis and three Palestinians who participated in or facilitated peacebuilding initiatives rooted in spiritual, holistic, and integrative methods. Simultaneously, such peace initiatives were joined and observed through the direct participation of the researcher in three transpersonal peacebuilding endeavours. Constructivist grounded theory was chosen as the study's methodology, as it is particularly valuable for exploring complex and multifaceted phenomena and as it focuses on understanding the multiple realities and perspectives of participants. The results indicate that peacebuilding events entrenched in transpersonal approaches emphasize the painful but necessary exposure of Israeli and Palestinian opposing narratives by applying a variety of integrative approaches during these events. Three main themes emerged from the data analysis: (1) Humanizing connections, (2) the role and power of semiotic signs, and (3) manifestations of change. These themes provided the foundation for the creation of the dual narratives integration model, contributing to the field's understanding of these complex and multifaceted peace initiatives.

Keywords: Israeli and Palestinian, peacebuilding, transpersonal approaches, peace, Israeli and Palestinian conflict, integrative methods to peacebuilding, constructivist grounded theory

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Recommended citation: Reichmann Popowski, V (2023). Pieces of peace: Transpersonal approaches in Israeli-Palestinian peace-building events: An exploratory grounded theory investigation. *Consciousness, Spirituality & Transpersonal Psychology*, 4, 46-63. <https://doi.org/10.53074/cstp.2023.59>

This article delves into peacebuilding events related to one of modern history's most challenging and enduring conflicts. Amidst the region's peace strategies that have led to building walls instead of bridges (Spitka, 2016), a new wave of engaged consciousness with a strong spiritual orientation towards peacebuilding is emerging. This approach, as described by Teixeira (1999), involves addressing foundational aspects of self-perception and worldview, emphasizing interconnectedness. In this context, the term *transpersonal peacebuilding* (TPPB) has been used to denote this distinctive approach, which echoes Landau's (2002) call for both sides to consider each other's feelings, attitudes, yearnings, and symbolic images.

Peacebuilding plays a vital role in the advancement of nonviolent societies, addressing external factors such as security, social and economic concerns, and restoration of political order (Teixeira, 1999). Hocoy (2016) elucidates that psychologists, in partnership with peacebuilding networks, are proactively involving grassroots initiatives and emphasizing the importance of incorporating internal factors, such as inner peace. Furthermore, he underscores the acknowledgment of transpersonal approaches in comprehending the interplay between internal and external realities, and individual and collective awareness, as well as the mutual influence of unconscious attitudes and societal conditions.

Hartelius et al.'s (2007) research identifies three fundamental themes within the realm of transpersonal psychology: (1) A beyond-ego psychology, (2) a whole-person psychology utilizing integrative/holistic methods, and (3) a psychology of transformation. While these themes may not appear directly connected to peacebuilding, a closer exploration reveals their valuable potential in this context.

In relation to the first theme, Maoz (2004) explains that beyond-ego efforts during peacebuilding calls for both parties to involve the other within the realm of relational moral responsibility. Similarly, Lederach (2015) emphasizes recognizing the other's humanity, leading to qualities such as faith, vulnerability, self-reflection, and compassion. Burdge's (2006) study links these qualities to spiritually oriented Israeli and Palestinian peace activists, investigating the interaction between activism and spiritual experiences. This provides a foundation for understanding the significance of these transpersonal psychology themes in the persistent Israeli-Palestinian conflict, offering a framework to encourage more humane interactions in this deeply entrenched conflict.

The second theme defines transpersonal psychology as a whole-person psychology (Hartelius et al., 2007), recognizing individuals within broader contexts. Palestinians and Israelis hold divergent narratives rooted in historical traumas. Israelis emphasize security and recognition rooted in their trauma of historical persecution, while Palestinians highlight the dispossession and displacement experienced during the establishment of Israel (Chaitin, 2011; Kahanoff, 2016). These narratives, shaped by decades of conflict, intertwine personal and collective traumas, influencing peacebuilding approaches. Halperin (2011) and Gordon-Giles and Zidan (2009) tackle the significance of narrative-exposure in the Israeli-Palestinian context

through the application of integrative, holistic, and experiential methods, which encompass expressive arts therapies and embodiment strategies.

