Peace Activism: Forging Change in a Complicated World
Case Study Focus: Israel/Palestine and Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

In May 2022, I was invited to be a participant in an international professional exchange program (IPEP) in Israel. Its specific focus was Peace Studies. Over the course of two weeks, I joined with two other participants from Spain and Taiwan, staying in the homes of both Israeli Jews and Arab Palestinians[1], attending professional work visits across different parts of Israel including East Jerusalem and joining workshops focusing on peace activism in Wahat Al-Salam~Neve Shalom village. Both in the week prior to the start of the IPEP and for one week after, I had opportunity to also stay and visit different projects in Bethlehem, Palestine on the West Bank. This paper has a twofold purpose: to share my learning from this exchange experience and apply it to my main area of research interest based in Myanmar.

In the direst of conflict, peace spaces can be found whereby peace activism can achieve pockets of peace. Leshem and Halparin's [1] recent research which surveyed 500 each of Jewish Israelis and Arab Palestinians relating to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, introduced a new concept for considering possible peace negotiation and activism – *Lay Theories of Peace*. They argue that this theory enables an examination of how people understand "what peace is" rather than the values of peace used as the basis of most international and national peace talks and agreements interpreted as "what peace should be". Contemporaneously with this understanding is the inner will to see a different outcome. Vogel [2] speaks to this as "At the heart of civil society activism and civil resistance lies its ability to imagine and contribute to an alternative social order and political change" (p. 441).

Applying the theoretical concepts of "cultural wisdom" [3] and "dialogic approach to communication" [4], this paper explores peacebuilding activities in the current conflicts in Israel and Palestine where my peace study took place, and Myanmar where my current research interests lie.

KEYWORDS: Peace Activism, Israel/Palestine, Myanmar, cultural wisdom, dialogic
              communication.

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[1] The terms Arab and Palestinian are used interchangeably in this paper.

1   INTRODUCTION

"Since wars begin in the minds of men [women], it is in the minds of men [women] that the defenses of peace must be constructed" [5].

This article is not the result of any formal research. Rather, it has been borne out of lived experience when in May 2022, the author participated in the Council of International Fellowship (CIF) Israel's international professional exchange program (IPEP), the focus of which was its second Peace Project. The learning I gained in this IPEP caused me to make comparisons with the current situation in Myanmar since the military junta staged its coup d'état in February 2021. The decades long Israel-Palestinian conflict since 1948 mirrors, in many aspects, the equally decades long civil conflict in Myanmar since independence. As a lecturer in the international Master and Undergraduate degrees in social science where the majority of our students are from Myanmar, and previously, since 2007, working as a volunteer educator in refugee and migrant programs on the Thai-Burma border, I am very aware of the impact of war on civilian populations. However, the focus of my different research relating to refugees and migrants from Myanmar over these years has negated to explore the positive outcomes of "everyday peace" that Roger MacGinty [6] describes as "small acts of peace … that have the capacity to disrupt conflict" (p. 2). This paper shares the beginnings of my exploration into this area.

In this way, as a social researcher, the focus of this paper reflects an action research paradigm defined by Reason and Bradbury as,

> A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people (p. 1) [7].

Further, it acknowledges the principal values guiding action research, being the abiding respect for people's knowledge and the notion that human systems can be best understood and changed if it involves the members involved in those systems [8].

2   RESEARCH QUESTION, OBJECTIVES AND THESIS STATEMENT

2.1   Research Question:

- How can peace activism create positive change in our turbulent world?

- What constitutes peace activism?

2.2   Research Objectives:

- To promote a culture of peace whereby individuals will actively engage to be agents of change in their divided societies.

- To understand the diversity of how peace is enacted in violent conflicts.

2.3   Thesis Statement:

In the direst of conflict, peace spaces can be found whereby peace activism can achieve pockets of peace.

3   LITERATURE REVIEW

In response to the continuance of wars and inequality situations in our world, a wide range of literature focusing on peace exists. This literature review first focuses on definitions and progresses to examine literature in peace studies.

3.1   The difference faces of Peace

Peace is a difficult word to define because of people's different viewpoints, religion, politics and social position. Herath highlights this by naming several different ideas people have about peace meaning,

> Peace is the normal, non-warring condition of a nation, group of nations, or the world", "Peace is an agreement or treaty between warring or antagonistic nations, groups, etc., to end hostilities and abstain from further fighting or antagonism", "Peace is a state of mutual harmony between people or groups, especially in personal relations: Try to live in peace with your neighbours", "Peace is the normal freedom from civil commotion and violence of a community; public order and security:", "Peace is the freedom of the mind from annoyance, distraction, an anxiety, an obsession, etc.; tranquillity; serenity (p. 104) [9].

