

Stories of Connection, Compassion, and Courage in Palestine-Israel:
The 'Combatants for Peace' Ceremonies as third narrative practices,
between (re)shaping of memory and *future-making*, towards collective
liberation.

Research topic

The research chooses as a case study the two Ceremonies of the binational movement of Israelis and Palestinians 'Combatants for Peace' CfP: the *Joint Memorial Ceremony* and the *Joint Nakba Remembrance Ceremony*.

CfP work together to end the occupation and bring peace, equality and freedom, for all people between the river and the sea, choosing nonviolence as “a form of creative resistance that has the power to transform both ourselves and others is our reality” (Combatants for Peace, n.d.).

The two Ceremonies are the enactment of CfP's value of shared humanity:

“We recognize the pain and human suffering of Palestinians and Israelis... we insist on keeping our hearts open to the suffering of both peoples... We acknowledge the difference in power dynamics between Israelis and Palestinians and leverage our privileges in working together to co-resist injustice.” (Combatants for Peace, n.d.).

The *Joint Memorial Ceremony*, is organized by CfP and the 'Parents Circle Families Forum'. It takes place every year on the eve of the *Yom HaZikaron* (Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day), which, in mainstream Israeli culture, tends to reinforce cultural narratives of pain, victimhood, and despair. The Ceremony transforms this narrative by bringing Palestinians and Israelis a “cry together and shape another possible way” (Combatants for Peace, n.d.). Even the *Joint Nakba Remembrance Ceremony* challenges dominant narratives: commemorates the pain and tragedy of the *Nakba* (Arabic for ‘catastrophe’), when in 1948 over 700,000 Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homes, and their villages and towns were destroyed (Pappé, 2006). In Israel, even mentioning the *Nakba* it's taboo.

Questions, objectives and expected results of the research

Questions:

Q1: What are the personal and collective challenges of the two Ceremonies in their invitation to open up to the memory and pain of the 'other', towards a third narrative? What are the potentials of the Ceremonies in the perspective of *future making*, within the horizon of collective liberation, understood as a re-semanticization of the concept of peace?

Q2: What synesthetic narrative of the two Ceremonies can emerge within a framework of stories of connection, compassion, and courage?

Objectives:

O1: To bring forth a deeper understanding of the processes that trigger and are triggered by the two Ceremonies and that support collective liberation when not only does a context of violence persist, but this violence intensifies.

O2: From a decolonial perspective, amplify - both in the often elitist processes of negotiation and in the virtual and physical spaces of activism, often overshadowed by moral purism - the voices and role of joint Israeli and Palestinian movements that co-resist the Israeli government's system of oppression, embody reconciliation, recognize the (inter)connectedness of the two peoples, expand the capacity for compassion, and act with courage, challenging the dominant narratives of their respective communities.

O3: Explore the processes that hold together an abundant, non-reductive sense of justice and a deep, compassionate sense of interconnectedness.

Expected results:

R1: Map, divided into the axis of temporality, challenges and potential of the Ceremonies.

R2: Synaesthetic narration of the Ceremonies within a framework of stories of connection, compassion, and courage.

Brief description of the methodology

The research is located at the intersection of anthropology, sociology and practices of *embodiment*, adopting an ethnographic approach.

Research always transcends the cognitive dimension and, consciously or dangerously unconsciously, positions itself as an intervention on reality. Consciously, this research aims to be cognitive and transformative.

My *positionality* (My partner is of Israeli origin, my daughters have a Jewish surname, we have Palestinian and Israeli friends, we live in Italy) and ethical dilemmas will be taken into consideration at all stages of the project.

The research considers the tools of ethnographic methodology, integrated with awareness practices and *embodiment*.

- Participant observation (in person or online) of upcoming Ceremonies and video analysis of Ceremonies after October 7, 2023.
- Reflective fieldnotes.

The practice of Focusing (Cornell, 1996) will be integrated, supporting a state of awareness and non-reactive presence, generating a space for reflection and ethical orientation.

- Interviews and focus groups with CfP members, possibly members of the 'Parents Circle Families Forum' and people in local and international activism.

Co-construction of knowledge is expected through careful listening, accompanied by awareness of power asymmetries, traumas, multiple narratives, ensuring continuous informed consent, anonymity, where required, and *agency*.

The practices of will be integrated *embodiment*, recognizing the wisdom of the body, the ability to be-with and the power of the arts to make the invisible visible (Hayashi, 2019; Boal, 2006), so as to be able to generate original materials (photos, videos, performances, poems) for a synaesthetic narration.

Originality and innovative content

The Ceremonies, although known and are sometimes cited in journalistic and *advocacy*, have not been studied in academic circles. Above all, the personal and collective processes of the people who perform them have not been made visible through their voices and bodies; their symbolic and transformative potential has not been valued.

In this research, the two ceremonies are analyzed as a process of (re)shaping memory, particularly that connected to pain, as a transition from an exclusive, ethnic collective commemoration, embedded in the cycle of violence, to a universal, inclusive collective commemoration, embedded in a third narrative. A third narrative goes beyond unilateral, polarized, and dehumanizing narratives; it considers the complexity of constructing belonging and identities (Davis, 2011); it is broad, containing a multitude of perspectives and possibilities.

In a context where the word 'peace' has been abused, and distorted, and oppression and violence are ongoing, this research investigates collective liberation as a re-semanticization of

the concept of peace, making room in a claustrophobic moral contest in which can occur the dehumanization of one side or the other.

The focus on temporality sees the Ceremonies dedicated to the past in the perspective of *future-making* (Appadurai, 2013), and *emerging future* (Scharmer, 2016), that is, as one of the social, cultural, symbolic, transformative practices that anticipate a future that does not yet exist, but emerges in its highest possibility, embodied in the people who courageously give life to these practices.

The *embodiment* practices integrated into interviews and focus groups, facilitate the emergence of awareness and intuitions, often not reachable through the logical-rational channel, allowing a synaesthetic narrative to emerge within the framework of 'stories of connection, compassion and courage' (Olimpico, 2025).

Alignment of the project with the educational objectives of the doctorate

The research aims to gain a deeper understanding of the reconciliation practices that occur when violence is ongoing and even intensifies. From a third-narrative perspective, it moves beyond dichotomies and explores, in a profound and embodied way, themes such as 'the encounter, recognition, conflicts, coexistence and respect between cultural, social and religious diversities'.

What happens "between the river and the sea" is having enormous symbolic repercussions around the world: not only is it part of foreign policy or global human rights activism, but it is also becoming part of domestic politics, influencing relationships between diaspora and local communities, reconsidering Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, and shaping the ways we address conflict. The Ceremonies can be considered "best practices," inspiring implementation at the local and transnational levels.

The research is particularly relevant to the educational objectives of Curriculum 2: analyses the (re)shaping of memories, the anticipation of the future, the re-semanticisation of peace and of the 'Day of Remembrance' established in Israel; it takes into consideration the accusation of 'normalisation' (*taṭbī'a*) of the *status quo* as a possible phenomenon of 'cancel culture'; it pays particular attention to the gender perspective in the evolution of CfP (the two current co-directors of CfP are two women, one Palestinian and one Israeli); more powerfully, through the integration of the cognitive channels of the body and the valorization of relationships in the research methodology, it embodies a feminist approach.

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