Building on the second theme's foundation, transpersonal approaches include a range of practices, including exploring altered states of consciousness through meditation and prayer, and utilizing symbols and archetypes in dream analysis and mythology. These practices are strategically designed to catalyze profound personal and collective transformation (Daniels, 2005). Lawlis (1996) and Scategni (2005) corroborate the substantial influence of symbols in rituals, shaping social reality, and aiding individuals and communities in conflict resolution. In this context, Biran's (2007) social dreaming workshop stands as a practical application of transpersonal approaches in Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding. The workshop used dream exploration, rich in symbols and archetypes, to unite Palestinians and Israelis, revealing shared fears, desires, and pain, fostering deeper understanding and connection.

Thirdly, Hartelius et al. (2007) proposed a psychology of transformation, emphasizing the need to transform relationships between parties toward collective awareness, involving cultural, social, and political change. Groppe's (2016) grounded theory research explores Wahat el Salam – Neve Shalom, the only community in Israel where Israelis and Palestinians cohabit in an environment of peaceful coexistence. In this intentional community, spirituality transcends religious boundaries, embracing both holism and plurality, which encourages diverse perspectives and personal agency in shaping spiritual content. This holistic approach to spirituality fosters communal harmony without a single absolute truth, creating an inclusive atmosphere where multiple truths coexist. This concept resonates with Rothberg and Coder's (2013) research on individual and social transformation and aligns with Hocoy's (2016) belief in the potential of transpersonal disciplines for positive social change. It showcases how individuals in this community engage with holism and the idea of plurality in spirituality to promote peace and reject dogma.

The studies mentioned, framed within Hartelius et al.'s (2007) research, represent a limited but existing array of transpersonal approaches applicable to peacebuilding between Israelis and Palestinians. These themes shed light on how individuals and communities involved in peacebuilding can transcend personal boundaries, explore multifaceted identities, and undergo transformation. Hartelius et al.'s (2007) research served as a pivotal theoretical underpinning throughout this research study, prompting a presumed relevance of integrating transpersonal aspects into the field of peacebuilding. Their work bridges transpersonal psychology principles with peacebuilding, paving the way for later discussions on the specific focus and contributions of this research.

Despite the above studies shedding light on the presence of transpersonal approaches in peacebuilding, they have each primarily focused on one specific transpersonal method. While these singular approaches provide valuable insights into the application of transpersonal principles in peacebuilding, this research study took a broader perspective by transcending

the confines of any one particular approach and aims to bring together a diverse array of transpersonal approaches observed in Palestinian-Israeli peace endeavours. This inclusive approach is significant because it unveils the rich tapestry of transpersonal approaches available, rather than limiting the discussion to just one method.

In light of the provided context, this study investigates the central research inquiry by examining the processes and dynamics of various transpersonal approaches to peacebuilding between Israelis and Palestinians, along with exploring the lived experiences of individuals engaged in these bridge-building methods.

Method

As a secular Belgian Jew living in Israel, I grew up with a one-sided perspective of the conflict. However, while enrolled in the academic program “Society and the Arts,” which combines social change theories with artistic practices, and places a strong emphasis on conflict resolution, I had the distinctive opportunity to study in Israel alongside Palestinian peers. This journey afforded me direct insights into a narrative I had never encountered before. Furthermore, it offered a balanced presentation of Israel’s history and cultivated open dialogues, despite the challenges. This experience broadened my awareness and led me to acknowledge the limitations of my previous narrative.

While the above might suggest a degree of personal exposure, it is imperative to note that the chosen paradigm for this research, constructivist grounded theory (CGT), inherently encourages the explicit recognition of the researcher’s standpoint. As emphasized by Charmaz (2014), this approach represents one of several valid perspectives on the subject matter. Consequently, I openly acknowledge my personal stance and am engaging the first-person singular throughout this article to ensure transparency and alignment with CGT principles.

The choice of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2017) as the methodological framework is based on its effectiveness in exploring individual processes, interpersonal dynamics, and broader social phenomena (Charmaz, 1996). Given the exploratory nature of this study, a constructivist approach was adopted, aligned with Charmaz’s ontologically relativist and epistemologically subjectivist perspective (Mills et al., 2006). This choice resonates with my beliefs about the nature of truth and reality, aiming to highlight the diverse perspectives, values, and beliefs of research participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018) through the incorporation of multiple viewpoints.

