Live action role play (larp) in a context of conflict:
An ethnographic study of larp in Ramallah

Tindra Englund
Abstract

This study contributes to the specific segment of the research field of peace and conflict studies (PACS) pertaining to the use of art as a tool for conflict transformation towards a positive peace. It is original for its choice of subject - live action role play (larp) as a potential tool for conflict transformation. The purpose of the study is to explore, describe and interpret the conditions for, and the content of, larp in present-day Palestine in order to construct a normative framework for how larp could be used as a tool for conflict transformation. In order to answer the question on the uses of this art form in Palestine, and the effects it has on the participants, their immediate surroundings, and the larger society around them, original empirical material was produced during a two-month long minor field study in Ramallah. It consists of ethnographic observations and ethnographic field interviews, as well as ten in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted between 14th of February and the 12th of April 2014. The material was analyzed with regard to Galtung’s theory of positive peace and Lederach’s theory of conflict transformation as well as to other selected theoretical and empirical work on the role of art as a tool for conflict transformation.

In the specific context that has been studied, the normative framework constructed through these findings show that larps and the larping community is encouraging a personal (norm-questioning) development within its participants. It also shows that larps could be used as a tool for evoking the moral imagination, helping people to imagine a future in peace, but also as a tool for rehabilitation and processing strong emotions. Within this framework, it is also suggested that larps could be used as a tool advocacy work as well as nonviolent resistance. Finally, larps could be used as a tool for creating a liminal space and social platforms where Israelis and Palestinians could interact on neutral ground. This thesis claims that larp is a potentially significant tool for conflict transformation and therefore deserves further research within the field of Peace and Conflict Studies.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 2

1. Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 4
   1.1 Statement of problem ................................................................................................. 4
   1.2 Art as a tool for conflict transformation .................................................................. 5
   1.3 Conflict transformation and live action role play (larp) ........................................ 5
   1.4 The purpose and set-up of this research ................................................................. 6
   1.5 The genesis of Larp in Palestine .............................................................................. 7
   1.6 Research questions ................................................................................................. 8

2. Methodology .................................................................................................................... 9
   2.1 Epistemological point of departure and research design ...................................... 9
   2.2 Fieldwork ................................................................................................................ 9
   2.3 Ethnography ............................................................................................................. 11
   2.4 Semi-structured Interviews .................................................................................... 11
   2.5 Sample ..................................................................................................................... 13
   2.6 Coding ...................................................................................................................... 14
   2.7 Ethical considerations ............................................................................................. 15
   2.8 My background as a larper ..................................................................................... 15
   2.9 Limitations and delimitations ................................................................................ 15

3. Theoretical framework and previous research ............................................................... 17
   3.1 Art as a tool for conflict transformation .................................................................. 17
       3.1.1 Positive and negative peace .............................................................................. 17
       3.1.2 Conflict transformation .................................................................................... 17
       3.1.3 Art as a tool for conflict transformation and peacebuilding ......................... 19
       3.1.4 Leisure and social change ............................................................................ 21
       3.1.5 Art as a victory of the civilian life over war ................................................... 22
       3.1.6 Critique of art as a tool for conflict transformation .................................... 22
3.2 Larp .................................................................................................................................................. 23
  3.2.1 Larp as a participant-centered, interactive art form ............................................................... 23
  3.2.2 How it all began .......................................................................................................................... 24
  3.2.3 Previous research on LARP ....................................................................................................... 25

4. Analysis .................................................................................................................................................. 28
  4.1 Living under occupation, life in Ramallah (spring 2014) .......................................................... 28
  4.2 Critique against the Palestinian Authority (PA) .......................................................................... 29
  4.3 Viewing larp as a tool ................................................................................................................... 30
  4.4 Escaping reality and imagining living in peace ........................................................................... 30
  4.5 Larp as a tool for personal development .................................................................................... 32
  4.6 Larp as resistance ......................................................................................................................... 33
  4.7 Advocacy work through larp ......................................................................................................... 35
  4.8 Changing the norms of society ..................................................................................................... 36
  4.9 The larping community as a social platform ............................................................................... 37
  4.10 The idea of larping together with Israelis ................................................................................. 38
  4.11 Obstacles for larp in Palestine .................................................................................................... 39
  4.12 Rehabilitation through larp ........................................................................................................ 40
  4.13 A normative framework of larp as a tool for conflict transformation ........................................ 40

5. Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 45

6. Final thoughts ..................................................................................................................................... 47

7. Bibliography ......................................................................................................................................... 48
  Interviews ............................................................................................................................................... 48
  Secondary sources ............................................................................................................................... 48
  Internet .................................................................................................................................................. 51
  Ludography ......................................................................................................................................... 52

Appendix I ............................................................................................................................................... 52
Appendix II ............................................................................................................................................. 55
1. Introduction

I closed the lights, and then I turned them on when the soldier came in […] he was waking them up with his feet. Moving them and asking them to leave, very rudely, very violently, and one of the family members (whom my eyes caught) was looking around very surprised […] I think that his eyes were saying that: “I am going to miss this place” […] So, he grabbed something from the wall, and he held it to his chest and walked very slowly. He didn’t even care that the soldier was pushing him, and that broke me to tears… Because this shit happens for real, and you don’t know it unless you feel it. You don’t know what it means to be homeless, to be left homeless. To put all your money and your family’s investment into a house. That is demolished like this…. Just because, an apartheid, fascist regime does not recognize your right in being where you are, or existing where you need to exist. […] I knew all along that, there will be political revelations for many, many people. But I didn’t know that it was going to be also for me… (Quote from an interview with “Shams,” who is describing a scene from a pre-workshop to the larp Halat Hisar," also known as “State of Siege”; 2013).

1.1 Statement of problem

The peace scholar John Paul Lederach, posed the question that is a straying point of this thesis: “How do we transcend the cycles of violence that bewitch our human community while still living in them?” (Lederach 2005:5). This thesis explores one of the possible answers that pertain to the protracted conflict between Israel and Palestine.

The conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians has been going on for over 65 years. Over and over diplomacy has failed and been proven futile, and today peacebuilding might seem like an impossible task. So, are there other options? When negotiations are freezing, once again stranded, what other tools could be used for building peace? Maybe the solution can be found “outside the box”? In this thesis, I will discuss larp as a tool for conflict transformation and propose how it might be used in the context of Palestine.
1.2 Art as a tool for conflict transformation

Lederach claims that to build peace we need to transform conflicts rather than thinking that we can simply solve them. He has been suggesting that if we want to be successful in doing this, we need to start using art.

“The artistic five minutes, I have found rather consistently, when it's given space and acknowledged as something far beyond entertainment, accomplishes what most of politics has been unable to attain: It helps us return to our humanity, a transcendent journey that, like the moral imagination, can build a sense that we are, after all, a human community” (Lederach 2005: 154).

In other words, in certain contexts art might be a more appropriate and more efficient tool than politics, to transform conflicts and build peace. In his book *The moral imagination, the art and soul of building peace* Lederach (2005) elaborates a variety of ways in which art can be used at different stages of conflict transformation. Lederach refers to his experience from peacebuilding all over the world and describes how art could be used before a conflict escalates into war by creating meeting spots and bridges of understanding between different groups. He also claims that art could be used during the war itself, helping people to cope with the tragedies happening around them and to imagine a future in peace, in a post-conflict setting. According to Lederach art can be used for re-establishing relationships and understanding between warring groups as well as a tool for reconciliation (Lederach 2005). Finally, he claims that there is a need to research different art forms and try to find out their particular strengths and weaknesses as tools for conflict transformation and peacebuilding (Lederach 2005).

1.3 Conflict transformation and live action role play (larp)

Building on the definition proposed by Montola and Stenros in their book *Nordic larp* (2010), I am defining larp (live action role play) as “a participant-centered interactive art form, set in a fictive reality and experienced from a first-person perspective through a more or less deep role conformation” (Englund 2013: 12). In my bachelor thesis in Peace and Conflict Studies at Malmö University, entitled *Larp, a possible tool for conflict transformation* (Englund 2013), I claim that larps might be a useful tool for conflict transformation and that it could be especially useful for establishing social platforms and for encouraging the moral imagination, a concept developed by (Lederach 2005). This concept will be central to my analysis, and I
claim that the interactive nature of larps in combination with its encouragement of imagining yourself as someone else makes it most suitable as a tool to use for encouraging also the moral imagination.

“The moral imagination requires the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that include our enemies; the ability to sustain paradoxical curiosity that embraces complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity; the fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act; and the acceptance of the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the far too familiar landscape of violence” (Lederach 2005: 5).

In my study, I found that larps could be a useful tool for conflict transformation at different stages and areas of conflict (Englund 2013). I claimed that larps might be a good tool to deconstruct the image of the enemy, not only through interaction between different groups, but also through the new perspectives gained through playing different characters and trying to understand their thoughts and actions. I also claimed that larps, due to their ability to generate strong emotions, could be useful for processing feelings, and might be used for reconciliation, and trauma rehabilitation in a post-conflict setting. I also found indications that larps could be used as a preemptive tool to increase empathy and understanding of other people’s perspectives, life situations, feelings and actions (Englund 2013). This is what Lederach (2005) describes as evoking the moral imagination. My conclusion was that through the interactive culture of the games and the strong relationships that the participant’s gain from sharing emotionally intense situations, new social platforms as well as a shared identity could be created (Englund 2013 48-49).