What is evident here is these ideas can be separated into three main types which are recognized in scholarly literature: Negative peace, Positive Peace, and Structural Peace. These terms were defined by Johan Galtung [10] in his seminal work, *Violence, Peace and Peace Research.* They can be summarised as follows:

Negative Peace: Peace as the absence of bloodshed and war achieved when there is a negation of overt violence.

Positive Peace: Characterized by friendship, cooperation, solidarity, and harmony.

Structural Peace: A socio-political order where equality and justice prevails ([1] pp. 18378-18379).

Leshem and Halparin's recent research which surveyed 500 each of Jewish Israelis and Arab Palestinians relating to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict introduced a new concept of peace – *Lay Theories of Peace* – which they define as how people define and understand what peace is. In so doing, their theory entwines all three of Galtung's peace types, with the difference being that it enables an examination of how people understand "what peace is" rather than the values of peace used as the basis of most international and national peace talks and agreements interpreted as "what peace should be". They go on to explain,

> Although participators from both disadvantaged and advantaged groups may have deep aspirations for peace, those from the disadvantaged group might be thinking about a completely different kind of peace than participators from the advantaged group (p. 13789) [1].

Oliver Richmond's discussion of *hybrid peace* bears similarities to Leshem and Halperin's work. He contends that negotiations involving both negative and positive peace aspirations face several dilemmas for realistic outcomes. Firstly, he states that,

> a hybrid peace cannot emerge without hybrid politics and some sort of basic order following an encounter between local and international agencies (p. 60).

He further raises the issue of power and how a *hybrid peace* needs to work within a framework in which "power circulates between its constituent actors" (p. 62). Here we can see the dilemma of equal inclusion of both advantaged and disadvantaged actors. Richmond concludes that the legacy of colonialism in many conflict situations today pose a great dilemma in achieving a hybrid peace framework citing countries such as Afghanistan, Timor-Leste, Guatemala, Liberia and Sierra Leone as examples where peace …

> … does not merely rest on building a liberal state or reconciling diverse identity groupings to liberal peace, but also on addressing customary processes and historical political organization, as well as local and international inequality (p. 64) [11].

> Roger MacGinty adds to these faces of peace when he coined the term "everyday peace" which he defines as,

> A series of actions and modes of thinking that people utilize to navigate through life in deeply divided and conflict-affected societies (p. 8).

Everyday peace is a bottom-up approach that aligns with Galtung's typology of positive peace, in that it is guided by core concepts of sociality, reciprocity, and solidarity. Adopting a hyper-local approach, MacGinty advocates that,

> "Peace acts and thinking can be conceptualized as micro-circuits that occur in larger circuits disrupting dominant conflict narratives … consitut[ing] the glue that prevents fragile societies from slipping over the edge" (p. 6) [6].

Ware et al add that these micro-circuits can be sites of active resistance requiring a social imaginary, leading people and communities to exercise their agency to bring about positive change to conflict situations overshadowing their existence (p. 292) [12].

3.2   Peace Spaces

Peace space or peace activism – which comes first? It's a bit like the chicken and the egg riddle. Some would argue that space first needs to be created for peace activists to be active; others would say that people first need to conceive a desire for peace and then they will find the spaces to be active. Birte Vogel contends that the study of "peace spaces" is neglected in the scholarly literature to the detriment of a proper understanding of what motivates peace activists and/or what goals and objectives they are aiming to and/or can achieve. He defines "peace spaces" as:

> … spaces where the subaltern voice, in this case the marginalized voice of peace, can find or create a space in which to evolve and challenge hegemonic discourses of (ethno-)nationalism or violence prevalent in (post-)conflict societies (p. 432) [2].

He refers to Busteed (2005) highlighting how "peace spaces" are created in "terms of their perceived differences, a narrative of historical community" (p. 435). Vogel agrees with Busteed that "peace spaces" can be both spaces created first by virtue of history and culture raising the "will" of the marginalised to "forge political unity in the face of the 'other'" (p. 435) [2]. However, he again refers to Busteed (2005), that "resistance creates its own geographies" (p.435) whereby peace activists utilize various tactics (thus creating peace spaces) to make their voice heard and effect change. Taken together, peace spaces are spaces of civil resistance against the hegemony of conflict and violence overall.