Sampling

Despite the multifaceted nature of peacebuilding (Daffern, 1999), the events I examined, organised by grassroots organisations, involve both parties. The initial inclusion criteria required participants to be Israeli or Palestinian. However, it is important to acknowledge the

complexities surrounding identity terminology, which is sensitive to diverse perspectives, historical narratives, and intricate political and societal issues tied to national identity (Spitka, 2016). For simplicity, any Jew in Israel or Israeli settlements will be referred to as Israeli, while Palestinian includes Arabs in Israel, and Muslims or Christians in Palestine (Gaza and the West Bank). These terms offer a simplified overview without diving into extensive details and are not reflective of a personal political stance. Additionally, participants were required to be fluent in English or Hebrew and actively engaged in at least one peacebuilding encounter within a holistic and integrative framework.

Initially, the study focused on recruiting individuals who participated in TPPB events, representing a homogenous sample. However, the use of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014) led to a shift to a heterogeneous sample driven by emergent data that emphasized the facilitator's role. This shift provided a more diverse and comprehensive perspective. One-on-one interviews were conducted with four Israeli and three Palestinian adults (see Table 1), including both participants and facilitators.

Table 1

Participants

Name	Gender	Age	National Identity	Facilitator/ Participant	Approach*
Azzam	Male	46	Muslim Palestinian from Gaza	Participant	Systemic Constellation
Sharon	Female	52	Jewish Israeli	Both	Musalaha
Saeed	Male	31	Muslim Palestinian from Bethlehem	Participant	Together Beyond Words Roots Spiritual Peace Conference
Daniel	Male	28	Jewish Israeli	Both	Open Dialogues
Dalia	Female	23	Christian Palestinian from Nazareth	Participant	Together Beyond Words Playback Theatre
Maayan	Female	42	Jewish Israeli	Facilitator	Dream Groups
Yael	Female	70	Jewish Israeli	Both	Buddhist approach Spiritual Peace Conference

Note: *See Table 3 for details of specific approaches.

As grounded theory also includes events in the sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018), my active participation in TPPB events (see Table 2) complemented the data, aiding verification and triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Table 3 provides further details on organisations and approaches.

Table 2*Participated and Observed Peacebuilding Events*

Event Name	Duration	Number of Participants
Systemic Constellation	3 hours (November 11th 2021)	15
Together Beyond Words	3 days (10th – 13th of February 2022)	30
Spiritual Peace Conference	3 days (21st – 23rd of February 2022)	300+

Table 3*Organisations and Approach Descriptions*

Name of Approach/Organisation	Description
Systemic Constellation (Hansen & Kleren, 2021)	A method that makes dynamics and relationships within an existing system visible. Relationship constellations and recurring patterns are to be uncovered, releasing feelings and impressions.
Roots (n.d.)	An Israeli-Palestinian grassroots movement, providing workshops and dialogues between both parties.
Together Beyond Words (n.d.)	A non-profit organisation promoting the healing of emotional wounds and trauma towards building a just and peaceful society. A multidisciplinary approach that introduces experiential methods, such as body work, playback theatre, and psychodrama.
Spiritual Peace Conference (Ehvam International Spiritual Center for Peace, n.d.)	Promoted by Project One Heart (Ehvam International Spiritual Center for Peace, n.d.), which brings Israeli Jews, Arab Muslims and Christians from Israel and the West Bank to joint sessions. Hosted by spiritual leaders of various traditions and peace activists.
Musalaha (2020)	A faith-based organisation that teaches and facilitates reconciliation mainly between Israelis and Palestinians, based on Biblical principles of reconciliation.
Open dialogues (Chaitin et al., 2002)	A process through which sides deal with disagreement or conflict between them through expressing themselves, listening to the other, and taking in or empathizing with the emotions, experiences, views, and values of the other.
Playback Theatre (Gordon, n.d.)	An original form of improvisational theatre in which the audience tell stories from their lives and watch them enacted on the spot.
Dream groups (Rimon Seton, n.d.)	Groups in which Palestinians and Israelis share their dreams, with the goal of returning the dream to its sacred natural place in the human consciousness and for collective healing and awakening.
Buddhist approach to peace (Moaoasis, 2020)	The belief that in order to eliminate violence and conflict, we have to resolve the underlying causes and conditions. The focus is on inner transformation, which in turn motivates change in behaviours.
Parents Circle – Family Forum (The Parents Circle, n.d.)	A grassroots organisation of Palestinian and Israeli families who have lost immediate family members due to the conflict. It operates under the principle that a process of reconciliation is a prerequisite for achieving a sustained peace.

Ethical approval was obtained from Liverpool John Moores University's Psychology Research Ethics committee. Participants received a thorough briefing on ethics, their right to withdraw, and the study's purpose. Verbal and signed consent was obtained, and pseudonyms were used for anonymity. Participants had the option to decline any uncomfortable questions.

