Social Forces Sustaining the Israeli-Palestinian Tensions: A Dynamical Psychology Perspective

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The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains one of the most deeply entrenched in the world. While there is great knowledge about numerous individual factors contributing to this conflict's persistence, much of the information is fragmented and segregated into different disciplines. This article seeks to integrate an array of literature using a dynamic systems perspective to examine how social – as opposed to political – forces contribute to ongoing tensions. The first part describes the dynamical systems perspective, focusing on how intractable conflicts emerge as a result of interlinking factors that anchor the social system in patterns that resist change. The second part explores the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in terms of specific social forces contributing to the conflict's persistence. These include leadership issues, economic inequalities poverty, youth disenfranchisement, and population distribution. Then the contribution maps how the discussed social factors interrelate to reinforce the ongoing tensions and addresses how small-scale approaches may circumvent the volatile, entrenched patterns of hostility.

Deep tensions between people living in Israel and in the Occupied territories have led to one of the most enduring conflicts of modern times. Despite numerous attempts, conflict resolution has generally failed in the Israeli-Palestinian case. One underexplored reason for the repeated failure to achieve resolution is that underlying social forces perpetuate the cycle of conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Following the 1995 Oslo Peace Accords, Israel's road construction to access settlements and formation of blockades and check-points in response to violence during the first *intifada* isolated Palestinian communities and exacerbated tensions (for example, Glenn and Gordon 2003, 2005). While these actions were necessary for Israeli security, they stifled economic activity in Gaza and the West Bank, leading to difficult economic conditions within the Occupied territories (Farsoun and Aruri 2005).

While Israel's settlement-building and Palestinian militants' violent responses are considered two (of many) causes for ongoing tensions, the persistence of the dispute is also related to the rather neglected social context (for example Cleveland 2004; Shlaim 2009). Social factors may be pertinent to attempts at peace-building because the dispute is heavily politicized. Politically inspired attempts at resolution often fail in part because conflict is simplified into lists of demands and implicit casual "if – then" statements through negotiations. As Coleman articulates, "linear political thinking is associated

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with a simple, dualistic view of conflict situations and with a more competitive and destructive orientation" (2011, 65). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is more complex than the sum of its parts. Giving up territory, legitimizing the opponent, or ending retaliatory attacks will not resolve this conflict. Instead of engaging the overt matters of conflict, progress toward peace may be made by addressing underlying social issues.

There is a host of support for the idea that indirect approaches addressing social problems may aid conflict resolution. For instance, the emergence of peace following Mozambique's civil war came partially from social – rather than political – efforts. As Bartoli, Bui-Wrzosinska, and Nowak (2010) elaborate, the Mozambique civil war eventually enveloped nearly all daily life within the country. As the conflict spread, people were drawn into it as factions solidified power and took control of or eliminated social institutions. According to Bartoli and colleagues, the Mozambique civil war thus became "frozen" as a bitter stalemate. Resolution began when various catalysts helped cultivate new communication channels between the factions. Bartoli, Bui-Wrzosinska, and Nowak (ibid.) suggest Bishop Gonçalves was one such catalyst, as his personal background facilitated his acceptance across the groups, which afforded him the opportunity to initiate intergroup communication as a neutral intermediary. Importantly, Gonçalves was not viewed as possessing legitimization from powers external to the conflict. While the circumstances surrounding the resolution of Mozambique civil war are complex, an insider's role in providing new avenues of communication between groups that otherwise interacted only with suspicion and hostility provides a strong example of what Coleman (2011) terms "weak power." Weak power attempts to help resolve conflict by indirect, and often local, engagement. Weak power is advantageous because it permits a bottom-up source of positive change where people experiencing a conflict are stakeholders in the pathway to peace, rather than remaining spectators to outcomes emerging from more forceful, externally controlled peace initiatives (such as those brokered by political powers or intervening third parties). A weak power approach also avoids the tendency for people to resist change concerning core conflict issues. Instead, weak power operates on the conflict's peripheries,

nudging those involved into new ways of thinking and behaving (ibid.), which facilitates new potential for situational change.

There are many social and psychological factors that promote resistance to change in conflict situations, including how religious, educational, and media institutions contribute to a conflict's persistence (Deutsch 1994). In addition, psychological factors, including cognitions, feelings, emotions, power asymmetries, and strong reactivity to negative information, play significant roles in conflict (Molm, Collett, and Schaefer 2006; Michaels, Vallacher, and Liebovitch 2013; Nair 2008; Pruitt and Olczak 1995). Finally, even broader factors wielding influence in conflicts include culture and cultural norms, ethnic salience, and group identification (Auger et al. 2010; Bhavnani and Miadownik 2009; Jabs 2007; Kozan 1997; Rouhanna and Korper 1997). Rather than reviewing the details of all factors (see Blumberg, Hare, and Costin 2006, for a review), it is beneficial to examine them from a broader perspective that provides insights into how they combine to sustain a conflict and how circumventing these factors can potentially provide a "path of least resistance" toward peace.

