

**Aspiring to Transformation:
Solidarity and Prefiguration in an Educational Social Movement
Organization**

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Introduction

Studies of peace and social justice-focused education have long explored the role of pedagogy in enabling individual transformation and moving towards social change (Bajaj et al, 2017; Finley, 2004). Indeed, the fields of peace and human rights education have increasingly emphasized critical, feminist, and transformative pedagogies as fundamental for developing a critical consciousness and motivation to act among young people (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016, 2021; Jenkins, 2016; Zembylas, 2013).

However, the primary focus in this scholarship has been on pedagogy itself: on interactions between teachers/mentors and their students, and how these are or can be designed in transformative manners. Little attention has been paid to *organizations* – that is, entities with some level of formality and hierarchy, and fixed bureaucratic functions (Huag, 2013) – that run the educational programs

where these pedagogies are put into practice. This is true even though we know that, especially in conflict areas, transformative education often happens outside of formal educational contexts (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009). In particular, scant attention has been paid to the way that organizations in conflict areas create conditions that both allow for transformative pedagogies to be implemented within their programs, and that enable these organizations, as hybrid educational-political organizations (Minkoff, 2002), to engage with external actors in contexts where their work is unsupported – even, at times, greatly opposed.

To address this gap, I explore the work of Sadaka Reut, an Israeli educational and social movement organization working with Jewish and Palestinian youth¹ and that is staffed and directed by both Jewish and Palestinian educators and activists. Using Sadaka Reut as an example, I ask two key questions: how do educational organizations formed across conflict lines develop a shared sense of solidarity and partnership that is modeled by its staff as part of its pedagogical approach? And how can these organizations interact with external actors that hold different values, in ways that remain consistent with their own values?

I argue that Sadaka Reut's *prefigurative politics* (defined below) serve the role of creating a strong sense of binational solidarity within the organization, and that this internal solidarity and sense of unity enables the organization to navigate the tensions between its own values and the values of state actors with which it must engage in order to recruit participants for its programming. In other words, prefiguration allows Sadaka Reut to be strategic in its actions when it navigates value tensions. My analysis suggests that we need to think about prefiguration as both an educational and political approach, and that we should view prefiguration as aspirational as much as it is performative. Further, my analysis illustrates the significance of internal solidarity for educational organizations working across conflict divides, as well as how such solidarity both shapes possibilities for engagement with the state and is shaped (and limited) by the broader socio-political context within which it functions.

The article proceeds as follows: I first discuss relevant literature for framing these questions. I then describe Sadaka Reut, the Israeli context within which it works, and the methodology used in this analysis, before focusing on the organization's internal dynamics. I consider the significance of Sadaka Reut's internal dynamics for how it engages with external actors before addressing challenges that the organization faces and implications for the work of educational

¹ I use the term "Palestinian" in this article to refer to individuals who are citizens of Israel but who are of Palestinian descent. My use of this term (rather than "Israeli Arab" or "Arab citizen") reflects the self-identification of my participants.

actors in other contexts.

Prefiguration, solidarity, and the education-social movement nexus

Three areas of literature provide a framework for exploring Sadaka Reut's work: the scholarship on prefiguration/prefigurative politics; literature on solidarity, particularly solidarity across conflict divides; and the burgeoning field of research on the connection between social movements and education.

Prefiguration as a movement ideology

The concept of prefigurative politics, or prefiguration, is central to understanding the way that movements model the change they wish to bring about (Boggs, 1977; Gawerc, 2012; Leach, 2009, 2013; Tarlau, 2021). Essentially, prefigurative politics refers to a means-end alignment where movements embody the change they wish to see as a means of achieving the end of broader societal change (Leach, 2013). Vinthagan (2015) refers to the concept as normative regulation, or "building up the new personal habits and social institutions to replace the oppressive ones, in order to form the basis of a new society" (p. 271), using the example of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (*Movimento Sem Terra*, or *MST*) to argue that this approach creates a movement culture/belief system enabling successful strategic action.

Theory contends that modeling desired change strengthens movements internally (Ross et al, 2019), which in turn sets a strong foundation for engaging with external actors. The foundation that prefiguration creates for strategic engagement indicates that internal solidarity can build a strong framework for engagement with external forces (see also: Ackerman & Duval, 2005; Hallward & Shaver, 2012), enabling navigation of value tensions in ways that are palatable to state actors but consistent with internal beliefs. Moreover, engagement with outsiders can enable further development and refinement of internal frameworks, thus creating recursive opportunities for visioning and modeling change. However, there is little literature on the nature of prefigurative politics within educational organizations, or within entities that aim to build solidarity across social identity divides or conflict lines.

Solidarity across conflict lines

As Donatella della Porta (2013) notes, the internal dynamics of SMO culture and possibilities within them created for solidarity remain relatively unstudied, at least in Western contexts. The two primary emphases in existing literature are

organizational culture as characterized by democratic decision-making (e.g. Kew, 2016), and deliberative and participatory decision-making within movements (e.g. Buhlungu, 2009; della Porta, 2009; Polletta, 2002). In the context of movement work that occurs across social identity divides or between dominant and marginalized groups, particularly in terms of transcending power imbalances, existing scholarship points to a number of inherent difficulties. For instance, while diversifying movements through inclusion of privileged allies can create positive opportunities, it can also potentially undermine attempts to challenge dominant social policies and discourses or result in elites or members of dominant groups taking control of decision-making (Buhlungu, 2006; Marx & Useem, 1971).