1.4 The purpose and set-up of this research

My bachelor thesis focused mainly on Swedish larps and their experience of larping, through this I outlined the potential areas of use mentioned above. However, I was still not sure if and how larps could be used as a tool for conflict transformation during an ongoing conflict, since none of the participants had actually experienced a violent conflict. Larps might not be something that people living in the context of conflict would be willing to spend their time and energy on? Further, if people living in the context of conflict would be willing to participate in larps, maybe their experience would be different from people living in peaceful surroundings leading to other theories on how larps might be used to transform conflicts.
After completing my bachelor thesis, I established contact with a small group of people participating in larp-related activities in Ramallah, Palestine. The Peace and Freedom Youth Forum (PFF) is a small organization based on voluntary work. It is supposed to be an umbrella organization for different projects, but lately their focus has turned more and more towards larp and to my knowledge they are the first group to play larps in a context of an ongoing conflict. The art of larp is very young and in Palestine it has only been practiced for approximately three years. This avant-garde group of larper in Palestine is still in the process of forming and framing what they think larp should and could be.

The purpose of this study is to explore, describe and interpret the conditions for and content of larp as a potential tool of conflict transformation, through an ethnographic study and semi-structured in-depth interviews with Palestinian larper. I intend to contribute to the specific segment of the research field of peace and conflict studies (PACS), pertaining to the peace-related uses of art in contexts dominated by conflict and negative peace.

I believe that this study contributes to the field of PACS in two ways, first and most importantly by bringing in new empirical material focusing on experiences of people participating in art related activities during a context of conflict and ongoing occupation. This is important because the empirical material on the topic of art as a tool for conflict transformation is still very limited. The studies that have been made so far are few and most of them very limited in scope as well as fieldwork material. Secondly, by outlining a normative framework of how this new art form known as larp could be used as a tool for conflict transformation and peacebuilding in the context of Palestine, I hope to create a framework that could be used as an outline on how larp could be used as a tool for conflict transformation in other contexts as well.

1.5 The genesis of Larp in Palestine

In February 2011, the Norwegian organization Fantasiförbundet established contact with the PFF. Martin Nielsen from Fantasiförbundet introduced the idea of using larp as a tool for democracy building, as well as a new and interesting form of entertainment. Just a few months later, in July 2011 a group of Norwegian larper went to Ramallah where they together with PFF arranged some small workshops as an introduction to larp.
A lot of the participants got fascinated by this new art form and its possibilities, as a tool for relaxation and entertainment but also an educational tool with the possibility to encourage democracy. After this experience, they were determined to introduce larp to more Palestinians.

The cooperation between Fantasiförbundet and PFF has now existed for about three years and as part of my research I have been in contact with representatives of both organizations. Because there is no need for an official membership to participate in the Palestinian larps, there is no exact information on the number of active larppers. However, my contacts estimate that there are around 30-50 active larppers in Palestine today and around 15 of these also has the knowledge on how to write and organize larps. In total, they estimate that so far, as many as 150 Palestinians have had the chance to participate in a larp.

So far the Palestinian larppers have used larp as a tool to discuss sensitive issues like honor killings (*Killed in the name of honor*, 2013), homosexuality (*Till death do us part*, 2012) and to educate outsiders about the Palestinian situation and internal politics (*So you think you can dance?* 2013). They have also made a larp about the Palestinian situation and about what it is like to live under occupation, including the growing feeling of nationalism (*Halat hisar*, 2013).

### 1.6 Research questions

Lederach claims that there is a need, within the discourse of conflict transformation, to ask the questions “what, when and how?” with regard to the potential use of art in different contexts and situations. In other words: what can art be used for, when in the process of conflict transformation it can be used, and how art can be used to understand and solve conflicts (Lederach, 2005). Building on Lederach’s claim as well as the findings of my previous study mentioned above, this study intends to answer the following research questions:

- **What is larp being used for in Palestine today, and how does it affect the participants, their immediate surroundings, and the larger society they live in?**

- **Which elements of a normative framework of larp as a tool for conflict transformation can be outlined on the bases of the case of larppers in Palestine?**
2. Methodology

2.1 Epistemological point of departure and research design
This research takes a social constructivist point of departure and employs a qualitative research design. In contrast to quantitative research that is often presented in terms of justifying hypotheses, qualitative research is instead concerned with exploration and discovery (May 2011: 161). According to John W. Creswell, social constructivists choose to explore the complexity of the world from several perspectives by posing broader and more general questions (Creswell 2009: 9). The purpose of qualitative research is to interpret the social phenomena being explored. Hammersley and Atkinson claim that it is in relation to the development of theory that the value of ethnography becomes the most obvious (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983:23). This thesis aims at exploring the larping community in Palestine, as well as at producing a normative framework for how larps could be used as a tool for conflict transformation (focusing on the Palestinian context). It does this through connecting the existing theory on art (and larp) as a tool for conflict transformation with my empirical data collected through ethnographic observations and interviews.

2.2 Fieldwork
The data was collected during a minor field study in Ramallah (the Palestinian administrated area) between the 14th of February and the 12th of April 2014. It was made possible by the financial support by the Swedish aid agency, SIDA, through a scholarship for minor field studies. During this time, peace talks, led by US Secretary of state John Kerry, were at their last stage (and shortly after they stranded). However, at first glance the West Bank and especially Ramallah would appear to be a place of peace. The Palestinians I encountered in Ramallah did not agree, they described it as living under occupation, in the middle of an ongoing conflict, and far from peace.

In order to answer my research questions, I collected empirical material. The fieldwork consisted of ethnographic observations, ethnographic field-interviews (made during my stay
in Ramallah and visits to other parts of Palestine as well as Israel) as well as ten semi-structured and recorded interviews (read more about these in the following sections). My observations were written down in a daily diary and everyday notes about things that I thought might be important or give a richer and deeper understanding. These notes include stories told by people (larpers as well as non-larpers), written out memory notes of conversations and observations of the mood and physical context in this area.

No larp was played during my stay in Palestine, but I got the chance to observe this group and the society they live in. I met with most of the participants more than once, outside of the framework of the interviews, and I also decided to meet up again with one of the participants to do one more interview with some follow-up questions. During the two months, some of the participants became my friends. I got to observe them in different social situations with their families and friends. I visited different parts of Palestine and Israel (Jenin, Nablus, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho, Nazareth and Jerusalem etc.) and I got to see and observe the physical-context that several of the participants grew up in. I also talked to a lot of other Palestinians, which are not larpers, and got to hear their views on the occupation, larp and life in general. I passed through checkpoints and visited the rooftops in Hebron as well as the graveyard in the middle of the refugee camp in Jenin.

Many of the findings and observations that will be presented in this study I could never have planned for finding or understanding before getting out in the field. I believe that this is the main advantage and strength of the ethnographic method: I got an understanding of the context that this subculture exists within, and this enabled me to understand what the participants were talking about on a deeper level. I believe it also helped me ask relevant questions – relevant to the people concerned and, therefore, from a constructivist point of view, relevant to research (Creswell 2009: 9). The contextualization also has an important ethical aspect that cannot be underestimated in social science research in general, and in PACS in particular. Namely, it enhanced the researcher’s cultural sensitivity, which helps posing relevant, understandable and non-offensive questions to the participants. This is something I believe to be of utmost importance when interviewing people that all carry more or less traumatic experiences in their emotional luggage. In this way, I believe that within my

---

1Hebron is known to be a city full of Jewish as well as Muslim extremists and the atmosphere is always very tense. Because of Jewish settlers living in the middle of Hebron, the Palestinians in the city center are not allowed to enter their own rooftops. If they enter them they risk being shot. However as an act of civil disobedience, they still enter them from time to time.
ethnographic study the ethnographic method and the semi-structured interviews worked well together, and both methods helped enriching the other.

2.3 Ethnography

The ethnographic method has got its origins within anthropology and was first used to describe the lives of different groups (Watson-Gegeo 1998: 576). According to Merriam et al. (2002: 236), an ethnographic study is one that is focusing on human society with the goal of describing and interpreting the culture of a group. It is common to view culture as “the knowledge people have acquired that in turn structures their worldview and their behavior”; the researcher describes and interprets “what people do, what they know and what things people make and use” (Merriam et al. 2002: 236).

An ethnographic study is normally characterized by a focus on the behavior of people within a group and the cultural patterns that can be revealed through their behaviors. Yet, it is the individual that is in the center of the study, it is the individual that is observed and interviewed, and it is with the individuals that the ethnographer develops personal relationships. However, the individual is not analyzed as a singular person but rather as part of a group within which the ethnographer is trying to discern certain patterns (Watson-Gegeo 1988: 577).

The data for an ethnographic study is normally gathered during an extensive amount of time. It can be based on immersion in the site as a participant observer, formal and informal interviews, analyses of documents, records and artifacts as well as the fieldworkers diary in which happenings, personal feelings, ideas, impressions and related insights are described (Merriam et al. 2002: 237, Chambliss & Schutt 2013:181).

2.4 Semi-structured Interviews

Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allow the researcher to get a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the interviewees’ perspectives, thoughts and feelings, since they allow the them to talk freely about the matters they find important. This method also increases the chance of finding
something crucial through serendipity, because the study is not limited to the researcher’s theories and questions, and the researcher can not predict the participants’ input.

According to May, the strength of the semi-structured interview is that the researcher can seek clarification and elaborate on the answers given. This allows the interviewer to probe beyond the answers and thus enter into a dialog with the interviewee (May 2011: 134).

I used Carol A. Bailey’s framework for how to perform semi-structured interviews (Bailey 2007). I constructed an interview guide with open-ended questions as a base for the conversation (see Appendix I). The questions mostly served as guidelines, and I also asked a lot of follow-up questions depending on the answers I got, in some cases I even skipped certain questions or asked them in another order, all depending on, what direction the participants choose to take the conversation in. At times, I let some part of the interviews turn into a dialog. According to Bailey’s practical suggestions on how to carry out semi-structured interviews, this is important as it allows for enrichment of the material, making it more detailed and alive (Bailey 2007: 100).