1. A Complex, Dynamic Perspective on Conflict

Complexity science and dynamic systems theory provide insights into how the various factors affect conflict development, progression, and change over time. Emergence is one concept that is insightful; *emergence* is the tendency for disorganized behaviors and interactions to organize into coherent patterns. Emergence is closely related to a second concept from complexity science: *self-organization*, in the sense of a process by which bottom-up actions by individuals give rise to organized larger-scale social action (Coleman 2011; Nowak and Vallacher 1998). Self-organization promotes coherence within social systems. Emergent social coherence can lead to a shared sense of identity, common norms, and shared morals, all of which are necessary for a functional society. However, coherence can also contribute to problems, including conflict when people embrace rigid, stereotypical attitudes about members of an outgroup that tend to exacerbate tensions. The sense of rigid coherence giving rise to a worsening conflict is a key idea that can be

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understood from a third complexity science concept, the attractor.

An *attractor* is any coherent, consistent, persistent, and stable state within a system (cf. Coleman 2011; Liebovitch, Vallacher, & Michaels 2010; Nowak and Vallacher 1998; Strogatz 1994). An attractor's stabilizing force tends to be restrictive, keeping a given system in a particular state over a long period of time. Applied to social systems, attractors include characteristic ways that people behave, coordinate, and interact. The attractor is a fundamental concept in dynamic-systems-inspired approaches to understanding the process at work across different levels of conflict. In benign conflicts, such as commonplace arguments and disagreements, conflict has not emerged as a coherent and defining pattern. The adversaries in a benign dispute may feel agitated and argue vigorously, but they tend to "cool off" and can later approach one another with new ways to settle differences. However, if the negative exchanges and consequences go unresolved or if the adversaries escalate the dispute, the underlying dynamic may change. Over time, persistent conflict primes adversaries to think and feel more negatively about one another. Seething emotions and malignant thoughts press those involved to act in hurtful ways toward one another. Such intensifying negativity can draw bystanders into the dispute. Friends of the adversaries are drawn into choosing sides, or if they try to remain neutral, may be accused of supporting the opponent. This familiar pattern of escalation reflects the emergence of a powerful, coherent, and self-organizing pattern of conflict (cf. Coleman et al. 2007; Vallacher et al. 2010). As the conflict between individuals or groups intensifies, the levels of psychological and social reality – including thoughts, feelings, actions, and social relations – become increasingly interlinked as an attractor emerges.

Interlinking refers to "conflict initiated at an intergroup level (...) likely to spawn and reinforce the [negative] beliefs, emotions, and actions of individuals in their interpersonal relations" (Coleman et al. 2007, 1465). Kriesberg (1980) defines an interlinking conflict as one with connected and embedded events pertaining to an enduring, malignant relation between adversaries. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is interlinked, multidimensional, and complex with internal

factors including leadership competition, economic development, and ideological changes all contributing to the "multidimensional ethnonational conflict" (Reiter 2009, xvi). Each of these factors is connected in some way to the conflict, contributing to an enduring pattern of conflict. Through interlinking, this "conflict attractor" influences many components of life in Israel and in the occupied territories, making the conflict a defining part of life. Is there any hope to escape this powerful dynamic?

According to the dynamic systems approach, peace may be more likely to emerge through taking initiatives to resolve social issues rather than by focusing on externally brokered peace agreements and politically directed negotiations. Addressing social problems through a combination of grassroots problem-solving efforts, improved social connections, and enhanced social capital, may allow the emergence of enclaves ripe for peace where people can arrive at new ways of acting, thinking, and feeling (cf. Coleman 2011). Over time, locally positive social relations can foster potential for peace. The core idea of this approach is that resolving intractable conflict first requires a secure social foundation capable of supporting peace.

2. Some Fundamental Social Factors Contributing to Conflict

Establishment of a social foundation conducive to peace between Israel and Gaza/The West Bank first requires an understanding of the complex social factors contributing to sustaining the conflict. These social factors persist beneath the more salient reasons for the dispute (such as historical tensions and land rights), and include problems with the Palestinian leadership (worsened in part by Israeli intervention), economic inequalities between Israel and Palestine, depleted social services within the occupied territories, geographic constraints that create dense urban clusters prone to social volatility, and psychological factors exacerbating rigid, inflexible patterns of interaction in both the Israeli and Palestinian contexts.

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2.1. Leadership and Instability