Data Collection

Data was collected through my fieldnotes and through individual Zoom interviews, during which participants had the opportunity to articulate their experiences of attending or facilitating TPPB events. These approximately 60-90 minute interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol, although flexibility was maintained to explore emerging themes. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed to ensure accurate data analysis.

The fieldnotes were categorized into three segments: (1) Observation and participation in the events. This enhanced my awareness of co-constructing research outcomes but made 'bracketing', which involves detachment from the experiences under investigation, challenging; (2) Informal on-site conversations for systematic analysis and comparison; (3) My personal inner processes during the events, recorded as journal entries.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews, I analysed the data using an initial line-by-line coding process, progressing to focused coding for abstract codes, identifying commonalities across interviews and refining them into conceptual themes. Fieldnotes underwent a similar process. Memo-writing (Charmaz, 2014) played a key role in theory-building, forming an analytical framework and elevating codes to categories. This analytical journey was non-linear, with critical insights and connections emerging at various points during the research process. Data analysis involved back-and-forth comparisons, revealing implicit elements in later stages.

Results

During these initiatives, participants shared narratives while confronting tension from opposing viewpoints, navigating discomfort, evoking intense emotions, and challenging ingrained beliefs. My first-hand engagement in an open dialogue session revealed struggles on both sides to perceive each other's narratives, clinging steadfastly to their own entrenched perspectives. Nevertheless, the dialogue environment maintained safety and respect, although a dozen of participants on both sides withdrew due to emotional intensity. Despite the tension, most participants navigated the various peacebuilding approaches and events without dismissing each other's perspectives, eased by the following themes that form the findings.

1. Humanizing Connections

A shared humanity approach was adopted across various events. Critical components of this strategy which contributed to the overarching goal of fostering genuine

connections among participants were the following: building intimacy and trust; indentifying common denominators; and engaging in deep listening.

1.1 Building Intimacy and Trust

In this aspect of the approach, participants engaged in activities that cultivated trust and intimacy, exemplified by interactive exercises in small groups. These activities played a crucial role in establishing an essential sense of connection, providing a solid foundation for delving into deeper and more complex topics. Facilitators' ability to build intimacy and trust through these exercises served as a tangible example of how these strategies were effectively put into action, ultimately creating a necessary sense of connection that paved the way for meaningful and constructive engagement with more profound issues. As Maayan stated: "We don't directly go to the conflict. We are going around and building this intimacy through the things that connects us as human beings."

1.2 Identifying Common Denominators

The second integral component of the shared humanity approach revolved around recognizing shared experiences, fears, and vulnerabilities. These common threads served to humanize relationships, transcending the boundaries of conflict and effectively forging connections among the participants. Examples of identifying common denominators, such as shared suffering, sacred feelings toward the land, and mutual fears, underscored the power of this approach. A poignant memory illustrates this: standing before a group of Palestinians, I admitted to each one-by-one my fear of them. This exercise, though among the most difficult and liberating I have ever undertaken, revealed the profound impact of acknowledging our vulnerabilities. The compassionate and appreciative reactions from the Palestinians, despite the weight of the content, created a cathartic moment that resonated deeply, ultimately generating an energetic field of humanization on both sides. To quote Azzam: "We are afraid of each other. And I really didn't understand that they are afraid of us. I was afraid of them. That's what I know. So, we don't meet as normal human beings. We don't have normal interactions."

Furthermore, the capacity to recognize these common denominators extended beyond explicit exercises. For instance, the joint playback theatre provided a subtle yet effective means to nurture this recognition. In this setting, the focus was not solely on the conflict; rather, simple stories from human experiences were enacted on stage, serving as a poignant reminder of everyone's common humanity. This indirect approach further solidified the sense of connection among participants, emphasizing how recognizing these shared elements consistently nurtures understanding and empathy.

1.3 Engaging in Deep Listening

The third vital element in the shared humanity approach was the practice of deep listening, also referred to as compassionate listening. It involved cultivating compassion and tolerance in conflict situations, as highlighted by Yael. The need to disconnect from oneself for effective listening was emphasised by both Sharon and Dalia. This also

led to improved communication and a deeper connection between people, ultimately enhancing the humanization of relationships.