3.3   Peace Activism across different arenas

> "At the heart of civil society activism and civil resistance lies its ability to imagine and contribute to an alternative social order and political change" (p. 441) [2].

I love this quote. It speaks to the heart of peace activism. First, people need to be able to *imagine* a different order; that the situation they are embroiled in can be different. Once the mind and the heart imagine a different order, then their whole body can recruit and or join with others – to contribute to what they imagine the social order needs to be.

In response to situations of violence and inequality, Bowman & Pickard highlight how peace is a "powerful conceptual tool for making sense of the complex relationship between emotions, community, support and the exploration of positionalities" (p. 505) [13].   In essence, peace activism aims to bring about social change – to make the world (or the space one is living in) a better place. Perhaps one of the most memorable peace activist movements of the last century was the Civil Rights Movement in USA led by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. motivated by his "I have a Dream" speech, an excerpt below:

> *With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day* [14].

3.3.1   Typologies of Peace Activists

Peace activism takes place in many forms and many arenas – from national rights movements such as people of colour in the USA in the 1960s to small communities advocating safe play places for their children and many situations in between. Those who take part in peace activism have been classified in the literature as belonging to two types – "accidental activists" and "lifelong activists".

Accidental Activists: These are people who, "had life dealt a different hand", most unlikely would ever have become involved in activism. Mostly, they have never had any experience in political matters or attended any specific training. Most often "they are thrown in" to activism by the events affecting them. Even so, Ollis's research found that, spurred on by the event motivating them to take action, "accidental activists" are rapid learners, learning quickly from the experiences and training of "lifelong activists" either through media and/or through garnering the support of such people for their cause [15].

Lifelong Activists: As the adjective implies, these are people who have grown up in a culture of "seeking good for all humanity" and/or have made active choices in their youth "to work to make the world a better place". They gain in experience through intentional education, seeking out like-minded people, learning from well-known activists, actively engaging in campaigns and immersing themselves in a wide variety of networks, community groups, NGOs, and social movements [15].

Of course, it stands to reason that those who begin their activist lives through accidental or single purpose circumstances, may progress on to lifelong activism. An apt example of this is of ethnic women in Burma who joined ethnic women's organizations such as the Karenni Women's Organization or the Karen Women's Organization to seek justice for human rights abuses within their own ethnic communities, some without even any elementary school education.   There are numerous examples of some of these women who have progressed on to hold committee positions in the Women's League of Burma to draft recommendations to the NLD Government for legislation based on CEDAW principles [16].

In common, are the motivations to activism of both types – accidental and lifelong. Working alongside like-minded people, they are motivated by values they hold, a sense of duty to those affected by whatever it is they are seeking to change, and a conviction that their actions will make a positive difference.   History and current times have shown the

importance of these activists in achieving positive and structural peace at community, regional, national, and even international levels.

3.3.2   Peace Education – A Tool for Peace Activist Learning

"Peace education promotes the knowledge, skills and attitudes to help people prevent conflict occurring, resolve conflicts peacefully, or create conditions for peace" [17]

The *Peace Insight* website is a great website to explore how the above definition is carried out in real life situations globally. While peace education has been a tool for promoting peace for decades (maybe even centuries), it gained global importance when the United Nations Assembly proclaimed 2001-2010 as International Decade for Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for World's Children [18]. Concurrent with this proclamation, the 72 member countries of the Hague Appeal for Peace Organizing and Coordinating Committee together with affiliated INGO's, ratified the "Hague Agenda for Peace and Justice for the 21st Century" in 2000 at their Conference in 1999. This Agenda is premised on four (4) strands:

1. Root Causes of War / Culture of Peace.
2. International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law and Institutions
3. Prevention, Resolution and Transformation of Violent Conflict and
4. Disarmament and Human Security [19].

Under the first strand – *Root Causes of War/Culture of Peace* – the first point "Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy" was named as an essential tool to promote peace from childhood to "empower people at all levels with the peace-making skills of mediation, conflict transformation, consensus-building and non-violent social change" with the following means to implement:

i.   Insist that peace education be made compulsory at all levels of the education system.
ii. Demand that education ministries systematically implement peace education initiatives at a local and national level.
iii. Call on development assistance agencies to promote peace education as a component of their teacher training and materials production [19].