The process for ending these violent cycles is multidimensional, but the lack of leadership in the occupied territories remains a critical and specific problem (Issa 2010). Without well-organized leadership in the territories, political instability is rampant (Nachmias 1999), contributing to the success of militant groups that thrive on the political instability. As Abu-Amr explains: "Hamas emerged in a context of disillusionment with the Palestinian secular political movements and with the frustrated hope of achieving salvation from the Israeli occupation through them" (Abu-Amr 1994, 66). Israel's involvement in Palestinian affairs had further unintended consequences leading to the rise of Hamas. For example, Israel initially showed some support for Mujama Al-Islamiya, an Islamic Center that included a mosque with social support units including a clinic and women's center. In the run-up to the *intifada*, Mujama Al-Islamiya became increasingly important within the occupied territories as Israeli-run structures of authority (such as the courts) shut down. The informal channeling of power to Mujama Al-Islamiya coincided with its founder, Sheik Ahmad Yasin, and others founding Hamas as a resistance movement in 1987 (ibid.). Hamas accordingly occupies a complex place within Palestinian society and in the broader context of tensions between Israel and the Gaza Strip/West Bank. While Hamas seeks Palestinian independence establishment of a truly Islamic society within Gaza and the West Bank and resistance to Israel, especially with respect to lands lost during the 1948 and 1967 wars (Shadid 1988), it also is linked to social services within the Occupied territories. Thus, Hamas is integrated within Palestinian life, providing essential social and educational services, which further permits this group to indirectly influence people's perspectives of the conflict in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank. Thus, understanding the dynamical interplay between economic inequalities between Israel and Palestine, poverty, and education can help to potentially generate new pathways for peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

2.2. Stratification and Poverty

There are stark contrasts between the standards of living enjoyed by people who live in Israel versus those in the Gaza Strip or West Bank. Whereas Israel is prosperous, the occupied territories suffer from significant unemployment and economic hardship (Nachtwey and Tessler 1995). In 1993, the U.N.'s annual report indicated 30 to 40 percent unemployment in Gaza and the West Bank (UNWRA 2009a); conditions have not improved since the early 1990s, especially in Gaza. In 2008, 48.3 percent of Palestinians living in Gaza were unemployed, whereas 26.0 percent of Palestinians living in the West Bank were unemployed (ibid.). Economic conditions are stagnant in the West Bank and "particularly dire" in Gaza, such that the economic conditions are among the worst in the Middle East and North Africa (UNWRA 2009b). Israel has lower unemployment and the highest GDP in the Middle East (UN 2009). The economic hardships in the occupied territories juxtaposed against prosperous Israel make the economic inequalities between Israel and Gaza/the West Bank especially salient, contributing to tensions arising from a myriad of social forces. For example, studies provide consistent evidence that in situations with two distinct groups, the lower status group tends to form stronger ingroup bias (see Tajfel 1982 for a review), which changes group dynamics in powerful ways including increased emphasis on ingroup similarities and outgroup differences (for example Tajfel 1969). As Brewer explains, a sense of "moral superiority, distrust of outgroups, and social comparison all emerge from ingroup maintenance and favoritism and can lead to hostility and conflict between groups even in the absence of realistic conflict over material resources or power" (2007, 703). Combined with memory of the intractable conflict, economic stratification strengthens ingroup-outgroup identities and is one social force factoring into the conflict.

The poor economic conditions in the Occupied territories further exacerbate Israeli-Palestinian tensions and contribute to aggressive attitudes within the territories (Shlaim 2009). It is well-known that there are correlations between poverty and violence (for example Foster, Brooks-Gunn, and Martin 2007). Individuals who join violent groups are often unemployed and marginalized but retain strong social bonds within their communities (Strom and Irvin 2007). In the Israel-Palestine context, associations between violence and poverty are amplified by political violence as evident by clear relationships

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between Palestinian youths' socio-economic status and exposure to political, domestic, and social violence (Al-Krenawi, Graham, and Sehwail 2007).

In many cases, violence originating in Gaza or the West Bank is directed towards Israel, which is seen as an exploitive, outgroup entity. One political example of exploitation comes from the Paris Accords, which allow Israeli products entry into Palestinian territories while restricting Palestinian exports (Farsoun and Aruri 2005). Palestinians' perception of Israeli exploitation goes beyond political discourse, however. As one sixteen-year-old Palestinian girl related: "Every day I wake up, I realize once again that we are still enslaved by cruel powers [Israel]" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009, 336). Furthermore, while Israel needs strict border enforcement for security, this heightens Palestinians' sense of exploitation (Borstein 2002). Empirical evidence of the relationship between Palestinians' economic trouble and violent acts against Israel comes from Sayre's (2009) observation that bombings carried out by Palestinian militant groups increased when economic conditions deteriorated in the Occupied territories. Sayre (2009, 23) concludes that one of the most important elements of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict may be the frustration shared by Palestinian youth who "unlike their parents, have been promised peace and prosperity by the Oslo Accords, and when these benefits failed to appear, their frustration soared." This conclusion is supported by other studies that link violent group membership with poverty and unemployment (see Strom and Irving 2007). In the Palestinian context, however, there is an additional factor contributing to the conflict: the complex interaction between organizations concerned with social welfare, fundamentalism, and resistance.

2.3. Link between Poverty and Support for Extremism

A difficult economy and ongoing political tensions between Israel and the occupied territories contribute to social frustrations within Gaza and the West Bank. This frustration benefits the militant groups that are active within the occupied territories. As Lederman summarizes: "when governments cannot provide essential services, radical groups can move into niche areas such as health services and education at relatively low cost, and that in turn has a direct impact on mass perceptions" (1995, 565). One outcome from continued social and economic frustrations may be the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in recent decades, which attracts disenfranchised youth who are most often exposed to the daily life difficulties these problems exacerbate (see Abu-Amr 1994; Nachtwey and Tessler 1995).