Still, existing scholarship in both social movement studies and other fields provides insight into how cross-conflict solidarity can be negotiated in positive ways. Jill Bystzdziencki & Steven Schacht (2001) emphasize the importance of acknowledging the dynamics of difference by both understanding “the process of how one’s own social statuses often inform one’s relationship to others” (p. 10) and trying to see the world from perspectives of others; and by finding a common ground “by accepting and honoring those perspectives, experiences, and insights that are shared between them” (p. 10). Bystzdziencki & Schacht also note that negotiation of difference is insufficient without simultaneously creating alternatives or working to transform existing structures (p. 11). Similarly, Einwohner et al. (2016) distinguish between *active* and *passive* solidarity: solidarity can only be characterized as active when it includes an intentional focus on confronting internal power dynamics and dismantling privilege (p. 10). In other words, active solidarity is not a “thing” but a *process* – ideally a deliberative process – that necessitates actively countering the silencing of marginalized groups. Solidarity requires acting to *change* power dynamics between dominant and oppressed groups, rather than simply working within the status quo. It is thus emblematic of a prefigurative approach where movements and SMOs deliberately work in ways that challenge the status quo as part of their strategy for broader change.

Empirically, Michelle Gawerc’s scholarship on Combatants for Peace (CFP) and the Parent’s Circle/Family Forum (PCFF), two of only a few joint Israeli-Palestinian organizations working against the occupation, illustrates how active solidarity can be engaged within conflict contexts. For instance, Gawerc (2018) describes steps taken to build trust and solidarity among Palestinian and Israeli CFP members, even as the risks each group faces differ. Gawerc suggests that explicit discussion of *what* creates asymmetry in the context of CFP’s work, serves as a foundation for trust-building. She further notes that three measures help build Israeli-Palestinian solidarity despite asymmetrical risks: a clear commitment to

shared goals; being willing to defend and support one another; and respecting the boundaries of engagement on both sides. This analysis is reinforced in Gawerc's discussion of collective identity formation in CFP and PCFF, which similarly emphasizes the importance of concrete actions taken by both Palestinian and Israeli activists, including actions taken solely by Jewish activists when Palestinians are unable to engage (Gawerc 2016, 2017).

Scholarship on feminist and queer activism offers further insights for examining the possibilities of solidarity and the prefiguring of alternatives to hegemonic power dynamics. Nira Yuval-Davis' (1999) concept of *transversal politics* challenges conceptions of "collective identity" within movements that ignore identity and interest differences (see also Rupp & Taylor, 1999; Steans, 2007), instead emphasizing difference as a basis for engagement. Empirically, Hewitt (2011) points to discursive framing strategies that transnational women's rights activists use to foster a sense of shared struggle across intra-movement differences, including process-oriented, *internally* focused frames that are "highly inclusive, broadly applicable, [and] indigenously generated" (88) and can be used to foster a sense of shared struggle that transcends intra-movement differences. Likewise, Weldon (2006) argues that within the movement against gender violence, cooperation has been achieved despite structural inequalities, due to inclusive norms providing a basis for cooperation. van den Brandt (2015), writing about religious-secular divides among feminist groups, also notes the significance, for solidarity, of actively engaging in creating discursive frames that deconstruct dominant norms. This conceptual and empirical scholarship challenges notions of solidarity that emphasize similarity rather than recognizing difference. As such, it offers a more nuanced framework for exploring the activation of solidarity within SMOs working across significant power differentials, and better understanding the nature of prefigurative politics in such contexts.

Social movements, SMOs, and education

Notwithstanding the significant body of literature that addresses prefigurative politics and solidarity across divides, little scholarship focuses on these issues within movements or SMOs that have explicitly *educational* as well as political orientations.

Historically, scholars connecting education to movement issues have primarily studied the influence of social movements on formal education (Niesz et al, 2018), focusing on challenges to dominant educational paradigms from civil society groups as well as larger movements. The scholarship illustrates two main forms of education-related social movements. First, there are those concerned primarily with the education system itself—e.g., the homeschooling movement (Apple, 2000;

Stevens, 2001) opt out movement (Pizmony-Levy & Saraisky, 2016; Pizmony-Levy & Cosman, 2017), or movements utilizing ‘bottom up’ community organizing for education reform (e.g. Kamber, 2002; Lopez, 2003; Oakes et al, 2008). Second, a range of organizing initiatives are connected to broader attempts at social transformation (e.g. Binder, 2009; Gaskell, 2008): as just one example, the emergence of school-based Gay-Straight Alliances (Fetner & Kush, 2007) can be understood as part of the broader movements for LGBTQI+ rights.