Creswell claims that interview is a suitable method when it is not possible to observe the people participating in the study in the situations one wants to examine; furthermore the participants can then give information of things experienced in the past (Creswell 2009: 179). By interviewing my research participants, I was able to gain access to extended information about their previous larping experience as well as their personal backgrounds. However, the data collected through interviews is limited, first of all because of the limited number of participants. Also, the researcher’s background affects the answers. For example, the answers I got and the way I understood them was largely affected by the fact that I am a larper myself: I have had the chance to play several of the larps that my Palestinian research participants were referring to, and I used my insider knowledge in order to get the interviewee’s trust.

Semi-structured interviews as the main method for gathering data limits the possibility for generalizations. However, the purpose of this study is not to make generalizations but to point

---

2 The terminology of larp. The phenomenon of larp were born within at a crossroads between theater, performance art, roleplaying, gaming etc. Because of this, the terminology that has developed within and between the different larping communities is also a mixture of words and concepts from these different discourses. For example, you play a character within the game but the organizers are only called organizers and not game masters. You can write a larp, but the script for a larp is normally more of a description of the setting and the techniques to be used, not the actual storyline and absolutely no dialog etc. The people that participated in this study often talked about “playing a game”, “becoming a character” “writing a larp/game”, “designing a larp”, “participating in a larp”, “organizing a larp”. Etc.
out – on the basis of in-depth understanding of several participants’ experiences and points of view – a possible direction for how larp could be used as a tool for conflict transformation within the Palestinian context.

2.5 Sample

Through a friend, I established contact with one of the larp organizers and he agreed to act as my gatekeeper to the larping community in Palestine. It was also through him that I got a list of names, consisting of active larpers who spoke good English and that he thought might be interested in participating. I then contacted all of them and asked who was willing to participate. In complement to this, I wrote an open invitation on the Palestinian larpers Facebook page asking if there were anyone else than the people that I had already contacted that would like to participate.

In total four women and six men choose to participate. Most of the participants belong to the core-group of larpers in Palestine (these are the ones that are the most active in writing and participating in larps), and they also had experiences of larping in the Nordic countries. However, one of the participants was almost new to larp and had only participated in the Palestinian larp-festival \textit{Beit Byout} (2013).

The youngest of the participants was 23 years old and the oldest 44 years old. They had all studied at a university-level, and most of them had experiences of living abroad or at least traveling outside Palestine. They all came from an upper middle-class background, and all but one are a part of what in Palestine is known as the “Ramallah bubble.”

During my study, I found out that there was three different “bubbles” that the participants would refer to. I, therefore, believe that a short explanation is needed to avoid further confusion. The participants described life in Palestine as life in a “bubble” separated from the rest of the world by the Israelis. However, they also describe the liberal circle in Ramallah as the “Ramallah-bubble” within the “Palestinian bubble.” According to them, the “Ramallah bubble” refers to the more liberal and well educated people living in Ramallah, the culture within this bubble is according to themselves more “westernized” and “modern” than the rest of the Palestinian society. To make things even more confusing some of the participants also described the group of larpers as a “bubble” within the “Ramallah-bubble," within the “Palestinian-bubble.”
2.6 Coding

Once the interviews were transcribed in full, I analyzed them in line with Creswell’s recommendations for how to perform a thematic analysis of qualitative interviews (Creswell 2009:186). First I read through the interviews several times and tried to find which main themes were represented. After that, I sorted the different themes into groups and sub-groups and determined which of these I considered to be the most relevant for this study. Finally, I coded the interviews by these themes; each theme got its document and all the data that circled around this theme was put together, and in that way I could clearly see what had been said about each theme. The themes that I found and choose to focus on where:

- Living under occupation, life in Ramallah (spring 2014)
- Critique against the Palestinian Authority
- Viewing larp as a tool
- Escaping reality and imagining living in peace
- Larp as a tool for personal development
- Larp as resistance
- Advocacy work through larp
- Changing the norms of society
- The larping community as a social platform
- The idea of larping together with Israelis
- Obstacles for larp in Palestine
- Rehabilitation through larp

The notes from my fieldwork where coded differently. I mainly used them to understand the context and the information that I got through the interviews. However, where they could make a complement some of them were also included into the different theme-documents.
2.7 Ethical considerations

In my research, I have chosen to observe the four main requirements for social studies research. The requirement - of considering how the information is gathered; - of getting informed consent (from interviewees); - of considering the participants need for confidentiality and of taking into consideration how the material will be used.

Before starting the interviews, I made sure to get informed consent from the participants by informing them about the purpose of the study and in what context the material would be used. After this, all of the participants got the question if they would still like to participate or not. There was no case of anyone choosing not to participate. In order to protect the participants, I decided to keep all identities secret, and each participant was urged to declare a code name before the interview. It is also in the interest of protecting the participant's identities that I have chosen only to include limited information about them in Appendix II (introducing the participants).

2.8 My background as a larper

I have been associating myself with the larping culture for about ten years. Therefore, my perspective on the larping community at large is an emic\(^3\) one (Önnerfors 2013: 12), a perspective of an insider who speaks the language of larp. However, I believe that for me the emic perspective of the insider has been a crucial asset for this study. Being both a larper, as well as a student within the discipline of PEAC, has enabled me to pose informed questions related to the idea of larp as a tool for conflict transformation based on mine and the participants common understanding of larp as well as getting access to the studied group in the first place.

2.9 Limitations and delimitations

The fact that I could only stay in Ramallah for two months as well as the fact that I do not speak Arabic, limited my accessibility to the Palestinian culture. I am sure that if I would

\(^{3}\) The terminology of the emic and ethic perspectives was developed by the linguistic Kenneth Pyke, to separate the knowledge that one can have about a language without speaking it (the ethic perspective) and the knowledge that requires a person to actually speak the language (the emic perspective) (Peterson & Pike 2002, Önnerfors 2013: 12).
have been able to stay for a longer time or re-visit my “field” I would have been able gain a
deeper understanding of the culture in Ramallah and Palestine, and through that to gain an
even deeper understanding of my material. The limited number of participants in the study is
also a limitation that makes it difficult generalize on the feelings and thoughts of
“Palestinians.”

The purpose of this study is not to make yet another attempt at a deep analyze of the Israeli-
Palestinian conflict or to come up with “the solution” for peace. However, I hope to make a
contribution on the path of transforming the conflict, and also the situation, by introducing this
new tool for conflict transformation and highlighting a few possible areas of use that I believe
would be worth looking further into. Also, I did not get a chance to interview or even encounter
any Israeli larpers, therefore, this study is mainly focusing on how larps are being used and
could be used as a tool on the Palestinian side of the conflict.

Regardless of these limitations I claim that my findings are valid and relevant. In a
qualitative research study, the findings and results are always influenced by the researcher and
my theoretical framework is an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it.
3. Theoretical framework and previous research

This thesis is building a theory of limited scope, concerning the specific art form known as larp as a tool for conflict transformation. Except for my BA-thesis there is no other existing theory about this particular subject. The foundation for my theory is to be found in more general and already existing theories of peacebuilding and art as a tool for conflict transformation. However, it is through the theories introduced in this chapter that I have been able to analyze the findings within my material.

3.1 Art as a tool for conflict transformation

3.1.1 Positive and negative peace

According to Johan Galtung peace, is not simply the absence of war. True peace, what he calls the positive peace implies also social justice and freedom from structural violence (Galtung 1969). Some researchers (e.g., Call and Cousens 2008: 4) claim that it is the physical violence that we should focus on; for them, negative peace is better than no peace at all. However, Galtung claims that as long as one form of violence persists, it will always be most likely that the other will also come back sooner or later, and therefore the absence of physical violence is never enough (Galtung 1969: 183, 31-33). According to him, there are more than enough people willing to sustain structural violence in order to avoid personal violence or to use personal violence to revolt against the structural violence. The ultimate mission for peace researchers is rather to find ways of reaching positive peace, free from all violence (Galtung 1969: 186). In my discussion of conflict transformation and peacebuilding, the goal is a positive peace, free from structural as well as physical violence.

3.1.2 Conflict transformation

Lederach agrees with Galtung that to build a sustainable peace it is necessary to achieve a positive peace, and he claims that this is impossible to achieve only by a peace accord through diplomatic negotiations on a top level. Instead, he suggests that a conflict transformation needs to take place on all levels and dimensions of society (Lederach 1997: 5-18).
The concept of conflict transformation represents a coherent approach to how conflicts occur, develop and change as well as how they are influenced by and influencing personal, relational, structural and cultural dimensions in a society (Lederach, 1997:83).

The scholars that are advocating the need for conflict transformation rather than conflict resolution do not necessarily see conflicts as something negative, but rather as a natural phenomenon that has the potential of changing societies and breaking down social injustices. However, the problems occur when the conflict leads to polarization and escalating violence. The main focus conflict transformation process is on how to keep conflicts from spiraling into violence, and if they do, how to bring them back to non-violent conflicts (Lederach 1997).

According to Zelizer (2003), peacebuilding activities (including activities aiming at conflict transformation), on a society level can normally be divided into two groups. The first group is activities focusing on structural problems that are either the root causes, or that has occurred as a consequence of the conflict. The other group he calls the relational group, and this includes activities with a main focus on creating relationships through dialogue and the development of trust and understanding between the different groups engaged in the conflict (Zelizer 2003).