Severe deficiencies in the secular Palestinian Authority's capacity to provide social services for its population plays favorably into Islamic fundamentalist groups' social power. This is especially evident with the Islamic Brotherhood in the Palestinian Territories, from which Hamas formed in response to the *intifada* (Abu-Amr 1994). The Islamic Brotherhood has a long history of running religious schools, kindergartens and nursery schools, libraries, sports clubs, women's centers, and even informal courts (ibid.). The Islamic Brotherhood also provides social and economic support to Palestinian victims of political violence (Abbott 2010). Its multifaceted role in Palestinian life garners support as the legitimate resistance to Israeli occupation. Comparatively, the Palestinian Authority is viewed less favorably and is considered an inept leadership (Farsoun and Aruri 2005). With support for the Islamic Brotherhood and stark differences between Israeli and Palestinian standards of living, associated fundamentalist groups in the Occupied territories capitalize on the economic situation. These groups gain support within Gaza and the West Bank, especially amongst students.

2.4. Students and Education

Under the Israeli occupation, Palestinian schools were often controlled by the Israeli government, poorly funded, and used a curriculum lacking cultural relevance to the Arab population within Gaza and the West Bank. Accordingly, these schools often became zones of confrontation with educators not necessarily adhering to the formal curriculum. Meanwhile, negative portrayals of the opposing side surfacing in both the Palestinian and Israeli primary schools sensitize children to the precarious socio-political situation existing between Israel and the Palestinian Territories (Abu-Saad and Champagne 2006).

The daily reality of living with the intractable conflict leads to children experiencing anxiety and other psychological distress

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which may enhance the vulnerability to influence of adolescents and young adults (for example Abdeen et al., 2008). This is evident within Palestinian universities, where Hamas and other groups benefit from students' frustration about Israel and difficult economic conditions. Militant groups attempt to influence such institutions so that they are "centers of political struggle and national resistance" that empower the Palestinian people (Abu-Saad and Champagne 2006, 1044; Bruhn 2006; Parsons 2005). The Israeli military and government is well-aware that these institutions are central to Palestinian resistance, but repressive measures taken toward the universities (Abu-Saad and Champagne 2006) only exacerbate hostile perspectives toward Israel.

Within the Occupied territories, the difficult economic situation provides limited opportunities for educated Palestinians (Farsoun and Aruri 2005). Therefore, Palestinian students graduating from the universities in the Occupied territories are likely to be unemployed and marginalized, factors that are precursors to potentially violent behavior (Strom and Irving 2007). With limited opportunities for university graduates in the Occupied territories, students may look to the Islamic Brotherhood for social validation and support (cf. Abu-Amr 1994). As is evident from this brief analysis, the education system in the Occupied territories faces an array of problems that combine to generate a persistent cycle of anger and frustration among students. Over time, and when they experience other consequences of the ongoing dispute, Palestinian youth internalize this hostility and negativity, allowing the conflict attractor to cycle through another generation.

2.5. Clusters of Poverty and Hostility

Israeli Defense Force ground and air strikes on the occupied territory escalated in late 2008 in what became known as the Gaza War. Conversely, militant groups persisted in rocket and mortar attacks on Israel (Ministry of Foreign Affairs – The State of Israel 2009). During the Gaza War there was relatively little violence within territory in Israel and in the West Bank, which some might attribute to the success of Israeli-controlled borders and defensive walls. There is likely, however, a deeper social dimension to the recent distribution of violence, linked to ideas from complexity science. The geospatial territory occupied by different groups of people may alter behavior and group stability, an idea captured by *clustering* of similar groups.

Clustering is a well-known phenomenon in social network models (Nowak and Vallacher 1998). A core assumption in social network clustering is that groups try to achieve homogeneous neighborhoods within an initially heterogeneous mixture of groups. Clustering patterns are evident in the more extensive West Bank and in the densely populated Gaza Strip. Lim, Metzler, and Bar-Yam (2007) found that separation between homogeneous population clusters may critically influence the evolution of intergroup conflict. When distinct groups are separated by less than 10 kilometers, significant intergroup contact may disrupt the clustering phenomenon and limit potential for the minority group to evolve a strong ingroup identity while separation of more than 100 kilometers tends to isolate the groups, lending to less immediate contact that reduces the chance of conflict. Simulations conducted by Lim, Metzler, and Bar-Yam (2007) found that when distinct groups exhibit strong clustering around incongruent identities, such as religious belief or historic identity, and have group separation between 10 and 100 kilometers, there is greater chance that the relative proximity heightens risk of conflict. Based on the simulations, geographic factors and population clustering may influence persistent tensions between Israel and Palestine considering that major population centers in the Gaza Strip, such as Gaza City, and West Bank, such as Ramallah, are within the 10 to 100 kilometer distance from Israeli controlled border crossings.

This assessment fits with Schelling's model that demonstrates that larger, more distinct clusters emerge when two groups are less tolerant of one another (Gallegati and Richiardi 2009). The historic tensions within Israel and Palesitne coupled with the polarized groups that have strong yet distinct social identities are contrasting factors that can yield a social situation that is especially prone to conflict (Bhavnani and Miadownik 2009). In addition to clustering's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, economic inequality and poverty in Gaza may combine to make this territory's border a particularly volatile place.