This scholarship provides important insights into the ways that education intersects with broader socio-political issues. However, most of this literature treats educational institutions as separate from their challengers and indicates that movements engaged with education and state actors operate in opposition to one another. An important exception is Rebecca Tarlau’s (2021) research on the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST) and the National Program for Education in Areas of Agrarian Reform (PRONERA). Tarlau explores a combination of simultaneously collaborative and contentious set of movement strategies by MST/PRONERA leaders for institutional engagement that she calls “contentious cogovernance,” illustrating the way that this combination of strategies works as a set of tools “not only for improving educational equity but also for increasing the strength and coherence of social movements themselves” (p. 2). In other words, Tarlau argues that by partnering with education officials, even when conflicts exist in that partnership, movements and movement organizations can enter institutions where they are able to demonstrate the values that form the basis for prefiguring the change they wish to see.

While Tarlau’s research helps us understand the integration of social movement and educational spheres, it remains focused on the movement-state dynamic with respect to making changes in the realm of formal education. Further research is needed to understand how movement organizations, particularly hybrid organizations (Minkoff, 2002) with both educational and political missions, navigate relationships with state actors. Additional research is also necessary to clarify the significance of prefigurative politics within these educational SMOs for success in navigating these relationships, as well as in enabling them to succeed pedagogically in their educational work.

I address these gaps in this manuscript by focusing on what Sadaka Reut, as a movement organization with both educational and political goals, does to prefigure an alternative vision of society at an organizational level. I show how Sadaka Reut builds internal cohesion among its binational staff in a way that demonstrates a set of values connected to cross-identity group solidarity; this cohesion among staff enables the organization to navigate value tensions in its

interactions with state actors, in particular education officials in schools, in order to recruit participants. I argue that as an educational movement organization, Sadaka Reut engages in a set of prefigurative strategies among its staff that enable it to successfully interact with external actors even when there are tensions between the organization's internal values and the values characterizing both the actors it partners with and Israeli society writ large. In my analysis, I show how Sadaka Reut's prefigurative strategies, while constrained by discourses in the broader political sphere, serve as a foundation for building solidarity within the organization and therefore for interacting with external actors in ways that allow for recruitment of participants and thus potentially for broadening the scale of the organization's values.

Sadaka Reut and the Israeli context

Discussion of Sadaka Reut's work must be preceded by an introduction to the Israeli context and the relationship between Israel's two primary ethno-national identity groups: Jewish citizens and citizens who largely identify as part of the Palestinian collective. This relationship is characterized by a severe power imbalance, where, most fundamentally, Jewish citizens hold rights as a *collective*, while Palestinian citizens hold citizenship rights but only at the individual level (Shafir & Peled, 1998). Concretely, discrimination against Palestinian citizens is a norm of Israeli society and occurs at an institutional level across almost all sectors (e.g., Coursen-Neff, 2004; Rabinowitz, 2001; Rouhana, 1997), as well as via vandalism and physical violence against individuals.

The power imbalance between Jews and Palestinians in Israel further manifests in dissemination of collective narratives: dominant ethno-national discourse in Israel privileges beliefs that emphasize Jewish victimization while simultaneously de-legitimizing the Palestinian historical narrative (Bar-Tal, Halperin & Oren, 2010). Palestinian citizens learn about Jewish history and culture in school but receive little or no instruction about events important to the Palestinian nation, while schools in the Jewish sector follow a curriculum steeped in Jewish discourse. Likewise, although Arabic is recognized as a language with special status in Israel, few Jewish citizens speak it, while Hebrew is required for full participation in Israeli society (Rouhana, 1997). In sum: while Palestinian citizens must be familiar with Jewish norms and the Hebrew language to succeed in Israeli society, little value is placed on their own history, language, or culture.

These imbalances exist within a broader Israeli context that is dominated by the military. Conscription to the Israel Defense Forces is mandatory for men and women within Israel's Jewish community; military service is central to civilian life,

even as its existence serves as an anathema for the Palestinian community. Thus, as Hila Amit (2018) notes, “the army itself is a symbol of normative behaviour in Israel” (80).

In this context, organizations challenging dominant norms – about narratives, language, military service, and so on – face a particularly difficult task. Indeed, Hila Amit (2018) suggests that working against dominant norms is so challenging as to only be possible by removing oneself from the Israeli context. In other words, creating alternatives to Israel’s dominant norms from *within* Israel is nearly impossible. And yet, collective action has occurred in Israel for decades, including by the aggregate of activist groups, individuals, and the field of organizations (Levitsky, 2007) that make up Israel’s “peace movement”, and that have worked against Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and, more recently, against unequal treatment of disadvantaged groups within Israel (Cohen, 2019; Fleischmann, 2016; Hall-Cathala, 1990; Herman, 2009).

Sadaka Reut (named for the Arabic and Hebrew words for “friendship”), one SMO within this movement, is a veteran Israeli organization founded in the 1980s by a group of Jewish and Palestinian citizens. Sadaka Reut brings together Jewish and Palestinian staff (all citizens of Israel) for educational work based in a mission “to educate and empower Palestinian and Jewish youth to pursue social political change through bi-national partnership.”² While its primary focus is educational, Sadaka Reut’s political work at an organizational level, and its emphasis on motivating young people to envision and create an alternative to the status quo – much as the organization itself aims to embody a different vision of society – situate it as a social movement organization within the broader movement, along the lines what Isaac at al (2021) refer to as a “social movement school.” It is within this framework that I explore Sadaka Reut’s prefigurative strategies, and how its internal work, both organizationally and in its pedagogical modeling, shape the way it navigates external engagement – particularly in a socio-political environment that has grown less open to joint Jewish-Palestinian initiatives in recent years.