All of these strategic efforts collectively culminated in a profound sense of being seen and seeing others. Azzam noted a growing sense of empathy on both sides. Through the process of role reversal, he felt acknowledged, while also gaining the ability to empathetically see the other:

I am Palestinian. I took a role from the Israeli side. If I am an Israeli, I took a role from the Palestinian side, and everyone talks about his role. Regardless of his background. What comes to his mind, and he can speak freely, and it was very interesting to put yourself in another position. A position you have never been through before. To see things from not your eyes, from the eyes of other people. To think not your mind, but of other people mind. (Azzam)

Feelings of being seen and being able to see the other also intersected with the mentioned shared suffering. In an informal conversation during a joint desert walk at the Spiritual Peace conference, a Palestinian participant affiliated with the 'Parent Circle Forum' (see Table 3), articulated the significant role that the concept of shared suffering played in nurturing a collective sense of humanity. To quote Yael in this context: "...and those bereaved families is exactly a point where humanity just shines".

2. The Role and Power of Semiotic Signs

Participants and facilitators engaged in semiotic signs: symbols and metaphors; embodiment practices; and archetypes.

2.1 Symbols and Metaphors

Earth metaphors were introduced like "watering" and "planting" seeds: "The more peaceful seeds I can plant in me the more peaceful I become and the more I can inspire peace in others" (Yael). Maayan shared the importance of long-term dream workshops: "the seed may be planted. The small seed. If you don't keep watering it, it might grow, it might not". Dalia compared herself to a butterfly, leaving behind her traces of transformation. Symbolic objects like water were incorporated during Musalaha sessions, representing tears of those who suffer. These vivid images and associations helped convey complex emotions and ideas.

2.2 Embodiment Practices

As integral components of these approaches, semiotic signs were predominantly integrated through facilitator-led embodiment practices. Participants frequently utilized their bodies as a means of communication, conveying emotions, gestures, and facial expressions to embody deeper levels of interaction. Movement served as a conduit for gaining insight. Techniques such as role reversal and theatrical methods were commonly used, enabling participants to authentically experience one another's perspectives. As Saeed explained:

I learned that for some people there are different ways and languages of expression. When you want to express your thoughts it's not only through words. It's not only through discussion and dialogue. [...] but also with the movement, with body language. [...] people who are trying to transcend their ideas and thoughts but in a different language.

Various other profound body practices, like role reversals, playback theatre, dance, and expressive emotion release were used alongside subtle techniques such as meditation, writing, drawing, visualization, and active imagination. In joint dream approaches, embodying others' dreams was emphasized. Participants thus utilized their bodies to communicate emotions, perspectives, and experiences, fostering a deeper understanding.

2.3 Archetypes

Archetypes, functioning as semiotic signs, not only played a significant role but also served as a strategic element in the process. Implicitly and explicitly introduced during sessions, these universal symbolic patterns, inherent to the human psyche, resonated with the participants, advancing humanization. For example, in the systemic constellation workshop (see Table 3), archetypal symbols like Palestinian Trauma, Jewish Trauma, Healing, and Unity, were role-reversed, while the Musalaha workshop (see Table 3) re-enacted cross-cultural weddings, activating the event archetype of marriage and thus implicitly enhancing universal concepts such as love and commitment. Moreover, archetypal symbolism was retrieved from participants' dreams during joint dream workshops. Maayan further explained: "And then we have like a circle. We put one dream in the middle of the circle and then we let the circle speak". All of these examples further enriched the experience and liberated emotional expression deepening the sense of a shared humanity.

3. Manifestations of Change

The unanticipated experience of humanizing connections together with the incorporation of these semiotic signs led to subtle yet significant inner and/or outer manifestations of change as temporary shifts in their narratives or as deeper, more enduring long-term changes. Transformations, whether profound or gradual, were embedded in two different properties: (1) Emotional, cognitive and behavioural shifts and (2) interconnected inner and outer transformation.

3.1 Emotional, Cognitive and Behavioural Shifts

Manifestations of change, such as increased empathy, tolerance, open communication, and social engagement, arose as a result of the synergistic effects of humanizing connections and semiotic signs. The mere presence of both parties in proximity significantly reduced fears during the workshops. The facilitators at the Together Beyond Words workshop (see Table 3) intentionally arranged shared lodging for Israelis and Palestinians, which led to a dramatic decrease in fear levels. Participants

reported becoming less resistant, more tolerant, and empathetic towards each other, accentuating the humanizing connections cultivated by this arrangement. Saeed, affiliated with the Roots movement for over six years reported: “Many things changed. The most important thing that I feel has changed is that it affected my relationships to my family, friends, and myself.”