The Hague Agenda's aim could be seen as having global impact with John Page writing a decade later that "Peace education is now accepted as an important part of educational endeavour" (p. 850) [20]. In his article, he highlighted how peace education has come to be recognized as "*a right*" that empowers the idea of a *"culture of peace"*. However, he tempers this optimism by saying how much of education institutions' curricula focuses heavily on "negative peace" of "educating students to reject war, militarism and arms races" while neglecting aspects of positive and structural peace that would educate young people "towards personal fulfilment and the creation of a cooperative society" (p. 850) [20].

Schools of Peace also exist in many global locations operated largely by non-governmental organizations such as the School for Peace in Wahat-Salam-Neve Shalom, Israel attended by the author in May 2022. This school has more than a 40-year history of delivering peace education courses to individuals, community organizations and university students [21].

4.   Theoretical Concepts and Conceptual Framework

Two conceptual tools to be effective in peace activism are Cultural Wisdom and Dialogic Approach to Communication.

4.1   Cultural Wisdom

Alfaro (2005 cited in Aldás, 2015, p. 81) provides a definition of cultural wisdom as being "a process that starts from an 'illusion to be informed'" [3]. Merriam Webster Dictionary define the word "illusion" as "something that deceives or misleads intellectually". The roots to violent and conflict situations within local, regional, and inter-regional levels frequently can be sourced to a lack of cultural wisdom and an unwillingness to seek to acquire it. In the least, this leads to stereotyping, demonizing of and segregation from "the other"; at worst, it leads to ethnic cleansing and genocide. Aldás continues to highlight the essentiality of motivating those seeking to create positive change in conflict situations to begin from a premise of actively seeking to be knowledgeable of all the different cultures involved – not only in content terms, but also in terms of emotions and feelings different groups are experiencing. In this way, *cultural wisdom* is developed – an essential precursor to empowerment communication – as a basis for "facing, fighting, transforming and eradicating inequality and injustice" (p. 81) [3].

Navarro-Castro and Nario-Galace add to this understanding of the necessity to develop cultural wisdom to be effectual in any peace movement. They define it as a "holistic understanding derived from ethical, cultural and historical roots" (p. 25) stating later that "throughout the world, indigenous communities have contributed their wisdom towards peace" (p. 57) [4].

4.1.1   Some cultural wisdoms relating to peace to learn from

Many countries who have faced or are facing violent conflict situations have multi-ethnic populations within a hegemonic power system. Varied scholars have researched the value of cultural wisdom in deescalating or transforming the violence – some on a national scale, others achieving peaceful change within communities and institutions such as schools.

Indonesia: Supriyanto, Asstuti and Saputra wrote that "peace in the individual shapes the behavior of a peaceful life in family, community, nation and world" (p. 179). Their research into peace education in high schools in Indonesia showed how these two Javanese cultural characters – Semar Punakawan and Bagang Punakawan – have been enrolled into helping to reduce gang fighting that has resulted in serious injuries including death in schools. Local wisdom says that these two characters "arouse human willingness to build harmony in society … [and] seek the value of difference" (p. 179) [22].

Figure 1: Semar and Bagang Punakawans known for their wisdom (p. 179)

Asian countries with high Chinese populations: Hyeyoung Bang's research highlighted how a resurgence of Confucius wisdom is being incorporated into peace education curriculum in schools aiming at eliminating student-student and student-teacher conflicts. Bang cited Lin, Culham and Oxford (2016, p. 143) to show how the cultivation system core to Confucian belief "links individuals with the world and the universe, and aims at transformation of one's body, mind, heart, soul, and spirit for the common good, and peace and harmony of the world". Her findings show that peace education curricula with a focus on "student self-cultivation" is having positive results in promoting a culture of peace in schools (p. 104) [23].

South Africa: Professor James Ogude in a BBC Reel discussed the philosophy of "Ubuntu", an ancient cultural wisdom that translates,

"I am because you are. You are because we are" (representing values of cooperation, compassion, forgiveness, and care for others).

Post-apartheid, Bishop Desmond Tutu promoted programs based on an *Ubuntu* wisdom philosophy to regenerate post-apartheid South African society to achieve positive and structural peace values of restorative justice, forgiveness, and healing [24].