Methodology

Data for this manuscript draws broadly on a decade of research with Sadaka Reut, which has previously explored Sadaka Reut’s pedagogical approach and the extent to which its programs have motivated participants to continue working for socio-political change (for more on the organization’s pedagogical approach and its impact on participants, see Ross & Lazarus, 2015; Ross, 2017, 2019). The

<http://www.reutsadaka.org/about-us-2/>, accessed September 21, 2021

present analysis is based primarily on interviews conducted in 2018 with all of Sadaka Reut's full-time staff (administrators and program coordinators) and with all but one of its board of advisors. Interviews were conducted with 15 individuals (8 Jewish, 7 non-Jewish; 8 staff, 7 board members) and addressed participants' understandings of the dynamics of internal Jewish-Palestinian partnership and the implications of this partnership for building relationships externally. The semi-structured nature of these interviews enabled participants to take the conversation in directions of their chosen within the broad areas of research focus. Interviews ranged from approximately 40 minutes to 1.5 hours; all were conducted in Hebrew in either Sadaka Reut's offices or in an alternative location of the participant's choosing, recorded with an audio voice recording device, and transcribed verbatim.³

I analyzed the transcripts using reconstructive hermeneutic analysis (Carspecken 2007, 2008), a set of techniques that emphasize reconstructing meaning by making explicit participants' implicit understandings. Within this framework, I examined my data holistically. My analysis began by writing reflections following each interview; once interviews were complete, I read interview transcripts in full and wrote memos discussing potential angles for exploration. I then coded my data line-by-line using an open, emergent approach, generating new codes and sub-codes as needed before refining thematic categories in further analysis.

I utilized several techniques to support my interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, although my interviews occurred over a period of only several weeks, my prolonged engagement with Sadaka Reut since 2009 (and my personal connections to Israel as a citizen who lived there for many years) provide confidence in my understanding of organizational norms and of the Israeli context. I triangulated interview data with data from other sources,⁴ including from earlier fieldwork. Given my ongoing work with Sadaka Reut, I also relied on peer debriefing to help minimize bias in my interpretations. Finally, ongoing discussions

³ A native Hebrew speaker, I conducted all interviews myself. Interviews were transcribed in Hebrew and translated to English only when necessary for quotations. I relied upon the help of an additional native Hebrew and fluent English speaker to ensure the accuracy of my translations and suggest possible wording when I was not certain how best to translate a Hebrew phrase.

⁴ In addition to interview data, I collected a range of materials from Sadaka Reut, including: internal monitoring reports; transcripts of recorded program meetings; lesson plans; and transcripts of interviews conducted as part of external evaluations. In addition, in June 2015, I participated in the last of a year-long series of training and debriefing sessions held for all Sadaka Reut facilitators. The following year, I attended the 3rd of 4 weekend-long strategic planning sessions organized for Sadaka Reut staff and board members as a part of an ongoing strategic planning process.

with Sadaka Reut staff served as a form of both preliminary analysis and member checking. These discussions continued into late 2019, including in the form of organization-wide discussions and strategic planning sessions, based upon the findings I discuss below.

Prefiguring a more just society: solidarity in Sadaka Reut

In the following pages, I critically examine what prefiguration looks like within Sadaka Reut. My analysis focuses on three elements that form the basis for establishing the cross-identity solidarity Sadaka Reut aims to model as an alternative to existing dynamics in Israeli society: decentering dominant narratives, amplifying Arabic use, and blurring personal and professional lines. I argue that the sense of solidarity that these elements provide internally within Sadaka Reut not only serves as a counterpoint to dominant dynamics in Israel, but also enables the organization to navigate relationships with external actors, even when this requires strategies that at first glance seem to contradict Sadaka Reut's values.

Setting the stage: Creating a culture of reflection

A sense of solidarity among Jewish and Palestinian staff is modeled through an environment of continuous reflection and questioning, formally (in staff meetings) and informally among individuals, as well as in the pedagogical approach Sadaka Reut staff use with program participants. As articulated during interviews, these ongoing conversations are perceived as providing an alternative to dominant power structures in Israeli society and prefiguring a society characterized by Jewish-Palestinian equality. Ilana,⁵ a Jewish staff member, illustrated what this looks like in practice by noting that it requires constant attention to decentering her perspective. She stated that as a Jew, "I need to be sensitive and pay attention all the time...it challenges me...and everyone who is around me, and...it requires me to look at things differently." Ilana also noted that she holds ongoing conversations with her Palestinian co-coordinator about what to present to program participants and how to discuss issues, including in terms of how to create space for conversation within the group of youth they work with; this requires her to put aside *her* view of doing things in favor of finding *joint* approaches.