Daniel, an Israeli open dialogues facilitator, defined transformation as a maturation of the group ego which is visible when group patterns are changing, such as the ability to tolerate more ambiguity on an emotional and cognitive level. Maayan, an Israeli dream group facilitator, encourages collective transformation among participants, exemplified by efforts like collecting food, toys, and clothes for those in need. Azzam expressed that the role reversal approach allowed him to think differently for the first time, overcoming initial fears and embracing open communication during the workshop.

3.2 Interconnected Inner and Outer Transformation

Inner shifts catalysed outer transformations and vice versa, creating a reciprocal relationship. While some participants emphasized the significance of engaging with the external context first to cultivate inner shifts, others reported that inner shifts enabled outer transformations in their lives. For instance, Yael, drawing from her Buddhist peace approach (see Table 3), claimed that to create outer peace, one must first find inner peace. Saeed emphasized that partnering with the other was instrumental in his growth: “I wouldn’t have been convinced by the Palestinian. Because I needed to see the partners on the other side who believe in this work.” Sharon described the ‘ripple effect’ as a strategy to inspire individuals who, in turn, could positively influence others and catalyze a transformative shift within their communities.

The Dual Narratives Integration Model (DNIM)

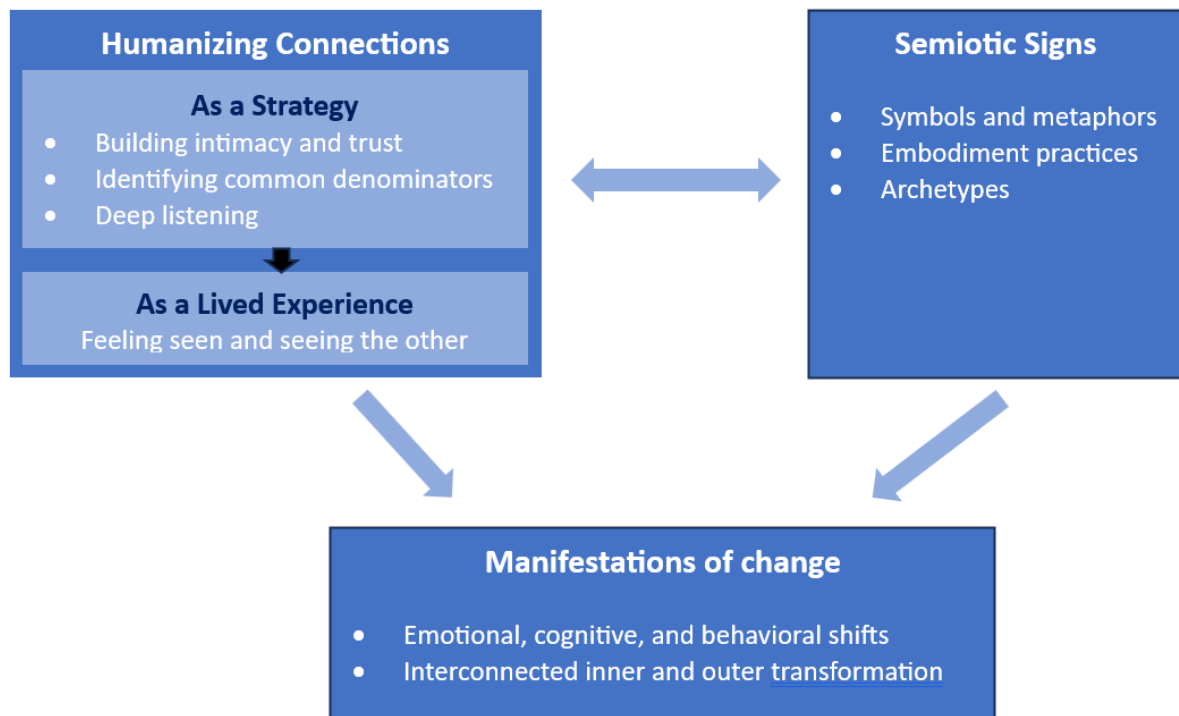
The DNIM explores the interlinkage of Humanizing Connections, Semiotic Signs, and Manifestations of Change in these encounters (see Figure 1). It is essential to recognize that while these interactions highlight the importance of embracing diverse perspectives and the ability of participants to manage tension amid conflicting narratives, they are not without challenges. Situations of unmanageable tension can result in some individuals temporarily or permanently disengaging from the process, underscoring the complexity and need for a delicate balance in these efforts.