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2.6 Religion, Politics, and Social Factors

Particularly salient social and psychological differences in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict relate to distinct religious differences and the trend toward more extreme, conservative, and nationalist political viewpoints that appeal to more fundamentalist religious beliefs. The relationship between Palestinian political leaders, the military wing of Hamas, social-welfare organizations, and the Islamic faith is complex and multilayered. The same is true within Israel. While is easy to scapegoat fundamentalism or Zionism as factors exacerbating Israeli-Palestinian tensions, the reality is that the majority of Israeli citizens and political processes are secular (for example, Beit-Hallahmi 1993). However, right-wing politicians appealing to a more conservative base adopt messages from faith and Zionism to advocate for land rights and a slower peace process (for example, for Israeli politics after Oslo, see Cleveland 2004). Unfortunately, this approach contributes to a mentality simplifying the conflict into an "us versus them" framework linked to a "right versus wrong" value system.

While there are numerous excellent examinations of how religion and Zionism play into this particular context (for example Beit-Hallahmi 1993; Cleveland 2004; Morris 2007), it may be insightful to draw upon ideas from psychology to better understand how these factors (and Israeli politics) contribute to a volatile conflict resistant to change. In the psychology of religion, recent research has identified that more negative, antagonistic relations often emerge between groups when group members adhere to a combination of religious fundamentalism and right-wing authoritarianism. Religious fundamentalism is the belief in a single true religion; right-wing authoritarianism is a belief in strict adherence to social convention and obedience to legitimatized leaders. Owing in part to their more absolute beliefs, people who adhere to religious fundamentalism and right-wing authoritarianism are more likely to derogate those who do not share their views and are more likely to behave aggressively, including supporting military aggression (for reviews see Johnson, Rowatt, and LaBouff 2011; Vincent, Parrott, and Peterson 2011; McFarland 2005; Rowatt et al. 2013). If military aggression is legitimized around religious values, the resultant conflict can be

particularly resilient as such beliefs promote totalizing goals; thus, outcomes are seen increasingly in "all or nothing" terms with little chance of a conciliatory approach (cf. Strom and Irving 2007). In a psychological sense, these rigid belief and value systems are hallmarks of a strong need for cognitive closure – a way of thinking that entails rigidly favoring one's own views while dismissing those of others, leading to intolerance for ambiguity when it comes to important issues such as moral justification (Webster and Kruglanski 1994).

Psychological factors including religious fundamentalism, right-wing authoritarianism, and need for closure doubtlessly play a role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While it would be too simple to presume the majority of people who live in Israel, the Gaza Strip, or the West Bank are swayed by these precise processes, there is little doubt that the vocal majorities that argue for a total victory in securing land rights based on history, ancestry, or religious belief tap into these powerful forces. Thus, psychological forces permeate the Israel-Palestine conflict and contribute to tensions that make reconciliation less probable.

3. Mapping the Social Factors that Stabilize Conflict

From a dynamic systems perspective, social elements are entrenched in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and coalesce with overt disputes to rigidly maintain the conflict status-quo. The previous section outlined six social factors that contribute to tensions between Israeli and Palestine: 1) lack of effective leadership within the occupied territories; 2) economic stratification and poverty; 3) support for groups linked to extreme factions as a consequence of poor social resources; 4) lack of opportunities for young Palestinians; 5) dense clusters of poverty; and 6) psycho-social factors that mutually influence, and are influenced by, politics and religion in the region. Mapping these factors in relation to one another and to larger issues may provide insight into the system dynamics, which are pertinent for finding new directions for peace building.

Examining system dynamics to understand relationships is at the core of systemic thinking, which "seeks meaning in the complex patterning of interrelationships between people and groups of people" (Burns 2007, 21). Examining how various

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factors in a social system interrelate makes nonobvious dynamics increasingly apparent. It is critical to assess such dynamics, as any outcome, including peace, rarely results from a one-step process (Burns 2007). Systemic mapping provides a tool for examining unanticipated relationships in a complex social situation and is itself a dynamic, iterative process (cf. Ricigliano 2012). Accordingly, the following maps are preliminary and are brief examples of how specific factors present in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may be mapped. In practice, such mapping should be undertaken in dialogue with actual stakeholders who know the conflict on different levels (see Burns 2007; Ricigliano, 2012).