Prefiguring solidarity necessitates that joint efforts reflect shared decisions at both pedagogical and organizational levels. Shlomit, a Jewish staff member, echoed Ilana's comments about the significance of transparent conversation with her co-program coordinator. She noted that talking through disagreements not only

⁵ The names of all individuals quoted have been changed.

helps her “think outside [my] assumptions” but also lends significance to pedagogical decisions she and her Palestinian partner make, because “it’s felt that...we really want to create something together.” At the organizational level, Hend, a Palestinian board member, said that “discussions about everything” in Sadaka Reut include issues not often addressed transparently among all organization staff, such as decisions about funding. For instance, Hend reflected on discomfort felt by several staff and board members about a USAID-funded program the organization was implementing, and explained that a conversation was held about this discomfort, open to all staff at Sadaka Reut. Not only was an open conversation held, but it ultimately resulted in a decision to stop accepting USAID funds, illustrating how Sadaka Reut’s dialogic culture helps strengthen the sense of belonging and solidarity within the organization.

Finally, several individuals noted the significance in Sadaka Reut of being able to voice disagreements about socio-political issues present in Israeli society, both in terms of modeling an alternative to the (lack of) discussion about such issues in other contexts, and in terms of strengthening the sense among Sadaka Reut staff that they are a collective. Munder, a Palestinian staff member, stated that the process of disagreeing is, by necessity, “a kind of dialogue that speaks about everything,” and noted the importance of staff “bring[ing] all of the world of the substance” into the dialogue process. He used the example of gender, explaining how paying attention to *who* speaks and *how often* helps foreground issues of equality, showing that the norm of attentiveness to both form and substance when discussing issues is central to building solidarity within Sadaka Reut:

We have a sort of culture among us, of certain understandings related to gender balance or related to how much I take from the circle or in terms of the amount of time that I speak...Things like that, that create a kind of culture that brings [into the conversation] the entirety of the content [we deal with], all our beliefs, all of our principles, as an organization. And that’s a model for real partnership.

For much of the staff, this ongoing reflection about social issues also is significant in explicitly prefiguring an alternative to existing power dynamics in Israel. Lucy, a Palestinian board member, said:

Because our reality is of a conflict, you can’t just leave [equality and partnership] alone. ...It’s something that, because you’re working within the framework of power dynamics that exist in reality, but you’re trying to create something different, you constantly need to be aware of the something different that you’re trying to create...So you constantly need to

work on it.

Likewise, Yael (Jewish), also a board member, noted that Sadaka Reut's uniqueness lies in creating space for "bringing everything" to the table; this creates an opportunity both for understanding the challenges of working together, and most significantly, *for creating a desire to do so*. In other words, Sadaka Reut presents a contrast to Israeli society in enabling difficult issues to be addressed (when they usually are not), and also in creating space for choosing to jointly engage in making change. As Yael stated,

When people work together, and do the educational work of getting to know one another, learning the narratives of the other nation, speaking about the conflict, speaking about the difficult things, speaking about identities...when you do these things you learn that's it's a choice, a very complicated choice, and very challenging to say, 'These things exist, we don't think [these things] make us enemies, and we want to live together and work together.'

Choosing to work together as Jews and Palestinians is a process Sadaka Reut staff and board members must constantly navigate. By doing so in the ways that Yael lays out, the organization solidifies a core value: engaging difference within a shared vision – a value that is itself a core element of Sadaka Reut's pedagogical model (Ross, 2013, 2017). This creates a space for balancing different needs and strengthening the sense of a collective – a counter to the segregation within Israeli society as a whole.

Linguistic equality: Arabic in the organizational context

A second element strengthening solidarity within Sadaka Reut is its normalization of Arabic language use. While approximately 20% of Israel's population speaks Arabic, the language holds second-class status compared with Hebrew (Saban & Amara, 2002) and in recent years lost its status as an official language.⁶ Thus, attempts to equalize use of both languages are, as Grace Feuerverger (2001) argues, "a powerfully subversive act" (p. 62), and another channel via which alternatives to societal dynamics can potentially be actualized. Within Sadaka Reut, an alternative is created by the fact that hearing Arabic

⁶ Arabic was recognized as an official language in Israel from the founding of the State in 1948; however, in 2018 a bill passed by the Knesset (Parliament) downgraded Arabic to a language with "special status" (see <https://www.language magazine.com/2018/08/14/arabic-downgraded-in-israel/>, accessed October 14, 2021).

requires non-Arabic speakers in the organization to experience, in some small way, what it feels to be outside of the dominant group. More broadly, staff use of Arabic is also tied to enhancing the status of the language across Sadaka Reut as a whole, including for program participants who quickly become used to dual-language conversations happening within their groups.

Ilana explained the significance of hearing Arabic, emphasizing that as a non-Arabic speaker, “there’s a certain lack of comfort [when Arabic is spoken]...as someone who doesn’t understand what’s being said.” She acknowledged that this discomfort enabled her to better understand and thus empathize with what Palestinians experience every day: “There’s something about understanding...to feel this discomfort, somehow I can understand the other within this experience.”