Despite these inherent challenges, the model is generally effective in illustrating the synergy between humanizing connections and semiotic signs as pivotal elements for change. In a majority of cases where the model is implemented, it successfully fosters mutual recognition and understanding between the conflicting parties. This effectiveness, achieved through various holistic and integrative strategies, typically leads to a significant impact, helping participants to navigate and sustain tension while promoting a sense of mutual existence and acknowledgement. Such impact is

particularly noticeable in the personal experiences of the participants, resulting in enhanced existential awareness and connectivity among them. This, in turn, cultivates stronger empathic feelings towards each other, highlighting the critical role of narratives and emotional connections in the process of conflict resolution. Hence, this model offers a comprehensive framework for practitioners and researchers in facilitating and comprehending these aspects in conflict resolution processes.

Figure 1

The Dual Narratives Integration Model



Discussion

This research explored TPPB efforts involving Palestinians and Israelis through in-depth interviews, event observations, and my participation. The framework uncovered mechanisms crucial for nurturing peace within this microcosm, emphasizing trust-building activities, embodiment practices, shared experiences, deep listening, and the use of symbols and metaphors. These mechanisms facilitate the establishment of humanizing connections, nurturing intimacy and mutual understanding, creating a profound sense of being both seen and seeing others.

Manifestations of change, such as reduced fears, increased empathy and open communication result from the interplay of these mechanisms. The emerging framework bridges gaps in the literature, consolidating integrative approaches under the transpersonal umbrella. While it does not resolve the larger macro-level conflict, it encourages trust, openness, and humanizing relationships between Israelis and Palestinians.

While there have been calls for more exploration of peacebuilding within a transpersonal framework (Hocoy, 2016), empirical evidence supporting this approach in the region remains limited. In her study, Groppe (2016) investigated how spirituality serves as a tool for peace within the only Israeli-Palestinian coexisting community. Her research highlighted integrative approaches such as role play and dialogues used in this community, dismantling barriers of ultimate truths and prejudices, enabling the growth of compassion and trust.

Groppe's (2011) research aligns with Ferrer's (2011) participatory approach, which emphasizes non-dogmatic integrative methods embracing pluralism and diverse ontological perspectives. This alignment is further highlighted by a central finding in this present study: The significance of acknowledging the other's narrative. Elevating narratives to ultimate truths or dogmas hinders effective communication, raising entrenched conflicts. This perspective dovetails with social constructivism, where knowledge is socially and culturally constructed, giving rise to multiple stories shared by research participants (Charmaz, 2014). To quote Allen (2011), "Truth resides in specific group values; any quest for universal truth or a single explanatory theory is illusory and oppressive" (p. 26).

Semiotic signs, like metaphors of planting seeds, deepen the humanization process, echoing the analogy of Ferrer et al.'s (2017) of the creative process mirroring nature's changing seasons. This analogy emphasizes shedding old mental paradigms to embrace new ideas. The recurring use of the seed metaphor suggests that acknowledging each other's narratives represents the vital starting point in the intricate peacebuilding process, symbolizing interconnectedness and progress. However, as Maayan noted, the growth of these seeds depends on adequate nurturing.

Within the context of signs and symbols, Musalaha workshops (see Table 3) included re-enactments of weddings from both cultures, tapping into the profound archetype of marriage (Jung, 1969) rooted in our collective unconscious. This shared experience has the potential to catalyze recognition of a shared desire for happiness, love, and harmony, breaking down preconceived notions about the other and promoting humanization.

At the systemic constellation session (See Table 3) (Hansen & Kleren, 2021) my counterpart, a man from Gaza, and I assumed roles that transcended our national identities. I embodied "The Palestinian People", while he took on "The Jewish People". This transformative exercise, utilizing semiotic signs, allowed us to personify disembodied inner aspects and bring them into consciousness. Through embodiment and role reversal, we experienced a profound sense of empathy for each other's pain and despair and experienced how the body can be used as a catalyst for expression.

Semiotic signs also took the form of objects and images. When utilized purposefully, these signs acquire a profound significance intertwined with historical context, as discussed by Scategni (2005). Such symbols help participants emphasize connections and themes. For instance, the deliberate use of water symbolizing emotions dissolving into tears, implies

the breakdown of psychic resistance. Through the act of shedding tears, individuals may become more attuned to the experiences of fellow group members, united in a collective acknowledgment of shared suffering.