I began my example mapping by relating the macro factors that are acknowledged in many traditional accounts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Figure 1). These include Israeli and Palestinian concerns with territory and land rights, Israel's need for security, and both sides' sense of displacement (for example "right of return" and land confiscation) leading to desire for retaliation (Cleveland 2004; Glenn and Gordon 2003; Shlaim 2009).

the conflict (for example Coleman 2011), thus serving a useful starting point. The map reveals the rich dynamics between macro-level factors. For example, Israel's attempt to tighten security with checkpoints makes settlement construction and land confiscation more salient for Palestinians, leading to frustration culminating in aggression on various levels (such as riots, extremist groups launching attacks), which is detrimental to Israeli security. This dynamic is evident in Figure 1 as a series of excitatory relationships (denoted with arrows) where Israel's desire for security promotes use of check-points, bolstering Palestinian frustration. This frustration contributes to violence against Israel, which reduces Israel's sense of security (denoted by a dashed line with a cross). Dynamics that influence Israel are shown with dashed lines in the figure, while dynamics influencing Palestine are presented as solid lines. Figure 1 provides limited new insights into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and forms a foundation for exploring how important deeper social elements interact.

After the preliminary mapping, I attempted to link smaller-scale social factors to the larger-scale issues and to one-

Figure 1: Preliminary map of some core macro-level factors contributing to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
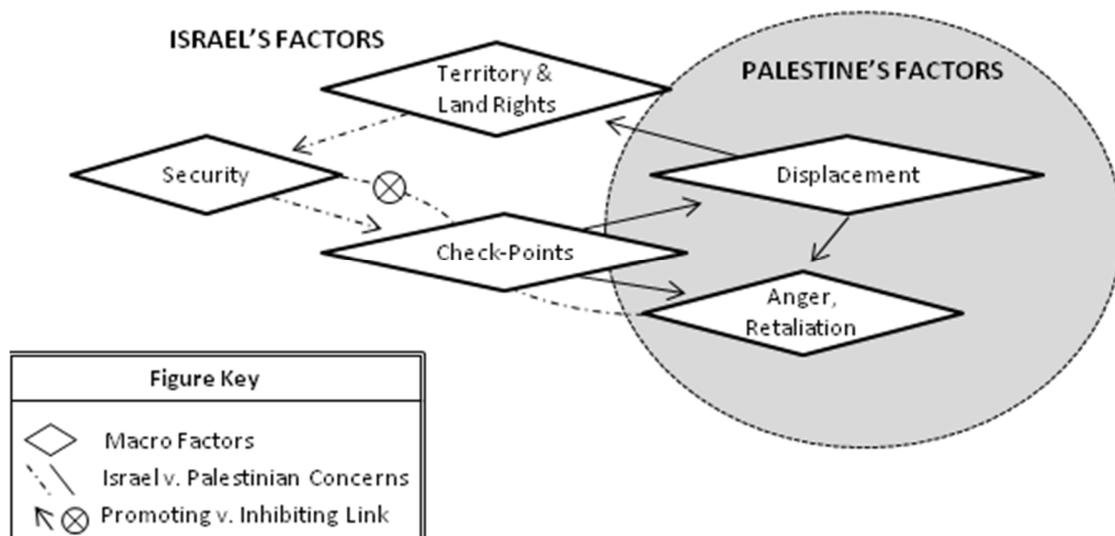
As Ricigliano (2012) notes, there is "no one clear place to begin" when it comes to systems mapping (116). The previously listed factors are often identified as core issues in
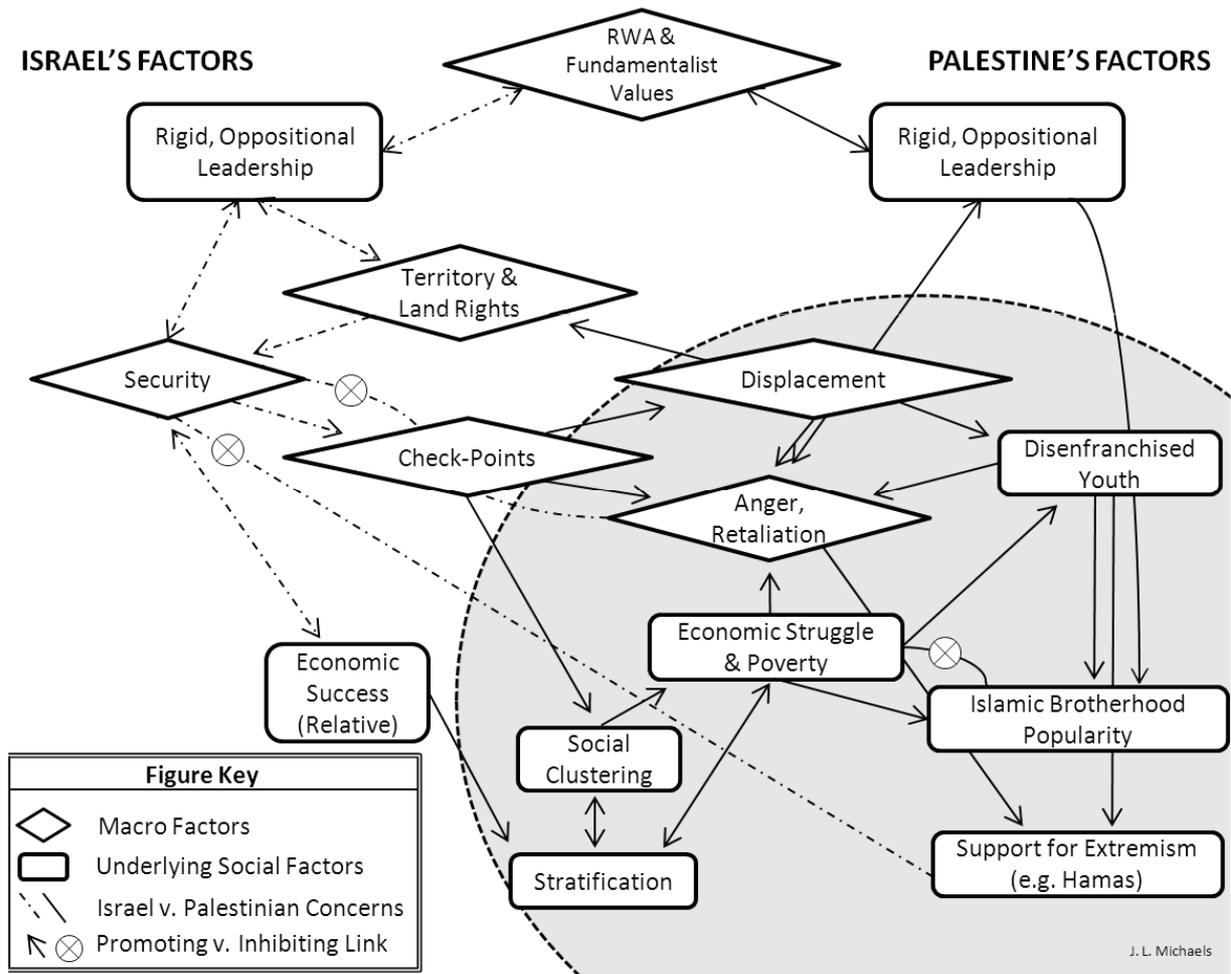
another, and to include a primary psychological factor (see Figure 2). For example, Israel's sense of security, bolstered by check-points and other unmapped factors (such as missile