For others, Arabic use within Sadaka Reut is significant because of its potential for increasing the status of the language. For instance, Liana, a Jewish project coordinator, spoke about how she and her co-coordinator had started the year with their participants by talking about the importance of language and more significantly, “our responsibility as Jewish [staff members] to learn Arabic...and what responsibility our participants have [to do so as well].” Nadav and Liana, Jewish staff members, also noted the importance of Jews learning the language. Liana stated, “I can talk as much as I want to about partnership, but the moment that someone has to translate herself every time for me to understand her, then there’s a kind of partnership that isn’t yet entirely equal.” In other words, for Liana as for other Jewish staff members, partnership requires linguistic equality, which necessitates Arabic use by both Jews and Palestinians. This means all staff in Sadaka Reut should have at least some facility in both languages.

“Everyone here is my partner”: Blurring professional/ personal relationships

Finally, a significant basis for solidarity within Sadaka Reut is a sense among staff that they are a “family,” characterized by strong relationships and a general lack of hierarchy. These are characteristics that help create partnership and commitment among activists (see Nepstad, 2004), and, given the Jewish-Palestinian rift in Israeli society, are significantly different from the dynamics of most contexts where both Jews and Palestinians interact.

Ameena, a Palestinian staff member, emphasized the importance of fluidity between personal and professional relationships within Sadaka Reut: “[It’s important]...that in our staff meetings you can get upset, or say something, like, criticize, but afterwards [you] can go and drink a beer with these same people.” To illustrate this, Ameena gave the example of attending events like birthday parties, or outside political initiatives, to deepen personal relationships between herself and

co-workers.

One of Sadaka Reut's co-directors noted that blurring roles is particularly important in Sadaka Reut specifically because it is both an educational organization and a binational, political organization. She said, "What lets a binational organization survive is...less hierarchy." She continued, stating that because of challenges staff face from others due to their political ideologies, "here's the place to talk...where it's protected, safe, you can say what you want... with the professionalism comes also the friendship." Furthermore, this blurring of hierarchy is modeled for participants in the organization's educational programs, which are co-facilitated: "If it's not in partnership, it won't work. So you need to know how to blur the boundaries of that hierarchy."

Others also affirmed the importance of blurring professional and personal roles. Ilana said, "What I love [about Sadaka Reut], it's a declaration of the organization that in order to engage in partnership the way it needs to be done, it's not possible for one person to be superior to another or lead another." Likewise, Ina asserted that the sense of family in the organization was important for letting her be her authentic self. She noted that in other contexts, "I didn't have that space. It was always...what's at home is at home, and what is at work is at work." Within Sadaka Reut, on the other hand, "[T]here's the space, and the openness to listen."

Finally, Yael, who was a long-time Sadaka Reut participant prior to becoming a board member, said that blurring roles creates a community among individuals – participants as much as staff and board members – that they continue to be part of even when no longer directly involved with Sadaka Reut. Being part of this community is important, Yael suggested, because it adds to the sense that members of that community are partners in their endeavors. In other words, it helps scaffold and reinforce the feeling of "being in this together" that characterizes Jewish-Palestinian solidarity in Sadaka Reut, thus strengthening the organization's ability to engage in its political work. Yael noted:

At the end of the day, it's an organization, but it's also a community...there are a lot of people who grew up in this organization, and who are now in a lot of different places and, [Sadaka Reut] is part of who they are. It influences their worldview, how people live their lives.

Yael's words echoed a statement made by Gabrielle (Jewish), a former staff member I interviewed several years prior. She told me: "My participants in Sadaka...this place, it planted roots in them, and in that sense, it creates a joint community of activists, I mean, a type of solidarity that you can't find in other

places.” The sense of community created in Sadaka Reut through its emphasis on relationships rather than hierarchy, in other words, enables a strong and long-lasting solidarity to be established not only among the staff, but also among participants in the organization.

Internal solidarity and external engagement

The previous pages illustrate how Sadaka Reut works to cultivate solidarity among Jews and Palestinians within the organization. This serves as a form of prefigurative politics, modeled and normalized for participants in the organization’s programs as well as exemplifying Jewish-Palestinian interactions among the staff. Further, it unifies Sadaka Reut staff and board members in a way that allows them to act in a consistent way when engaging with external actors not ideologically aligned with the organization. More specifically, unity among staff and confidence in the values the organization stands for allows for using certain strategies with external actors even as these strategies may seem contradictory to the organization’s values – but ultimately that serve the purpose of recruiting participants, thus enabling Sadaka Reut to thrive and potentially to scale its work.

The significance of Sadaka Reut’s prefigurative strategies is exemplified in a comment Ameena made about needing to dialogue with her co-facilitator about challenging issues before engaging with their program participants:

I need to know [how she feels], so that I’m not in a situation where I’m surprised each time anew...So, I know what she’s going to say, and she knows what I’m going to say. And when she and I aren’t surprised [by one another], then also in front of the group [of participants] it gives them a chance to understand, ok, we’re engaged in partnership but it’s possible to not agree about everything.