An apt closing to this exploration of the theoretical concept of "cultural wisdom" as a necessary precursor to effective peace activism is a universal indigenous wisdom,

Do not strive to cause your neighbor's undoing, for as you strive for your own good treatment, so render it to others [4].

4.1.2   Structured Dialogic Approach to Communication

This concept has its roots in Habermas's (1984) argumentation discourse whereby,

Participants put forward "validity claims" and supply reasons either supporting or critical of them [25] (p. 94).

Not to be confused with "discussion", dialogue is aimed at building "communicative reciprocity" enabling dynamic and deep insight into the issue [26] (p. 8). O'Rourke et al refer to Bangerter and Clarke (2003, p. 196) to explain that "people create dialogue *in the service* of the basic joint activities they all engage in" and they proceed to state that the purpose is to accomplish a joint aim that all participants recognize and endorse, even if they don't respect each other (p. 97) [25].

Walton 2010 (p. 1) cited in O'Rourke et al (p. 101) list 7 basic types of dialogue (Table 1).

Table 1: Seven Basic Types of Dialogue (Source, Walton, 2010, p. 1 cited in O'Rourke et al, 2021, p. 101) [25].

Type of Dialogue	Initial Situation	Participant's Goal	Goal of Dialogue
Persuasion	Conflict of opinions	Persuade other party	Resolve or clarify issue
Inquiry	Need to have proof	Find and verify evidence	Prove (disprove) hypothesis
Discovery	Need to find an explanation of facts	Find and defend a suitable hypothesis	Choose best hypothesis for testing
Negotiation	Conflict of interests	Get what you most want	Reasonable Settlement both can live with
Information seeking	Need information	Acquire or give information	Exchange information
Deliberation	Dilemma or practical choice	Coordinate goals and actions	Decide best available course of action
Eristic	Personal conflict	Verbally hit out at opponent	Reveal deeper basis of conflict

Dialogue specifically related to issues of conflict and inequality can embrace all of these types in a critical and structured approach. Two definitions are relevant here:

1. <u>Critical intergroup dialogue approach:</u> An approach that advocates explicit focus on power relations during a structured contact situation. It places power dynamics "on the table" at the heart of the encounter. [27]
2. <u>Structured dialogue:</u> Talking together in an engaged way enabling participants to collectively discover aspects of the issue together that might have been previously unknown and/or unappreciated [26] (p. 8).

Key elements in both definitions are:

1. Interaction occurs between participants who are both speaker and listener
2. The joint communicative activity enables people to reason together, establish closer relations to work towards collective goals [25] (p. 97).

Relating this theory to Peace Education and Activism, in common, is that dialogue is essential to peace education and peace activism. Chabbra's research showed how one person

who "transfer[s] the internal essential dialogue between the 'internal other' to the 'self as observer'" is key to changing the dynamic of conflict with external others. The author explains that encounters of deeply opposed beliefs involve the interplay between two others that exist within each of us as persons – "the internal other" who internalizes the view of another person or persons as a source of fear, anxiety and resistance – and the "self as observer" who is a "judicious impartial spectator", the latter being the source of possible transformation [28].

Bajaj and Vlad refer to the "empowering praxis" of peace education stating that the dialogue learning participants gain in peace education cultivates their transformative agency, empowered to be agents of peace, human rights and justice [29].

In conclusion, recent comparative research by Magda Cárdenas (2022) exploring women's peacebuilding activities in Georgia (Europe) and Myanmar concurred that dialoguing "across divides e.g., multi-ethnic or multi-religious, allows participants to both challenge and gain understanding of the other's narrative,

> "They all have experienced war and no matter what side, they all have the same aspirations such as education and economic possibilities … If you think you can solve at least one practical question, then you need to talk to them" (p. 7) [30].