One of the most-important ingredients for a sustainable conflict transformation is, according to Lederach, the creation of social platforms. With other words sustainable venues for people to interact in that over time, has the potential to generate positive initiatives for social change (Lederach 2005:47). According to peace researcher Mary Kaldor, it is within these “islands of civilization” that hope is to be found, in small groups of people that refuses to be a part of the ongoing violence. However for them to prosper and eventually challenge the structure of violence surrounding them, they are in need of financial as well as political support (Kaldor 2004: 135-136).

According to Lederach, conflict transformation can be seen as a spiral process with successes and failures in different stages. To build a sustainable peace, it is important to create long-lasting and sustainable relationships as well as social platforms where the reconciliation can continue long after the negotiations have ended (Lederach 1997). Lederach also highlights the need for a toolbox, full of different tools to use at different levels of society (leaders, middle and grassroots) and at different stages of the process of conflict transformation (previous, during and after) (Lederach 1997, Lederach 2003, Lederach 2005).
In a similar way, Michael Shank and Lisa Schirch (2008) (in their research on music, as a tool for conflict transformation), argue that the peacebuilding field requires tools that are as diverse and complicated as the human spirit and the arts emerge as a logical choice. According to them, art is a tool that can communicate and transform the way people think and act and thereby change the dynamics in intractable interpersonal, intercommunal, national and global conflicts (Shank and Schirch 2008: 2). Through this thesis, I hope to introduce a new tool to be included in the toolbox. My framework shows how larp could be used in the context of conflict transformation in Palestine.

3.1.3 Art as a tool for conflict transformation and peacebuilding

The Sociologist, peace researcher and activist Elise Boulding (1990) argues that humans have three modes of knowing. The first one is the cognitive and analytical mode; the second one is the emotional mode, and the third mode is the intuitive one. For peacebuilding to be effective, she claims that humans have to use their imagination, and open up and use the emotional and intuitive modes, as well as the cognitive, analytical mode (Boulding 1990: 95).

During the last couple of decades a growing number of people, all over the world, have started actively using art to de-construct images of the enemy, rehabilitating community’s suffering from war traumas, reconciling divided societies through creating social platforms for recreation of trust and understanding. There are many examples of when art has been used as a platform for the creation of a liminal space where strangers can meet on neutral ground (Lederach 2005, Jennings and Baldwin 2010, Bergh 2010, Robertson 2010).

The number of studies made on art as a tool for conflict transformation is still very limited, and most of them have also been small and only included limited fieldwork. Most studies made on art as a tool for conflict transformation were based on ethnographic methods and qualitative interviews (Bergh and Slaboda 2010, Riiser 2010, Robertson 2010). Lederach’s (2005) and Pettan’s (2010) work is an exception, since they grounded their theories in their experiences as peace builders as well as scholars. While most authors have chosen to focus on only one group, Bergh (2010) and Jennings and Baldwin (2010) have conducted research on more than one group and tried to compare the different results.
In his book *The moral imagination, the art and soul of building peace* Lederach (2005) discuss the power of art in meeting the challenge of transforming conflicts. He argues that art can be the key to unlocking people's imagination and how this is essential for conflict transformation to take place. According to Lederach, art can be used as a tool for conflict transformation at different stages of conflict and war. First it may be used for the creation of social platforms and bridges of understanding before the conflict develops into an armed conflict. Secondly it may be used during the war, helping people to cope with the tragedies happening around them. Thirdly it can be used as a tool in a post-conflict setting to re-establishing relationships and understanding between warring groups, but also as a tool for reconciliation and rehabilitation.

According to Lederach, peace is first born within the imagination of people, and when all you have experienced is war, it takes much imagination to be able to imagine and to dare believe and work for peace (Lederach 2005:39).

Kathryn M. Lance, researcher within the fields of Psychology and Peace Studies, claim that one of the crucial aspects that make art useful as a tool for reconciliation and peacebuilding is its ability to serve as non-verbal means for emotional expression (Lance 2012: 13). In Omagh, Northern Ireland in 1998, a devastating bomb-blast went off, it killed 29 people and injured over 400. After the explosion, the citizens filled the streets with flowers and when the flowers began dying the officials asked some artists what to do with them. One of the artists, Carol Cane, suggested that they should make paper out of them, and it led to a series of workshops that brought Catholics and Protestants together, working side by side. While they were working they also had the opportunity to express their shock and grief. In the end:

“each bereaved family was... presented with a piece of this artwork symbolizing, through the flowers, the thoughts, prayers, love and friendship which emerged worldwide as a result of the atrocity” (Lance 2012: 13).

One of the few attempts of theorizing art as a tool for conflict transformation was done by Shank and Schirch, and their conclusion was that art can be used for waging conflicts nonviolently, reducing direct violence, transforming relationships, and creating a building capacity (Shank and Schirch 2008: 5-7).

In her work about art therapy in practice, Marian Liebmann (1996) found out that art could be a used as a tool for conflict transformation in several ways. She claims that the participants in
different activates (for example in a role play) are offered a way of experiencing a situation from another person’s perspective, through this the participants gain a new perspective that is helpful when dealing with conflict-related situations. According to her, the participation in art-related activity enables people to express their emotions in a creative way, which might lead them to the new insights and personal development that is needed for them to be agents of a conflict transformation that aims at positive peace (Liebmann 1996: 3-4).

3.1.4 Leisure and social change

Lise Kjølsrød, researcher within the field of Sociology and Human Geography, questions the contrast between social movements and social worlds of leisure and proposes that communities gathered around leisure activities can also be a growing-ground for democracy. She argues that:

“Even if the political goals of leisure organizations are much less grandiose than those of social movements, both articulate external commitments, both contain practical elements as well as voice, and both dispatch knowledge, information, and loyalties across territorial borders” (Kjølsrød 2013: 1222).

Carlson argues that people participating in performance-related activities are also likely to be a part of changing society’s norms, especially if they participate in deep play performances (such as larps). Within the context of the performance there exists a social space that is more open to social experiments and norm breaking behavior then within society at large. His theory is that there is a possibility that these ideas will follow the participants out of the space of the performance and into society at large (Carlson 2004: 19-20).

In the case of the PFF, they see themselves as both a group for leisure but also an active agent for change within Palestine’s civil society (you can read more about this dual role in chapter three). In her book “Agents for Change: Civil Society Roles in Preventing War & Building Peace” Catherine Barnes, associate professor at the center for Justice and peacebuilding, is elaborating in what ways civil society can be an active agent for change towards positive peace. She claims that civil society activists should work with surfacing and challenging structural violence in a non-violent way. According to her, this is crucial to bring about necessary changes that will act preemptively to hinder the outbreak of a full-scale war (Barnes 2006: 8).
3.1.5 Art as a victory of the civilian life over war

In her anthropological study of the people trapped within the city of Sarajevo during the years of siege, the Swedish anthropologist Ivana Maček describes how they nevertheless created and consumed art. She suggests that it might have to do with their strong conviction to sustain an important aspect of prewar normality. She also claims that it might have to do with an urge to share their experiences of war and siege as well as creating a feeling of connection with others beyond the borders of the sieged city. This made the art scene thrive in the city during the years of siege; it offered hope and granted a feeling of dignity and humanity within the chaos of the war as well as essential attraction from the rest of the world (Maček 2009).

3.1.6 Critique of art as a tool for conflict transformation

Bergh and Slaboda have done one of the most critical studies of art (focusing on the art of music) as a tool for conflict transformation. Bergh criticizes Lederach, (among others) and emphasizes the dangers of referring to, or trusting in "the power of music" when it comes to conflict transformation. This might make us miss the potential that is there and how it could be used to change the situation. Another risk is that the projects transform participants from active agents engaged in conflict transformation, into passive agents relying on art to do the job and transform the conflict for them (Bergh 2010: 14). In another study, Bergh and Slaboda claim that it is counterproductive to rely on short-term and strong emotional reactions through aesthetic experiences, and they believe that peace builders instead should be focusing on a long-term commitment and the creation of platforms based on artistic expressions (Bergh and Slaboda 2010: 12).

In their study of the evaluation processes within the community theaters and their impact in Northern Ireland Jennings and Baldwin found that a lot of the studies have focused on the perspective of the organizers and not on the participants (Jennings and Baldwin 2010). They claim that this is problematic because the organizers and organizations depend on good evaluations without any particular flaws, to get further funding. The consequence of this method for evaluation is primarily missed opportunities to learn from your own and others mistakes (Jennings and Baldwin 2010).

Despite these problems, Bergh concludes that in the cases that he studied music definitely seemed to have had a positive influence on relationships and the creation of liminal space within the community’s (Bergh 2010: 227). Jennings and Baldwin found that the community-
based art could be a powerful tool for generating new cultural perspectives and building social relationships (Jennings and Baldwin 2010). Despite the problems mentioned above, all of these studies agree that art could be a very useful tool for conflict transformation, presuming that it is used according, in a way that is appropriate in a specific context, and that is embraced by the local participants (Lederach 2005, Jennings and Baldwin 2010, Bergh and Slaboda 2010, Bergh 2010, Robertson 2010).

3.2 Larp

3.2.1 Larp as a participant-centered, interactive art form

In the very beginning of this thesis I described larp as “a participant-centered interactive art form, set in a fictive reality and experienced from a first-person perspective through a more or less deep role conformation”, However, larp could also be described as a form of interactive theater without an audience, roleplaying, game playing or as a sort of performance art (Hjalmarsson 2011: 34). According to Christopher Sandberg and his theories of art and larp, the simple description of larp as interactive theater without an audience is problematic since, unlike traditional theater, the participants are all both actors and audience. With other words:

“The larp piece only exists in the shared fantasy, which means that the larp is both a mental and physical form of human expression that can only be realized in unity. This unity is a cycle of creation and consumption. Thus, the notion of ‘no audience’ doesn’t ring true” (Sandberg 2004: 275).