Ameena’s quote illustrates how the culture of openness within Sadaka Reut enables staff to develop what Ilana told me is necessary for the organization to achieve its goals: “the most basic thing, a set of shared values.” Because of a unified understanding of these values *within* the organization, staff and board members can engage with external actors in ways that are palatable to those who may not share Sadaka Reut’s ideology, such as school administrators or Ministry of Education officials. For example, several staff members spoke about “muting” the language they use when engaging with institutional actors or, in the words of one staff member, “walking the razor’s edge” with the framing they use, given the politicized nature of terminology related to their work. This emphasizes the significance of a uniform understanding with Sadaka Reut that such “muting” is strategic rather than reflective of a value shift. For instance, citizens of Israel who are of Palestinian

descent are referred to as “Palestinians” within Sadaka Reut, because is how most individuals in this group identify; however, in meetings with external actors, staff often use the term “Arab” or “Israeli Arab” (the official designation of this group). Likewise, instead of discussing Sadaka Reut’s focus on Jewish-Palestinian solidarity, staff often frame Sadaka Reut’s educational work as focused on universal values such as human rights. As one staff member put it, “You don’t lie...but there’s depth [that isn’t addressed]” in how Sadaka Reut presents itself externally.

The success of Sadaka Reut’s use of seemingly contradictory strategies when navigating relationships with state and other educational actors manifests in the organization’s ongoing ability to work with groups reflecting the Israeli mainstream. Sadaka Reut regularly holds one-day workshops in Israeli public schools; staff also give presentations in schools to recruit participants for Sadaka Reut’s programs, and they run programs for students at Israeli universities. More significantly, in recent years the organization has established an ongoing partnership with a program of the Israeli Scouts, which holds what can be characterized as a mainstream Zionist ideology. Participants in the Scouts’ program join participants in Sadaka Reut’s leadership program for high school graduates for the entirety of the year-long initiative, and as one of the coordinators of this program explained to me, the very existence of the partnership, as she sees it, has resulted in the development of a critical consciousness not only among Scout participants but also among the staff who work with Sadaka Reut counterparts to implement this program.

Sadaka Reut’s capacity for building relationships with non-ideologically aligned actors is particularly important given Sadaka Reut’s focus on education rather than explicitly on advocacy or protest. Given that the organization recruits participants from within schools, it must be able to engage *with* state actors and not only function in conflict with them (Tarlau, 2021). Sadaka Reut’s approach thus provides a template by which other education-focused movement organizations can engage in both modeling change internally (among staff and for participants in educational programs), *and* in finding ways to engage externally with ideologically divergent actors.

Confronting the limits of solidarity

Despite Sadaka Reut’s capacity to engage with external actors, it is worth further exploring the nuances inherent in use of strategic shifts in language and framing of goals when staff and/or board members engage with external actors. On the one hand, *because* of the development of a “binational consciousness” (in one

staff member's words) that is jointly created among staff, Jews and Palestinians in Sadaka Reut feel that their shared values are strong; strategic tactics used as the basis for partnering with external actors are just that – tactics – and don't reflect compromised values. Therefore, Sadaka Reut can work with institutions or organizations that whose values stand in contrast with its own. On the other hand, the external framing Sadaka Reut uses privileges the status quo, rather than emphasizing the experiences and needs of Palestinian citizens: to use Scott Davies' (1999) words, it is framing that "holds resonance with the prevailing culture" (pp. 17) rather than its own values. In this sense, although the frame is used strategically and with full consent of all staff, as an organization working within an oppressive system, Sadaka Reut cannot fully transcend it. In other words: the paradox of Sadaka Reut's work as an organization engaged in social change is that its emphasis on internal solidarity stands in tension with its orientation towards outside actors. This is a tension that must be negotiated constantly in its work, particularly given its emphasis on modeling Jewish-Palestinian solidarity for participants as well as among staff and board members.

Moreover, it is important to note that even Sadaka Reut's internal aspirations are constrained by the socio-political context – most prominently in terms of achieving Arabic language equality, but also with respect to imbalances in staff tenure. In terms of the former: while Sadaka Reut makes a concerted effort to elevate Arabic and ensure its use within the organization, there is a clear disparity between desire and outcome. The disjuncture between *creating a space* for Arabic and the *actual use of Arabic* among Jewish staff raises questions about can be realistically expected in terms of linguistic equality. As Rula, a Palestinian staff member noted, both Hebrew and Arabic need to be equally utilized within the organization for there to be true partnership – suggesting that just having Arabic be (occasionally) present is not enough: "If we're talking about partnership, we need to speak both of the languages...and to flow from language to language. That's what needs to exist here." However, realistically, in a context where Jews in Israel receive little if any structured exposure to Arabic (and the language in fact is no longer an official language), equal usage is unlikely to happen. This raises the question: in a broader socio-political environment where Arabic is not valued, is simply being open to Arabic sufficient for creating an alternative within Sadaka Reut to what exists outside of it?

Similar questions arise with respect to discrepancies between Jews and Palestinians in terms of the length of their tenure as Sadaka Reut staff: as a whole, Palestinian staff members remain within the organization for much longer than Jewish counterparts who leave for other positions within a few years. Ameena, a long-time Palestinian staff member, suggested that the issue of Jewish staff leaving

after relatively short periods of time raises questions about their commitment to the organization and its values:

You see that the Jewish staff turns over and the Palestinians do not. And then you ask yourself, what's happening here?...There's *privilege* – they can allow themselves simply to take on a position, and...and then decide to leave...and that creates a crisis among the Palestinians – each time we start over getting to know new people, believing in them, and then suddenly they leave.