Refer to the following conceptual framework (Figure 2):
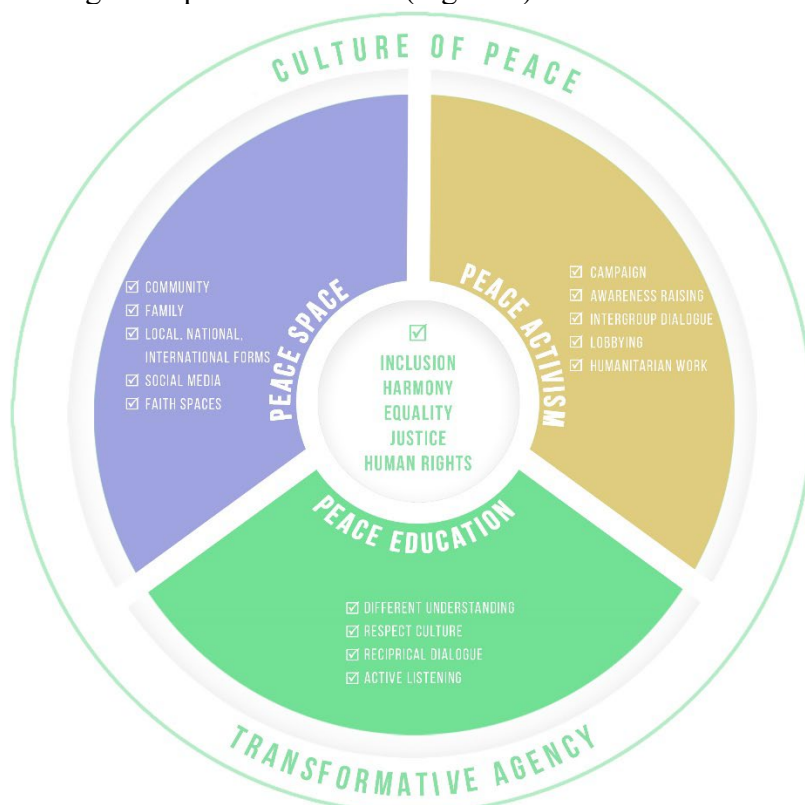

Figure 2:   Conceptual Framework showing the value of cultural wisdom and dialogue to achieve a culture of peace (created by author, designed by Brang Ja, 2022).

5.   COMPARISON OF PEACE ACTIVISM – ISRAEL/PALESTINE and MYANMAR

While each of these countries have very different histories of conflict since 1948, there are many commonalities in how bottom-up peace activism is forging positive change in

the midst of overwhelming and seemingly intractable conflict situations. For the purposes of this paper, the author focuses on the current time based on her experiences and learning during the time spent at Wahat Al-Salam~Neve Shalom (WASNS) as part of the CIF-Israel IPEP program coupled with her time spent on the West Bank, and her experiences of liaison and support of Myanmar citizens impacted by the current violence since the 2021 coup d'état.

<u>Wahat Al-Salam~Neve Shalom (WASNS)</u>: Located midway between Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, WASNS is a one-of-a-kind type of place. Beginning as a vision by Father Bruno Hussar of the Latrun Monastery in the 1960s, he gathered young Jewish and Palestinian followers who shared his vision of creating a place where Jews and Palestinians would intentionally live and strive together for equality, justice, and peace; to intentionally challenge racism, discrimination, and the conflict prevalent in their divided land. In 1970, on land first leased and later donated by the Latrun Monastery, they created the village Wahat Al-Salam~Neve Shalom (meaning Oasis of Peace in Arabic and Hebrew languages). From its humble beginnings of no paved roads, electricity or running water, this village remains unique in Israel with some of the original citizens plus others numbering more than 70 families with plans in progress to extend to 150 families in the next decade [31].

Education has long been recognized as a tool for peace [20]. Concurrent with establishing housing, Father Bruno and the original inhabitants of WASNS step by step established the first binational and bilingual nursery, kindergarten and primary school in Israel. At time of writing, the primary school hosts 270 children in Grades 1-6 who include those living in the village and others who travel daily from a radius of 30 kilometers. While following the national approved curriculum, the primary school adds a unique module – "Culture and Tradition" which aims to give space for both Arab and Jewish students to experience and learn together each other's language, cultural and religious traditions.

In 1979, the School for Peace (SFP) was established in WASNS as

> "… the first educational institution in Israel promoting … change towards peace and more humane, egalitarian and just relations between Palestinians and Jews" [32].

In its more than 40-year history, SFP works towards its goal through workshops, training programs and special projects with university students and Jewish and Palestinian professional groups employing methods of "cultural wisdom" and "critical intergroup dialogic approach" that places power dynamics "on the table" and expands critical thinking and identities to include "the other" [27].

As a final vision of Father Bruno's to be realized, the Pluralistic Educational Center was inaugurated in 2000 – four years after his death. This Center hosts film screenings, spiritual and cultural activities creating a space for learning and searching for peace both within personally and between people.