This shared recognition underscores the importance of interpersonal co-creative dimensions, aligning with prior research findings. Ferrer's (2011) participatory perspective emphasizes that transpersonal phenomena result from individual and collective interactions with the world. This study reveals that participants' shared sense of humanity emerged not only from individual experiences but also through their cultivated relationships. Saeed's transformative journey, which involved improving his relationships, signifies a crucial step toward creating an environment that supports peace. Strong personal relationships can contribute to a culture of understanding and dialogue, essential elements of peacebuilding. Saeed's personal growth is intricately linked to his connections with others, highlighting the profound connection between the external world and inner peace.

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned in the introduction, this reflection raises questions about Maoz's (2000) notion of "including the other within the self". While Saeed's experience suggests significant personal growth and an elevated level of consciousness, it does not necessarily imply a complete integration of the other within the self. Instead, it highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of the peacebuilding journey, which involves various experiences in developing relationships with both the other and oneself.

These peacebuilding events relied on shared participation, emphasizing the importance of mutual exchange for embracing a shared sense of humanity. Group dynamics, as discussed in the results section, were crucial, with ego maturation contributing to personal transformation and maturation of the collective identity. This activation of the group identity was evident in the resonance of interpersonal dynamics within the group, fostering increased trust and more compassionate relationships, often referred to as the "ripple effect" by Sharon, highlighting the transformative impact of individuals on the collective.

Limitations, Nuances, and Future Studies

Time constraints limited the in-depth exploration of all approaches, potentially overlooking essential aspects. Given the collaborative nature of CGT, different researchers might produce different findings. Language barriers affected the sampling process, and two Palestinian participants withdrew due to fear and mistrust. The self-selecting bias of participants may not fully represent the broader Israeli and Palestinian population. The varied settings and structures among approaches might have caused some confusion. Logistical constraints prevented full access to select workshops at the spiritual conference, and the religious dimension of peacebuilding received limited attention.

While CGT emphasizes the significance of researcher reflexivity, it did present challenges and complexities due to my dual role as both participant and researcher, especially when

participants recognized me from previous events. Nevertheless, it mostly fostered a fluid and transparent dynamic with interviewees.

In the future, studies can expand on this foundational framework to explore various transpersonal peacebuilding approaches. This could involve examining organisational versus independent workshops, conducting longitudinal research, and exploring religious aspects. A more in-depth analysis of participant withdrawals and a comparison of Israeli and Palestinian experiences would be valuable.

Conclusion

This article highlights the transformative potential of integrating the transpersonal dimension into intractable conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While a transpersonal framework for peacebuilding does not mandate specific integrative techniques, this study emphasized their significance in nurturing a shared sense of humanity and overcoming fear and mistrust. These approaches stimulate inner growth within communities, fostering empathetic dialogues among parties with conflicting narratives.

Transpersonal peacebuilding distinguishes itself from conventional methods by unlocking dynamic forces that connect individuals with themselves and others, creating shared human experiences. Activation of the psyche beyond the usual sense of self is important, sometimes requiring disidentification from the ego-narrative to enter the other's narrative. It is not a denial of one's identity, but a tool for more meaningful engagement in the process. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the emotional intensity of confronting one's narrative, as this journey can be emotionally overwhelming, leading some individuals to withdraw from peacebuilding processes. Nonetheless, this research indicates that these challenges should not overshadow the potential for transformation that transpersonal peacebuilding offers with its possible contribution to a sense of relief and interconnectedness, illuminating a path forward in an ongoing and fragile journey.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on the final dissertation research project undertaken by the author and supervised by Dr. Jessica Bockler. It was submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc programme in Consciousness, Spirituality, and Transpersonal Psychology. The programme was delivered by Alef Trust in partnership with Liverpool John Moores University, UK.

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About the Author

Valerie Reichmann Popowski is a secular Belgian Jew who has resided in Israel since 2012. Growing up within the deaf community in Belgium, she cultivated a creative and theatrical mode of self-expression from an early age. This early inclination prompted her pursuit of studies in expressive arts therapy, with subsequent specialization in group therapy, psychodrama, dance- and movement therapy, and dreamwork. Upon her arrival in Israel, she studied an M.A in Society and the Arts, which goal is to achieve social change in the Israeli society through the arts. Her MSc in Consciousness, Spirituality, and Transpersonal Psychology at The Alef Trust is a natural progression of her prior academic pursuits, affording her the opportunity to delve deeper into interconnectedness, peacebuilding methodologies, all underpinned by a transpersonal framework. Valerie runs her own psychotherapy practice while simultaneously facilitating group therapy sessions in various institutions to support individuals facing distressing challenges.



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