Larps can have any theme, set in any year or place, fictional or real, telling the story of grand events, or focusing on small, everyday aspects of human life. The number of participants also vary from around several hundred to only two players. Sometimes a lot of energy and money is put into creating an illusion of the fictive setting, with expensive costumes and scenery, at other times they are set in a black box or in an apartment without any props or costumes at all. However, one thing that all larps have in common is that they always enable people to gain new perspectives by physically putting themselves in someone else’s shoes. By doing this, the participants experience something they would not be able to experience ‘being themselves’ in their everyday life.
Some of the people I interviewed in Ramallah described it as walking into a movie and playing one of the parts. However, one of the most prominent differences between movies/theater and larp is that there is no pre-written detailed manuscript. Larps can consist of some scripted scenes or have a timeline (if it is a more detailed and directed timeline it is normally called a railway larp). However, the organizers’ job is to create a setting and sometimes the characters, but once the game started, the participants are free to act on their impulses and ideas.

3.2.2 How it all began

Some claim that the earliest forms of live action role playing can be dated as far back as 735 a.d., when real people were used as chess pieces (Tychsen et al. 2006: 257). Another form of precursor is the so-called “carousel” games that were set up by, and performed at, the European courts during the 17th and 18th centuries. These games had huge budgets and the members of the court, noblesse and servants all dressed out in valuable costumes and acted within full scale stage settings where they reconstructed and played out ancient battles, tourneys or mythological tableaus (Söderberg et al. 2004: 2).

Exactly when and where the first modern larp was played is impossible to say, but according to most sources within the discourse, it evolved from table top games at the end of the 1970s. This development took place simultaneously within different groups in the western world (Stenros och Montola 2011:1).

It is within the so-called Nordic larp-style tradition that Fantasiförbundet and through them also the larping community in Palestine has its background, and it is, therefore, this particular style of larp that I have chosen to focus on. It is difficult to define exactly what separates Nordic larps from other larps, however, Steenros who is one of the front figures within the discourse of larp and research described it like this during a lecture at the Knutepunkt convention in Oslo 2013:

“A tradition that views larp as a valid form of expression, worthy of debate, analysis and continuous experimentation, which emerged around the Knutepunkt convention. It typically values thematic coherence, continuous illusion, action and immersion, while keeping the larp co-creative and its production noncommercial. Workshops and debriefs are common” (Stenros at NLT, Nordic Larp Talks, 2013).
Nordic larps are known to be ambitious and to have a deeper purpose, some of the most controversial and sensational larps have handled themes such as migration issues, cancer, military occupation, marginalization and consumption (Stenros och Montola 2011: 2).

3.2.3 Previous research on LARP

The academic writings focusing on larp is still very limited. However, the interest is growing, and articles and even books are published in which larp and its potentials and effects are explored from different points of view. So far, the majority of the work has been focusing on larp as an educational tool, however, studies have been carried out within several disciplines. Larp is gaining ground as an area of interest within as different disciplines as phycology (Bell-long 2012), drama (Levin 2012), game design (Söderberg et al. 2004) and security studies (Hjalmarsson 2011).

In her thesis Democratic effects of role-playing in participatory art – Participant reflections from the larp Till Death Do Us Part in Ramallah 2012. Hilda Levin shows that the participants of the larp Till death do us apart considered the larp to have been a “democratic experience” where they not only had the chance to build new networks and friendships over borders, but also to gain new insight and knowledge, as well as experience personal development and empowerment (Levin 2012). She argues that when everyone present are also participating in the creation of art, the power structures and patterns of communication change, and this is where larp has an advantage over traditional theater (Levin 2012: 5). It could be used as a tool to empower the powerless. Through the emerging that takes place with the character, the participants are able to step into the story and try on new perspectives. This includes other social positions and different behaviors than they would experience in their own life (Levin 2012: 5). Levins conclusion is that the participant-centered nature of larp makes it more democratic in its essence then traditional theater (Levin 2012: 5).

According to Sara Hjalmarssons study on larp as a tool for scenario-based training for security and emergency services, pedagogical larps are an extraordinary tool to teach so-called soft skills, for example, emotional intelligence, decision-making and ethics. She also claims that larps have several advantages compared to other methods of learning. Larps are providing a safe environment for individuals, an environment where they are allowed to make mistakes and learn from them, without having to identify personally with the mistakes that have been made, because
they were made, not by themselves but by their character. According to her pedagogical larps, are also a great tool to involve people emotionally (Hjalmarsson 2011: 96).

Within the field of education, the interest for larps as a pedagogical tool is gaining ground and in 2006, the world's first role-playing-school opened up in Denmark. Østerskov Efterskole is working within the framework of the Danish curriculum, but with LARPs and Role-plays as one of their most important educational tool (Hyltoft 2008).

In the article Four reasons why Edu-Larps works Hyltoft argues that pedagogical larps, contrary to traditional education, have a pronounced ability to activate the students both physically and mentally. This is essential to gain a deeper understanding and knowledge.

“The larp comprises several factors that call for a high level of activity. Most notably are competitiveness, strong group structure and narrative. This means that a student only has to want to win, want to be popular in his group or want to experience the story in order to feel the urge for active participation, but very often all three factors will urge the student to activity in some measure” (Hyltoft 2010: 51).

According to Hyltoft larps authorizes the student to make his or hers own decisions and to live with them (Hyltoft 2010: 53). In the Palestinian context, life and society are shaped by the conflict and occupation, according to some of the participants in my study there is a tendency of apathy and blaming everything on the occupation. Hyltoft’s and Hjalmarsson’s studies show that larps might be used to engage and encourage people to become active members of society. But also that it can be used as an educational tool for people to learn and gain knowledge about everything from the reasons behind the conflict to theories on how to work with non-violent resistance.

According to Juhana Petterson, one of the co-organizers behind the larp Halat hisar, the aim of the larp was to “change the world” through a small political impact. According to her, when using larps as tools for political impact the design has to be somewhat different then when aesthetics is the only concern. She also claims that “A larp can engage with its participants on a political level while simultaneously acting as a media story to improve the visibility of the issues it deals with” (Petterson 2014: 71)

Misje et al. writes about their experience of organizing larps for kids living in Rashedie a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. Here the aim of the larps was to create a space for play
and interaction. The organizers claim that this project showed that “larp can be used as a tool for activating and inspiring kids and grownups in refugee camps” (Misje et al. 2014: 100).
4. Analysis

The analysis is based on data from some texts about Palestinian larps, my fieldwork and notes made in the field, in combination with ethnographic field interviews as well as ten semi-structured, recorded and transcribed interviews carried out with active larps in Palestine (February 14th – April 15th, 2014). The interview guide can be found as an appendix (appendix I). In the second appendix, you can find as a short introduction of the Participants with their code names, age, occupation, social status and information about where they come from originally (see appendix II). The code names used were picked by the participants and the ten people quoted in this analysis are: “Yousef,” “Waseen,” “Shams,” “Rasha,” “Rami,” “Louie,” “Leila,” “Khalid,” “Batman” and “Amal”. The analytical categories (found in chapter 2.6) that was used for coding the material has also been used to organize the following section.

4.1 Living under occupation, life in Ramallah (spring 2014)

During my observations in the field (February 14th – April 15th, 2014) life in Ramallah was largely influenced by the Israeli occupation. The occupation was present through trade blockades, limitations of the Palestinians freedom of movement (including checkpoints and the separation barrier), harassments, house demolitions, unlawful killings, displacements of Palestinians, as well as Bedouins, and the growing number of Israeli settlements on Palestinian land. In Ramallah, even during this period of less physical violence, structural violence was constantly present through the occupation. It was a textbook example of what Galtung describes as negative peace, a situation that will sooner or later once again escalate into violence and war (Galtung 1969: 183, 31-33).

Despite these problems, some of the people that I interviewed said that it is simply the way things are and that all you can do is to try to adapt to the situation. One of these was Yousef who said that:

“For me, it is a kind of part of my life. So for example to go from here to another city, I get stopped, for example, in a checkpoint… and I get stopped for a couple of hours and ok I dont feel very aggressive towards it because it is part of my life. If I want to go to the sea and I don't have permission, I can’t go there. So... that is all a part of my life...” (Yousef).
Others, like Shams, refused to accept and get used to what she calls a “fascist” and “apartheid” system. She claims that it is suffocating her and effecting all parts of her life:

“It’s like you feel the the... foot of a soldier is on your neck, and that is the humiliation... I always feel [...] that the soldiers would be right here on your noose, between your eyes and not allowing you to be. [...] And it doesn’t mean that I don't go swimming, it doesn’t mean that I don't go dancing, and drinking, and clubbing and traveling... But everything about this is very complicated [...] not because there is a checkpoint at the entrance of the bar, but because this is becoming very mental, it is a mental occupation [...] there is so much to living under occupation [...] it is about everything that you do. And it is because, this regime, that was that is... and has been suppressing us for a long, long time... “(Shams).

My research participants were pessimistic about the future, and it was difficult for them to imagine a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to them, what happened is that after the second intifada most Palestinians surrendered their hope of a future in justice and peace. They are also disappointed by the luke-warm response by the rest of the world, and feel that the international community is ignoring the constant injustices against them. Loui tells me that he used to work actively for peace but that he believes things are frozen for now (Loui). Khalid explains that it is difficult because the Palestinians will never forget their land, and the Israelis will never leave theirs, still he claims that every Palestinian dream of freedom and peace (Khalid).

4.2 Critique against the Palestinian Authority (PA)

The negative peace in Palestine is not only a matter of structural violence from the Israeli side. During the interviews, most of the frustration that was aired was not against the Israelis but rather against the PA. This surprised me, and when talking to some peace activist working for International Solidarity Movement (ISM), they claimed that a lot of the people that they encountered even thought that the third Intifada would most likely not be against the Israelis but against the PA and their unfair rule, corruption and maintenance of the status quo.