Over four days, staying in the hotel on site, the author and the two other IPEP participants had the privilege of "living the WASNS vision". We joined "Culture and Tradition" classes in the primary school which focused through film and art on the meaning of the recently remembered Nakba Day (May 15th) – the catastrophe for Palestinians resulting from Israel independence in 1948. The principal and teachers shared with us the vision and accomplishments of the school and a new annual program to be held on May 31st – the Festival of Hope – where the whole community celebrated a hope for peace and a better future for their country.

We attended the School for Peace to understand its vision, methods, and activities. The Projects Director, Dr. Roi Silberberg, shared the various programs of the school. He shared with us how these programs are achieving "everyday peace" in communities across both Israel and Palestine which in many instances are resulting in "structural peace" as trainees

and workshop participants realize their vision for peace in specific projects in areas where they live.

Wi'Am Palestinian Conflict Resolution and Transformation Center, Bethlehem, Palestine: Separate to the IPEP program, the author had opportunity to spend time in Bethlehem and visit with the staff of Wi'Am (Agape in Greek, Peace in English). Established in 1994, its founder and Director, Zoughbi Alzoughbi shared Wi'am's many programs aiming to mitigate the overt oppression and vulnerability of Palestinians living under occupation. Through Wi'am's programs, Zoughbi and his staff utilize *Sulha*, an Arab tradition of reconciliation to create spaces of 'everyday peace' [33].

Civil Resistance to Myanmar's military junta coup d'état since February 2021: The people of Myanmar are no strangers to military rule that caused deprivation and hardship, especially for people living in the ethnic states, for decades. While protests and demonstrations occurred sporadically, they were short-lived with the resultant junta crackdowns. However, the response nationally to the latest coup has been very different from any time previous in the history of Myanmar. Its people had experienced 11 years of a democracy for the first time since independence and, across the country, they were prepared to fight to regain it. Beginning with country-wide demonstrations with an expectation of international intervention that did not materialize, and which were met with fierce retribution by the junta, rather than weakening as in previous times, the resistance has grown in strength taking many forms across the country [34, 35].

At the time of writing, the junta regime has wielded its power over the nation for 21 months. And for 21 months, the everyday people of the nation have resisted this power despite the junta's violent retributory response that has resulted in gross human rights abuses. From the structural to the everyday levels, resistance to the regime has grown in strength. At the structural level, within weeks of the coup, political survivors of the junta's purge, in exile or in hiding, had formed the National Unity Government (NUG) that has gained the people's support globally. It is acting as a government, albeit in exile, with ministerial portfolios and developing policies for a realistic federalism. Alongside ethnic armed groups that had been actively fighting a civil war since independence, a new military style armed force emerged. Determined young people from all strata of Myanmar's society, across all areas of Myanmar, formed People's Defense Forces (PDF), procured training and arms, and are actively resisting by force to regain the democracy that has been stripped away from the country. Immediately after the coup, the civil defense movement (CDM) emerged that continues, whereby people across the country have refused to work in any junta-controlled employment including both government and private sectors [35].

Among other factors, the involvement of all strata of Myanmar's society in opposing the coup has resulted in a significant outcome, in that many people from the urban regions and some in majority ethnic regions now understand for the first time, how incorrect has been their unquestioning acceptance of the hegemonic narrative that the ethnic people of the rural areas including the Rohingya who had been fighting for their human rights for decades were "enemies of the state". From the structural level of the NUG, to the everyday level through social media, apologies have been given with assurances of a more inclusive society to be realized when democracy is restored [34].

The question arises, can this resistance be categorized as peace activism. Many scholars are in agreement that resistance is a necessary precursor to achieving peace. Roger MacGinty [36] stresses that agency is required at both individual and group levels for peace to be achieved and that this can include active resistance (p. 555). Birte Vogel [2] and Anthony Ware and his colleagues [12] support MacGinty stating that people need first to

have a group "social imaginary" opposing dominant conflict narratives, to then exercise agency that can involve active resistance to establish positive peace outcomes.

6.   CONCLUSION

This paper opened with a quote from UNESCO's Constitution "Since wars begin in the minds of men [women], it is in the minds of men [women] that the defences of peace must be constructed" [5]. The "defences of peace" to which the Constitution refers are the subject matter of this paper.