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defense) also contribute to the nation's economic success relative to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. This in turn enhances Israeli security while alienating Palestinians who perceive severe economic hardship and inequality. The dynamic link between Israeli security and economic success is shown by a dashed line (designating a primarily Israeli concern) ending in arrows on either end (designating excitatory factors). The dynamic interaction between Israeli's economic success and Palestinians' sense of economic difficulty is shown by a solid black line (designating the dynamic as a primarily Palestinian concern) ending in an arrow. Many of the factors related to support for more extreme views and need for

within-group security are strengthened by the underlying right-wing authoritarianism values.

The expanded system map (see Figure 2) provides a foundation for considering the complexity inherent in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a systemic perspective. It is evident from the map that multiple connections exist between factors that promote negative interactions and combine into antagonistic feedback loops between the involved parties, with these feedback loops serving to sustain the conflict (cf. Coleman 2011).

Figure 2: Expanded map of the macro-level and social factors present in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

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4. Circumventing Entrenched Feedback Loops via Weak Power

The feedback loops underlying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict enhance its persistence. Figure 2, coupled with ideas from complexity science, provides insights into how indirect approaches may circumvent the interacting factors that sustain the conflict as a normative pattern. Over time, indirect approaches can gradually alter the feedback loops to generate new potentials for peace arising from small-scale patterns of positive social relations between adversaries. In time, positive exchanges may intensify and become commonplace leading to new *latent attractors* for peace, eventually supplanting the attractors that constrained the system in a conflict pattern (for example Coleman 2011; Liebovitch et al. 2010, Vallacher et al. 2010). As with any complex system, a new pattern, such as a latent attractor for peace, is unlikely to yield purely predictable outcomes, and peace may fail to take hold. Nevertheless, as Nowak and Vallacher (2000) demonstrate with computer simulations, in a space with complex connections between people, positive social change developing in a system riddled by conflict can yield local bubbles harboring new ways of thinking and acting. Once rooted, these positive behaviors can spread, leading to potential for emergent peace that is the critical factor for escaping an intractable conflict.

The idea that local peace initiatives can yield larger influence is not confined to theory. For example, *social entrepreneurs* are individuals who "produce small changes in the short term" that eventually elicit "significant change in the longer term" (Praszkier and Nowak 2012, 10–11). Typically, social entrepreneurs engage in small-scale initiatives that seek changes within a local community rather than engaging a large-scale problem directly. This approach relies on what Coleman (2011) terms *weak power*: an indirect approach to problem solving that avoids direct engagement in the issues that lead to extremism and polarization. Weak power often relies on a bottom-up approach that permits greater emergence of new patterns of action within a system (cf. Coleman 2011; Praszkier and Nowak 2012). Unlike the top-down approaches often applied to conflicts when external parties become involved in negotiation and peacemaking, the bottom-up process often used by social entrepreneurs allows local social organization to enhance *social capital*, the elements of social life that permit effective interactions between people and groups (cf. Praszkier and Nowak 2012).