According to the people participating in my study it is dangerous to be too critical about the PA, and when discussing such matters in public spaces, several of the participants lowered their voices and made sure first to have a look around to know who could be listening. Several of the participants told me that they believed the PA to be corrupt and unjust, collecting taxes from the people without giving them access to social security, or political influence. Almost
all of the people that I interviewed, as well as other Palestinians that I talked to also expressed anger towards the PA for protecting the Israelis and not the Palestinians.

“The problem is when a martyr dies, and the protest goes, the problem is, the first barricade is our own police, before the Israeli, because our government, it’s in its own interest is to feel good relations with Israel, because there are negotiations. I feel that this is bullshit” (Waseen).

Waseen was far from alone in feeling betrayed by the PA and several others of the participants described similar feelings.

### 4.3 Viewing larp as a tool

None of the Palestinian larpers that I interviewed view larps as simply entertainment, they all point out different and useful areas of use. They all claim that for them larp is both leisure as well as a tool for change. They tell me that they believe that this tool could be used for educational purposes, democracy promotion, advocacy work, personal development, escaping reality and “staying sane.” The reasons for why they choose to participate in larp-related activities and even organize them seem to respond to the need to experience something that breaks their daily routine and makes them forget about their life situation and the occupation. For some it is a way to process and pour out some off their emotions. They all describe it as an amazing experience, and they are all fascinated by the potential that larp has as a creation of liminal space where anything is possible.

### 4.4 Escaping reality and imagining living in peace

Most of my interviewees described a feeling of being trapped, and they claimed that living in Ramallah is like living in a bubble – here used with negative connotations. They also told me that within a society with as strong cultural norms and values as Palestine, it is difficult to find space to discover your individuality, to dare and think differently and to question these values and norms.

Even if Rami points out that there are coffee shops, restaurants, bars and even a bowling place (Ramallah is a growing city full of construction sites), he still thinks that:

“Your life is in 5km square where you go, eat, meet your family, work...ch... go for holidays... in this, a small jail. But you can move from one jail to another, let's say Ramallah to Jericho [...] It's a lie, its a big
lie, you feel like you live in a country that is called Palestine, but no, in reality, no... We live in a small compound, in a bubble” (Waseen).

Several of the participants repeat this reason for larping and they tell me that life under occupation is not only stressful, but also very limited and boring. Larping offers them a temporarily escape from their everyday life. They can travel and experience new things just by using their imagination.

“[…] it's really boring... style of life. There is no entertainment; routine is... really, really hard for us... so... something to break your routine is maybe by larping. Because you want something new maybe, maybe once in a month” (Rami).

Both Amal and Rasha also point out that one of the main advantages of larping is that if you choose to play a non-political larp, it enables you to forget about the occupation (at least for a short while) and pretend that you are somewhere else, and someone else. Khalid describes larping as something nice but also something necessary to stay mentally healthy, and avoid going crazy in the small Ramallah-bubble. For Joseph, the most appealing thing was that larping was something new and something that helped him to break his life’s routine:

“My first experience with larp cleared up my mind a lot. Even I felt more peace; it took me out from routine. Even in your life if you break your routine, it is kind of still routine. Because you break the routine, but here it is the larp that command you to break your routine so, that’s the... a good point of larps” (Joseph).

According to the larpers, I interviewed when they tried larping for the first time it was an experience, not like anything else they had ever experienced before. They all described it in very positive terms. Yousef described it as “an amazing experience.” Amal said that “it was [a] really refreshing feeling, actually” and Khalid thought it was “really, really, really nice... I loved it; it was really much fun” (Khalid). One could claim that the reason they love larping is because it offers them a way of escaping reality, and this could be seen as something negative. But according to the theories of Lederach (2005), Boulding (1990) and Maček (2009), escaping reality and imagining a different life is not necessarily a bad thing. One of the larps that were mentioned, by several of the participants, as a funny and entertaining larp was the larp the unforgettable holiday and one of the participants described how wonderful it was to just for a short while imagining yourself on a beach, on a funny holiday. According to Lederach one of the main obstacles for conflict transformation is the fact that people who have never experienced anything else than conflict can not imagine what it would be like to live in peace. He believes that it is only when you can imagine peace that you can dream of it, and it is only when you can dream of peace that you will start working for your dream to
come true (Lederach 2005). The hopelessness expressed by most of the Palestinians I encountered during fieldwork indicates that the dream of peace is today becoming very vague.

4.5 Larp as a tool for personal development

According to Waseen, larping changed him as a person and that he felt different after participating. He is not alone. Shams and Rasha both claim that through larping they have become better at not judging people at first sight. They also describe how they believe that larp helped them to understand people and thereby judge them less harsh.

Batman is another of the larper who strongly expresses how larp changed his perspectives:

“[…] My life before larp is different ... and I am proud to say this, it changed a lot of my perspectives and my understanding of myself and how I deal with people and how to understand. I learned a lot from playing games and also discuss the stuff that we played after the game” (Batman).

Normally the larps are always followed by a debriefing where the participants share their experience and get a chance to discuss it through their own personal view. Several participants told me similar things like Batman, how they believed theirs and their co-players opinions and views changed from before the larp.

Several of the participants described how they believed to have changed as people by participating in larps, they talk about a growing confidence and also a growing patience, and tell me how larp has helped them to stop judging other people too harsh. Most also highlight how they have been able to gain new perspectives on things and people by looking at it through their characters eyes.

“I think, especially about the things that are about conflicts and about values, how you decide your values, and how to measure your values in life, and your believes, larp can be a good tool […] To try, to test your values and beliefs […] Especially when you find this conservative structure in Palestine, it gives the people the chance […] To try something else... and outside their real world” (Batman).

The participants stressed that they have gained a new kind of understanding, even for people much different from themselves (pedophiles, religious, homosexual, looser, terrorist, Israelis interrogator or soldier). Waseen says that:

“It’s an amazing experience, because it opens up your mind, it lets you experience, different characters, different personalities and being poor, being rich, being poor educationally, being a slave, being a doctor, being however...” (Waseen).
Shams declares that she loves larping and explains how even playing a character you strongly dislike can be a nice experience. For example, once she played a stupid secretary:

“I played that I was a secretary, and it was great, it was... awesome! I hated myself, but... I really hated myself at that point, but then after the game, everybody came and hugged me and said that I was great and that I was and that I made them laugh and... That was...That was something for me” (Shams).

Her example seems to indicate that larps could be used as a way of deconstructing images of the enemy, as a context where people are willing to play someone they really dislike. However, to play the character good (which is the goal and aim of most larps) you still have to try and understand the reasons behind their actions and personality. One of the men that I interviewed told me about playing a character that was in fact a pedophile and he was proud that he succeeded with making this character human and even in gaining a certain amount of understanding for his character. If larps can help people to deconstruct the enemy image of pedophiles, then it seems likely that it could work in similar ways to deconstruct enemy images between groups stuck in a conflict.

Some of the participants tell me about their experience of playing Israeli soldiers and interrogators during the two games *So you think you can dance* and *Halat Hisar*. Some admit that it was a thrilling feeling of power, but at the same time disgusting (because they describe this feeling as “wrong”). Some of the people playing these characters were deeply disturbed by doing it while others described it as an interesting and enjoyable experience. It would have been interested to hear their thoughts on playing an Israeli civilian, unfortunately, none of them told me of any such experiences. Their purpose of putting these characters into the game have been to give non-Palestinian participants an understanding for the occupation, rather then challenging some of their own prejudices and hate towards the Israelis. However, even if this is a big step to take, my impression is that this would be possible, after all this is a group of people that are enthusiastic towards new experiences that challenge their own norms and values.

### 4.6 Larp as resistance

Shams (born in Jerusalem but grown up partly in the Gulf because of her fathers exile) explained how she believes that their generation was born to a generation of defeat “a product of the diaspora, and a product of the defeat of 1967.” During one of my fieldwork conversations, another girl in her mid-twenties, claimed that the Palestinian cause is lost
because everyone willing to fight are either in prison or dead by now. This feeling of having to choose to fight for what is right or choosing to have a good life is a struggle that I realized existed within a lot of the young people that I talked too, both during my fieldwork, as well as within the framework of the interviews. On one hand, they long for freedom and change, on the other, they have seen the cost of fighting, and just like most people in the world they simply want to live a good life in peace. They want to get a good job, get married and have fun. Some believe that it is possible to almost ignore the political situation, at least while living in the “Ramallah bubble.” Others like Shams claims that the occupation influences everything in her life.

In Palestine, several organizations are using art as a form of nonviolent resistance. Two of the most famous expressions are the graffiti’s on the separation wall that surrounds Bethlehem and the Freedom Theater in Jenin. In March 2014, as a part of my fieldwork, I had the privilege to visit the theater for two days, and also take a walk in the refugee camp that it is located within. When you walk through the gates and into the little courtyard that belongs to the theater, it is obvious how the atmosphere changes immediately. This is a place where people hope and work for change through peaceful means, and it stands in sharp contrast to the hopelessness and violence in the surrounding camp. There are several similarities between the values of the Freedom Theater and the group of larpers in Ramallah, both groups believe that it is possible to criticize internal problems and oppression through art, and also to regain the world’s attention for the ongoing occupation.

Through art and larps there is a possibility for the youth to fight the occupation and the Israelis, joining in the struggle for liberation in a nonviolent way. This kind of non-violent struggle, gaining the world’s attention through different art-projects and daring to refuse to choose the path of violence, is a way of struggle that would allow these young people to both “fight”, but still have a chance of living “a good and full life.”