The case studies of Wahat Al'Salam~Neve Shalom in Israel, Wi'am in Palestine and the current situation in Myanmar in response to the 2021 coup d'état each highlight both the diversity of peace activism and its commonalities. In WASNS, live an intentional community of Israeli Jewish and Palestinians who demonstrate the core components of 'everyday peace' of 'sociality, reciprocity and solidarity' [31]. In this way, the residents and the organizations operating in this village including the elementary school and the School for Peace are achieving the wider typologies of peace, being 'positive' and 'structural' peace. The residents project their 'everyday peace' life of the village to their study and workplaces outside, exampling an alternative viewpoint of the Israeli nationalistic, hegemonic narrative.

Socio-politically, both the elementary school and the School for Peace advocate for structural peace to be achieved in their country through their programs. For example, through representation and negotiation at both District and State levels, the unique 'Culture and Tradition' curriculum developed by the school is now being considered for inclusion in the curriculum of some state schools in the wider district. In its more than 40-year history, the School for Peace has documented and published many positive outcomes in both Israel and Palestine of its flagship activity of "Change Agents" programs. The empowering praxis of education as a tool to cultivate transformative agency for peace [29] can be seen in the programs of both these schools.

The regulatory barriers controlling identity and movement of Palestinians' forcible location to the West Bank restrict, though not entirely, Wi'am's ability to work for 'structural peace'. Through global connections, they are a voice advocating for essential human rights of their people to be recognized. A staff member stated to the author that while the nine-meter-high physical wall very visible outside his office that separates Bethlehem and Jerusalem bars the way to physically lobby for Palestinian human rights at the Knesset[2], the internet enables far more reaching avenues for lobbying. On the ground, their many programs with men, women, youth, and children are examples of activities working for positive peace outcomes in their community.

The junta's violent retributive response to the agency of the Myanmar people to rise up and oppose military rule has resulted in countless number of people killed, upwards of one million internally displaced, more than 10,000 unjustly detained and a conservative estimate of 30,000 fled the country [37]. However, the people's response nationally within and those living outside the country remains stalwart in their resistance to the regime. At the structural level, the NUG is utilizing critical structural dialogue for international recognition of their legitimacy as a representative government of the people of Myanmar. Their acts of peace are evidenced through the ministerial portfolios they have created. In consultation with civil society organizations (also in exile), they are writing policy and reviewing the Constitution to enable an orderly transition to democratic government in the conviction that the military regime will be defeated. Acts of positive peace are evident in the different strata of Myanmar society, from rural villagers and internally displaced collaboratively sharing scant

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[2] The Knesset is the Hebrew word for Israel's parliament located in Jerusalem
(https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/history-and-overview-of-the-knesset)

resources, to CDMers, both internally displaced and those living as refugees in neighbouring countries using social media to foster solidarity. Hyper-locally, these peace acts are what MacGinty describes as micro-circuits that are informing larger circuits [6] of their intention and will to live peaceful existences, significantly disrupting the military regime's power and claim as rulers of their country.

An important point in common to both the Israel/Palestine and Myanmar case studies is the development of cultural wisdom. In the case studies of WASNS and Wi'am, it is seen how communal living and programs intentionally seek to change dominant narratives of "the other" (Palestinian). In the current situation in Myanmar, many native Burmans across the country and majority ethnics in some states have publicly through social media and formal statements acknowledged the falsehood of the many decades' dominant narrative that the ethnic people opposing the different regimes labelled as "enemies of the state" that has led at its worse to ethnic cleansing [34, 35]. These are significant steps forward in nation-wide development of cultural wisdom which Aldás states is essential in achieving both structural and positive peace [3].

To conclude, bringing the subject matter of this paper to the personal level, having a desire and will to enact peace must begin in our minds – to have a real desire "to be informed" – to understand "the other" that so often has been misinformed through media reports, accounts passed down generationally and word of mouth. From the mind, there needs to be a change of heart in how we view "the other" which in turn, will lead to intentional action of the hands – a millennia old philosophy coined by Aristotle – *logos, pathos and ethos* – the three elements that can achieve positive change in so many spheres of life [38].

While it is unlikely that "negative peace – the absence of wars" – will ever be achieved globally, within entrenched conflict situations, it is possible to achieve both "positive and structural peace", to challenge dominant conflict narratives, in the places where we are. The tools are in our hands – developing cultural wisdom, and with that wisdom, enter into critical structural dialogue. From this, transformative agency can accomplish much needed change in the midst of conflict.

<center>"Learn peace – Teach Peace – Share Peace" [39].</center>

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