Within the Israeli-Palestinian context, there are social entrepreneurs whose efforts may provide starting points for cultivating peace. For example, Abdelfattah Abusrour has worked to provide Palestinian youth with centers devoted to promoting positive experiences, ways to resist Israeli occupation through non-violent means, and counseling and tutoring services (see Ashoka 2013a). Abusrour provides a clear example of the bottom-up, weak force approach advocated by the present analysis. Having grown-up in a refugee camp, Abusrour possesses firsthand experience with the human consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On account of his background, Abusrour is capable of building rapport with Palestinian refugees (youth in particular) and draws upon his knowledge to facilitate proactive, small-scale social change. Abusrour worked to develop the Al Rowwad Community Center (ACC) in the Aida Refugee camp, a place ripe for volatility due, in part, to its location near an Israeli checkpoint. Through the ACC, Abusrour has created a safe haven for Palestinian youth to escape the social problems that plague their community, where they can instead express themselves, dream, and simply be children.

Other social entrepreneurs are engaged in issues relating to violence, youth, and economic problems within the Palestinian Territories. Yehudah Paz's efforts led to the Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Development (NIPSED), an organization that provides training and organization for peacemakers and the development of small scale economic and social projects that help transform local communities (Ashoka 2013b). Recognizing that a top-down approach to social problems does not foster transformation, Paz and the NIPSED cultivate grassroots efforts to provide positive change and improve Israeli-Palestinian relations. For example, in 2009 Paz's International Center for the Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises brought Israeli and Palestinian women artisans and entrepreneurs together in Beersheva, Israel, and Beit Jalah, West Bank (ibid.) so that they could collaborate. This project transcends the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to bring

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together people who might not otherwise work together. Ultimately, the project serves to help the local artisans and entrepreneurs build social capital and enhance their communities' economic potential.

Abusrour and Paz are two exceptional individuals whose actions demonstrate that a weak power, peace writ small, approach to conflict may help to generate new ways for people to interact and frame their social relations. While such small-scale initiatives are unlikely to lead to immediate cessation of hostilities, they can be an impetus for emergent peace (for the Mozambique case, see Bartoli et al. 2010). Social entrepreneurs work at the periphery of conflicts to generate enclaves in which new interactions distinct from the established antagonistic ways of thinking and behaving can emerge. Given time, emergent new behaviors can organize across a grassroots level and provide a critical foundation for peace.

5. Conclusion

The Israel-Palestine conflict has persisted for over a century – exacting immense costs through loss of life, psychological trauma, and economic turmoil (see Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009; Sayre 2009; Al-Krenawi et al. 2007). One likely reason for the failure of previous initiatives is that they largely relied upon political or third-party mediation. There is more than politics or history at work in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Daily life in Gaza and the West Bank as well as in Israel has been frequently disrupted by the conflict. Even when there are no overt instances of violence, the conflict's impacts linger. As the conflict has deepened and persisted, multiple elements of life have been affected and absorbed in the vicious conflict cycle. Therefore, successful conflict resolution in the Israel-Palestine context needs to address a broader array of elements including social factors.

Several social problems exacerbate the Israeli-Palestinian tensions. These include wide disparities between the two regions, which are most salient in economic stability, opportunities for employment, and access to social resources (Faroun and Aruri 2005; Abbott 2010). The network of security wells and border crossings disrupt travel and communication and in-turn heighten the formation of population clusters

where insular ideas can more readily spread (Borstein 2002; Lieberfeld 2007; Lim et al 2007). Clearly a program that addresses all the social problems in detail would be unwieldy, and people on both sides obviously have a right to security and economic well-being However, smaller initiatives with specific goals to address social problems could be implemented. Such programs may not quickly resolve the enduring Israel-Palestine conflict, but may "ripen" the situation so that resolution may take root (cf. Coleman 2000; Zartman 2000). Indeed, there is a complex and nested network of social forces influencing one another, as revealed by the systems maps. Unraveling the web of factors that contribute to a resistant conflict in Israel and the occupied territories is no easy task and necessitates starting at a small-scale social level.

This brief analysis identifies some key social problems that need to be addressed before peace can emerge within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including: 1) enhancing opportunities for Palestinian youth expression, success, and achievement (such as Abusrour's efforts); 2) initiating new social services which may reduce reliance on services presently provided by groups that have historical affiliations with militant organizations; 3) opening new lines of communication between the occupied territories, which may reduce the volatile group clustering observed in the Gaza Strip by better connecting this isolated territory with the larger West Bank; and 4) developing new lines of communication between the occupied territories and Israel, offering non-conflict-oriented exchanges between the people living in these area, which may gradually lead to new understanding and spreading tolerance between the two groups (such as Paz's efforts). While peace is unlikely to come from these ideas alone, working to promote small, socially focused changes can locally alter the persistent negativity, antagonism, and pessimism that contribute to a social atmosphere unready for peace or change. In order for Israelis and Palestinians to come together in peace they must first escape the vicious conflict cycle that is linked to a multitude of related factors. The previously outlined peace writ small approach, inspired by complexity science and dynamic systems, is merely a starting point to inspire new ways of thinking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Gradually applying such ideas may lead to small-scale

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initiatives facilitating new ways of thinking, behaving, and interacting. Gradually, these new and more positive experiences can spread, generating an emergent foundation for peace that is capable of supporting larger scale initiatives.

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