For the research participant who chose the code name Batman, daily life in itself is an act of resistance, as long as the Palestinians manage to live their life and celebrate their weddings it is a proof that the Israelis haven’t succeeded in crushing them. Batman talked further about the importance of weddings as an act of resistance and proof that the Israelis have not succeeded in their attempt to crush the Palestinian culture. One could easily imagine that this is why the first international larp ever set up in Palestine was chosen to be a larp about a wedding. This idea of enjoyment as a form of resistance is similar to what Mačeks describes
from her study of Sarajevo under siege, where “every performance was a victory of civilian life over the war” (Maček 2009: 55). In a similar way in the context of Palestine, every wedding (or larp) becomes an act of resistance, a victory of the civilian life over in this case the occupation. Further down you will also see how the larpers describe the liberating feeling of larping, being able to forget about the occupation and experiencing some “normality” in the middle of a reality and life shaped by the occupation and conflict.

4.7 Advocacy work through larp

According to Shams politics is constantly present when she is arranging and writing larps, and she is especially proud of the larp Halat hisar, in which the Israeli occupation of Palestine is moved to a fictive occupation of Finland. She believes that larp is a good tool for advocacy work, allowing for the feeling of being occupied to get under the skin of the participants from the Nordic countries. Through participating in a larp like Halat hisar it is possible for people in other parts of the world to understand the life and situation for Palestinians in a new way. Rami also see larp as tool to inform and further spread the information about what it’s like for Palestinians to live under occupation

“We want people from outside to know more about the conflict, to know more about Israel to know more about Palestine. What is the struggles that Palestinians face in Palestine every day, so to us the larp showed the participants from abroad what kind of struggles we have in Palestine, how others see us, for example” (Rami).

Rasha hopes that the connections between Palestinian larppers and other larppers in the world will grow stronger and that it will be normal for people to travel to Palestine and participate in larps and Batman told me that both the larp Till death do us part and the larping festival Beit Byout, brought people to Palestine that might not have come there otherwise. While visiting they also got some information about the occupation and situation for Palestinians, in this way larp could clearly be used as a tool for advocacy work, creating a reason for people to visit Palestine and a social platform for the building of relationships between Palestinians and people with other nationalities, which in turn travel back home and carry out advocacy work for the Palestinians within their own social networks.
4.8 Changing the norms of society

According to the participants and the observations that I made, the larpping group in Ramallah is different from the rest of the society they live in, they are a bubble, within the already more liberal Ramallah bubble. They described the larpping community as a context where there are no taboos, where they are able to think new thoughts and discuss things not accepted within the rest of their society. In contrast to the majority of the Palestinians in the West bank, many of the larpers drink alcohol and some are even in boyfriend-girlfriend relationships. Unlike the society around them, they also proclaimed a sympathy and understanding towards gay people.

The participants told me that when they larp everything is possible, there are no limitations. But the people participating in my study also tell me how they use larping to discuss internal Palestinian issues and politics, like the polarized political situation or the problems with homophobia and honor killings.

In the larping Killed in the name of honor, the gender roles were flipped around, and it was the women of the family that was hurting the men in the name of the family’s honor. The larps seem to have made a strong impact on everyone participating, especially the men. Waseen tells me that after having seen the women in these strong characters, his view of them changed, and also he claims that once the men were put in the women’s situation the stupidity of the system became far more obvious.

This is a good example of larping as a breathing ground for people thinking differently, a place where they are allowed and encouraged to question the society around them that is shaped by decades of conflict. In this case, a larping Killed in the name of honor could be seen as a peacebuilding activity focusing on a problem that is an indirect consequence of the conflict.

Kjølsrød believes that even if the main goals of organizations focusing in leisure are less grandiose than those of social movements they still inhabit the capacity to be a driving force for change (Kjølsrød 2013: 1222). According Carlson people participating in deep-play performances (such as larping) are also likely to change the norms of society. Through the questioning and experimentation a set of new norms and values are created within the group (much like what has happened within this group of larpers), and these are then most likely to follow the participants out of the space of the performance and into society at large. If they are right, the larping community in Palestine inhabits a natural and growing capacity to be a driving force of change within the Palestinian society.
“We would give a chance to more Palestinians to play larp, and to feel free to talk about any topics they want, at least we will say that listen, we have people that are thinking different. In a different way., and the sky is the limit” (Loui).

Loui hopes that through larping the community will create people thinking differently and that their community will grow bigger and in the long run even become a source of change in their society.

4.9 The larping community as a social platform

The larpers I interviewed all described how larp has become an important part of their life, some say that they hope to keep larping for the rest of their lives, others seem less certain that it will be a part of their future. However, they all identify as larpers. Even Joseph who only played two shorter larps clearly associate himself with the worldwide larping community.

They explain how they got new friends through larp, both from Palestine but also from other parts of the world.

The larping community in Palestine today consist of a tight group of people and most of them also party together, eat together and hangout on in their free time. They tell me that it is within this group they can “let the masks fall” and be more who they really are, because within the larping community the social framework is more understanding and acceptable. In this group Waseen tells me that:

“[…] you feel free around, you can joke, you can be sarcastic, you can become serious, you can become what you want, they respect you and listen to you […] But if you look at our culture (the Palestinian culture), our society, they are afraid to become vulnerable when they open up. Afraid to be crying, to be this weak person to open up, they don't want people to view them. SO they try to put this cover […] The mask… And I think larp makes you in no need off this mask” (Waseen).

The larping community in Palestine has grown step by step, from the mouth to mouth. The participants describe the close ties that are created when sharing an experience, and a game together, and how these experiences has tied their small community close together.

“I think larp, engages in getting us closer, because this girl, I do not know, and this man I do not know, but in this larp, he is my son, or she is my wife or... the person who I hate she is a lover, but we have to interact, we have to open up in this personality. And sometimes when you see
these characters around you, you admire them. And after the larp you want to see them and talk to them, because you have something to share. You have something in common, even though you just seen this person today. And it’s amazing, it’s amazing. You feel like you have known this person for fifteen years” (Waseen).

According to Waseen, larping together has the tendency of creating strong bonds between people. The nature of the larp also forces you into a new social framework where your characters emotions towards people become more important than your own. This feeling of quickly established connection is similar to what the participants in my Swedish study described, and it seem to indicate, that larp would be most useful as a tool when connecting people from different sides of the conflict.

4.10 The idea of larping together with Israelis

According to some of the participants there has been some thoughts about larping together with Israelis, but during the present context most of the people that I interviewed feel that this would be impossible because of the tense situation and the feeling that everything is political. They declare a frustration and the feeling that by participating in peace-building initiatives they would agree on the fact that there is a two-sided conflict, rather than an occupation met with resistance. One of the main problems, according to the participants, is the ignorance they are expecting from the civilian Israelis (not admitting that they have any responsibility for the ongoing occupation). The Palestinians that I interviewed believed that even civilian Israelis are responsible for the way that the Israeli government is acting. Because of this ignorance most of the larps that I talked to believe that it would be impossible to have a constructive dialogue.

However, two of the people that I interviewed clearly declared that they would be willing to and interested in playing larp together with Israelis even today, Loui dreams of arranging larp for Israelis as well as Palestinians, larp that handle the human side of the conflict. In contrast Joseph hopes that these larp will not have a political theme. Some of the other participants could imagining playing larp with Israelis in the future, even if they were not sure about how, when or where this would be possible.
4.11 Obstacles for larp in Palestine

When it comes to potential obstacles towards setting up larps in Palestine the participants mentions the occupation and the limitations on freedom of movement. This complicates traveling between cities in Palestine but also the contacts with larpers in other countries, for the Palestinians to travel elsewhere they have to go through Jordan and get expensive and sometimes complicated visas, for outsiders to travel to Palestine to participate in larp related events, they have to pass through Israel, and this can be very complicated, they might have to lie about their reason for the visit as well as about where they are going. The occupation also limits the access to suitable places for outdoor larps. What are the Palestinian administrative areas today can be described as a quilted fabric consisting of small patches of land (See the attached map in Appendix III).

However, one of the most important obstacles that all the larpers and organizers that I talk to in Ramallah mention is the conservative Palestinian culture. They believe that they have to be careful and think closely who to invite to their sometimes politically or religiously sensitive larps. This is their primary explanation of why they have so far chosen deliberately to keep the group as homogeneous as possible and only invite people they consider liberal enough.

All of the people that I interviewed had studied at the university, and my impression was that they all came from the upper middle class. Some of them are politically engaged but far from all. They are loosely organized around a few strong leaders and are right now in the middle of a crossroads, trying to choose if and in that case how to open up larp and introduce people outside their bubble. However, there seem to be a clear wish of the group to eventually make it more diverse (in age and background, etc.. Batman believes that another obstacle is the fact that a lot of the Palestinians still lack necessities as food and water security and as long as this is the case they will not prioritize participating in a hobby like larp. Khalid thinks that a lot of people would probably think of this hobby as only childish and stupid.
4.12 Rehabilitation through larp

Waseen tells me the story of the day his father got arrested during the second Intifada and how he as a child was left in charge of the family (his mother had already passed away in cancer):

“So I was responsible, and I had to think about making sure that everything is ok. And I had to act like a man. I was put in a situation... that compels me, to do more as a kid, not to think about playing, not to think about toys, not to think about all these fancy stuff. It is not fancy; it is a child’s need to play and... But no, I was thinking about, I was worried about my family might get shot, that people might get killed…” (Waseen).