Greater turnover among part of the staff raises both a pedagogical challenge, in terms of modeling joint commitment to program participants, and a logistical one – specifically, the need to bring Jewish staff members in more often and build the internal solidarity necessary for successful external engagement. In both ways, it raises questions about the actual strength of Sadaka-Reut's solidarity and unified commitment to organizational values.

Discrepancies in staff tenure, as in Arabic use, can largely be explained by socio-political forces outside of Sadaka Reut. For instance, Jewish staff members have educational and/or professional options, in Israel and elsewhere, that are often not open to their Palestinian counterparts. Likewise, while Jewish and Palestinian Sadaka Reut staff are paid equal salaries, more lucrative positions are far more abundant for Jews than for Palestinians, making their departure to higher paid positions more likely. However, the discrepancies serve to highlight how even an organization such as Sadaka Reut, which tries to create an alternative to Israel's current socio-political reality in every way possible, is affected by that reality in ways that limit its ability to create a truly equitable partnership. In this case, it shapes the commitment that different groups of staff members feel they *can*, or that they *need*, to give to the organization.

Ultimately, these issues raise important questions about the potential for educational organizations engaging in prefigurative politics to be exemplars of the change they wish to see. Even in an organization like Sadaka Reut that models a culture of solidarity, attempts to create an alternative to Israel's current socio-political reality are affected by that reality – in ways that limit possibilities for creating a truly equitable partnership, and that therefore constrain possibilities for solidarity to fully emerge.

Discussion

Sadaka Reut's example holds important implications, both theoretically and

practically, for education-focused organizations that are oriented towards social transformation. One significant implication has to do with our concept of *prefigurative politics* and what prefiguration entails. While Sadaka Reut prefigures an alternative to the status quo among its staff and board members, and also serves as a pedagogical tool for participants in its educational programs, as discussed above, its capacity to embody this alternative is constrained significantly by the environment within which it operates. To this end, Sadaka Reut's experience suggests that we might think about prefiguration as *aspirational* rather than as modeling an entirely different set of norms than those that are prevalent in a given socio-political context. Maelkelbergh (2009) argues that prefiguration consists of "everyday practices and processes of revolutionary change through doing in the present" or "the creation of alternatives in the here and now" (2011, p. 3). These definitions, like others in the literature, seem to take for granted that the act of prefiguration is equivalent to the future that actors envision. And yet, as Sadaka Reut's experience shows, prefiguration itself can be limited by the socio-political context within which it is enacted. This indicates that we might benefit from exploring prefiguration in a way that orients us towards understanding its possibilities and constraints, and as something that actors are striving toward, rather than having already accomplished. That is: we should explore prefiguration as a *process*, rather than as an outcome or product.

At the same time, Sadaka Reut serves as an example of how organizations can create binational solidarity across conflict lines and draw upon that solidarity to find strategies for engaging or even partnering with non-aligned, and sometimes ideologically opposed, actors. The same strategies that allow for Sadaka Reut staff to develop a strong sense of solidarity internally – particularly its culture of constant questioning and dialogue – provide a foundation for engaging in the challenging work of finding ways to frame its work in ways that will appeal to others and to deal with the inevitable tensions that arise in the context of ideological conflicts with external partners. This is no small feat in the context of an ongoing conflict, especially given that the goal of Sadaka Reut's work with external actors is to find ways of educating children in ways that challenge dominant narratives and the conflict-perpetuating beliefs that permeate Israeli society (Bar-Tal, Halperin & Oren, 2010).

It is also important to consider the significance of Sadaka Reut's approach as a hybrid political and educational organization. As discussed above, all the organization's prefigurative strategies – creating a culture of dialogue, normalizing Arabic use, and blurring hierarchies – are modeled pedagogically in its work with young people. And as I have written elsewhere (Ross, 2013, 2016, 2017), these approaches have led to a motivated cadre of Sadaka Reut alumni who are

themselves committed to engaging in social change and to different kinds of relationships, personal and professional, than those that are traditional in Israeli society. In other words, an important dimension of Sadaka Reut's prefigurative politics is its potential for diffusion (Yates, 2014). However, the *aspirational* nature of Sadaka Reut's prefiguration suggests that within the context of organizations committed to educating young people for change, it is important to focus work with young people not only on envisioning alternatives to the status quo, but also on considering strategies for building solidarity within structural constraints.

Finally, Sadaka Reut's navigation of relationships with government institutions, while challenging, also illustrates that for entities functioning within the framework of the Israeli state bureaucracy, it is not feasible to act in ways that are fully antagonistic to this system. Organizations committed to creating change through education and that are connected to formal education institutions must engage *with* the system, even as their missions aim at changing it. While doing so may make social transformation more challenging, it also points to the potential of education-focused SMOs to influence the system in the process, thus using the educational sphere to achieve their transformative goals.

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