Almost all of the people that I interviewed as well as other people that I talked to during my field observations had similar stories to tell. Stories like this made me realize that growing up and living your life in a country shaped by conflict and occupation, you will get emotionally affected and most likely experience some more or less traumatic situations. Several of the participants also described the need somehow to express and process these feelings of humiliation, anger and fear and they believed that larp worked well as a tool for doing so.

“After playing it I felt like everything inside me, I threw it out on the floor, all the emotion, the anger, the sadness, anything I break it down on the floor with the glasses” (Amal).

Amal describes how she enjoyed her very first larp as a cleansing experience. Within the framework of the larp, she felt that she got the chance to let out a lot of emotions that she had been carrying around for a long time (during this larp they used a meta-techniques where crushing plastic glasses symbolized the emotions felt by the characters). These stories indicate that larp is used as a tool for rehabilitation.

4.13 A normative framework of larp as a tool for conflict transformation

Even if the larpers that participated in this study clearly described a wish to use larp as a tool, the main reason for them participating in larps are still for leisure and amusement. However, several of the participants explained how they saw larps as a way of “staying sane” and a way of processing emotions. The larping group in Palestine have also used larps to discuss internal Palestinian politics, social values and norms, as well as a tool for advocacy work. In this normative framework of larps as a tool of conflict transformation, I incorporated the ways that

---

4 The second Intifada broke out in September 2000 and lasted until the beginning of 2005. After years of negotiations and the collapse of the Camp David summit in July 2000 frustrations was boiling. After a visit by Ariel Sharon, to the temple mountain in Jerusalem, known to Muslims as Haram al-Sharif, frustration boiled over into escalating violence (BBC, 2004).
larps are already used in Palestine but also outlined several more ways in which they could be used as a tool for conflict transformation.

Based on the conclusions from my bachelor thesis (Englund 2013), previous research by other scholars (within the fields of conflict transformation, peacebuilding and larping), and the research presented in this thesis, I will here list six suggestions on how larp might be used as a tool for conflict transformation in the Palestinian context.

This framework suggest that larp can be useful as a tool for (i) imagining peace; (ii) personal (norm-questioning) development; (iii) achieving positive peace within Palestine; (iv) relationship-building between Israelis and Palestinians; (v) advocacy work; (vi) rehabilitation.

(i) Larp as a tool for imagining peace

First of all, larps could be used as a tool to help Palestinians (growing up, and living in the middle of conflict and occupation) to imagine what it would be like to live in peace. According to Lederach this dream and vision is essential. If people can not imagine peace, peace is impossible (Lederach 2005: 160). One clear way of doing this would be through the construction of a larp set in a fictional future, where Palestinians and Israelis live together in peace, and by letting Palestinians as well as Israelis play this larp (not necessarily together).

(ii) Larp as a tool for personal (norm-questioning) development

Secondly larp could be used as a tool for personal development. The Palestinian larps that I interviewed told me about how they believed larp changed them as people. They believed that larp had a tendency of making people less judgmental but in the same time more confident in themselves and their abilities. The larps in Palestine seem to be more open to a norm-breaking behavior and social experiments then society at large. According to Liebmann this is exactly what is needed for them become agents of a conflict transformation towards a positive peace (Liebmann 1996: 3-4)

By being forced to play someone different from who you are in real life, they claim that their minds get more open than before and that they have gained a new understanding for people
different from themselves, the choices they make, the way they think and the way they act. None of the participants told me of any experience of playing a civilian Israeli-character and therefore it is difficult to draw any conclusions on what effects playing such a character could have on the larvers. However, based on other examples of playing extreme characters (such as for example pedophiles) and gaining a new understanding of the fact that they are indeed humans, I would still be willing to argue that if Palestinians would play civilian and nuanced Israeli characters this could be an effectual tool to de-create the enemy image of the Israelis.

(iii) Larp as a tool for achieving positive peace within Palestine

Thirdly larps could be used as a tool to change the norms of society towards a positive peace. For a positive peace to become reality in Palestine what is needed is not only an end to the ongoing occupation, but also justice and a functioning political system within Palestine itself. On the basis of my interview material and fieldwork, observations and conversations in the field, I maintain that a conflict transformation process towards a positive peace is no longer (if it ever was) only needed between Israelis and Palestinians, but also within Palestine itself. Here larp might be used as a tool to help preventing this internal conflict escalating into violence. Using larps to discuss internal issues and norms are also something that the larvers participating in my study were very positive towards doing to a greater extent. According to Levin the participant-centered nature of larps makes it a democratic experience, it encourages interaction and empowers the powerless through the change of power structures and patterns of communication (Levin 2012: 5). Building on Levin’s theory of larp as a possible tool to encourage democracy, as well as Barnes (2006), Carlsons (2004) and Kjølsrøds (2013) theories about how civil society and leisure activities can change societies at large, I would argue that larps could be one tool (used together with many others), to discuss internal problems and create a solid foundation for democracy and a positive peace. According to Lederach the conflict itself is not necessarily something negative, as long as there are other tools to deal with it then violence (Lederach 1997). Larps could be used as a preemptive tool to hinder the internal conflict to escalate into violence.

(iv) Larp as a tool for relationship-building between Israelis and Palestinians
Fourth, larps could be used as a social platform where relationships and trust could be built between Israelis and Palestinians. This element of the proposed normative framework relates to the quality of play as an arena of liminality where anything is possible, thus also good relations between Palestinians and Israelis as participants in larps.

A larp that had Israeli, as well as Palestinian participants, would clearly fit within Zelizer’s framework for relational peacebuilding activities and probably be a useful tool for dialog and trust building (Zelizer 2003).

In the current situation, where one part in the conflict is so much more powerful and occupying the other part, makes the struggle very uneven. In summer 2014, polarization, anger and hate are once again boiling over on both sides, and it would most probably not be possible to set up a larp with participants from both sides. However, my scope is normative, and I hope to have shown in the thesis that larp, indeed, would be an appropriate tool for conflict transformation (not by itself, but used as a tool among others) by he means of creating the space and time for building personal relations between Israelis and Palestinian participants. The very participation in a common subculture, or just the very act of doing something (a larp) together, would be a meaningful move towards conflict transformation.

(v) **Larp as a tool for advocacy work**

Fifth I would claim that the Palestinian larpers are already using larp as a form of non-violent resistance and as a way of gaining the world’s attention. The larp *Till death do us part* and the larping festival *Beit byout* both brought people from other countries to Palestine and gave them a chance to show what life is like under occupation. Through the larp *Halat hisar* (state of siege), they managed to bring the experience of the occupation with them to Finland, and the participants from several countries got to get a physical experience of the injustices and humiliation of living in an occupied country. One of the main goals with these projects was to create a political awareness among the participants and to gain some media attention that would support the Palestinian cause. They believe that this is their small contribution to the efforts of assembling a united global political pressure on Israel to end the occupation.

(vi) **Larp as a tool for rehabilitation.**
Within the context of the larp strong emotions are encouraged and therefore larps could be a useful tool to ventilate negative emotions. As mentioned above, several of the Palestinian larpers that I interviewed claimed that they were already using larps as a way of processing and to let their emotions out, this indicates that larps might also be a possible tool for processing traumas from the past well as post-conflict rehabilitation. However, if and how larps could be used as a tool for rehabilitation is to be researched further within the field of psychology.
5. Conclusion

This thesis answered the two questions stated in section 1.6. The first question is what larps (live action role plays) are being used for in Palestine today, and what effects it has on the people participating, their immediate surroundings, and the larger society around them. The qualitative material (based on fieldwork and interviews) was analyzed in relation to the following themes: Living under occupation, Critique against the Palestinian Authority; Viewing larp as a tool; Escaping reality and imagining living in peace; Larp as a tool for personal development; Larp as resistance; Advocacy work through larp; Changing the norms of society; The larping community as a social platform; The idea of larping together with Israelis; Obstacles for larp in Palestine; Rehabilitation through larp.

The second question referred to the elements of a normative framework (of larp as a tool for conflict transformation) that could be outlined on the basis of my findings pertaining to the first question. The framework suggested defines larp as a potential tool for (i) imagining peace; (ii) personal (norm-questioning) development; (iii) achieving positive peace within Palestine; (iv) relationship-building between Israelis and Palestinians; (v) advocacy work; (vi) rehabilitation.

In the present context and situation, I am willing to agree with Lederach (2005) that in the middle of an ongoing conflict, the most-important function of art (in this case larp) is to help people to cope with the tragedies happening around them. For example, it could offer people a way of escaping reality and through this escape stay sane and human. It could also be a tool for processing traumatic experiences and strong emotions. Taking it one step further art and larps could be used as a tool to help people to imagine a future in peace. However, I would also like to add that in the context of an occupied country larps also seem to be particularly useful as a tool for advocacy work and nonviolent resistance.

If the occupation would eventually cease to exist, the emotional and relational nature of larp would have a great potential of bringing these divided groups back together. Creating a liminal space for reconciliation and providing the possibility for growing trust and understanding

In conclusion, through my study of larpers in Palestine I believe that I have managed to develop a framework for how larp could be used as a tool for conflict transformation in the context of conflict, and in this case occupation. I thereby hope that this thesis contributes to
the understanding of conditions and contents of conflict transformation, as well as the specific role that art in general, and larp in particular, could play in that process.
6. Final thoughts

In this thesis, the focus has mainly been on what could be done on the Palestinian side and how larp could be used as a tool for conflict transformation within the Palestinian society. Here in the very end of this thesis I would like to elaborate on in what ways larps might be used as a tool for conflict transformation on the Israeli side.

During this study I made some efforts to get in contact with Israeli larppers, but due to the lack of contacts and the fact that my main focus would be on the Palestinian side, this soon proved impossible. However, I believe that it would be worthwhile to do a similar study focusing on Israeli larppers, to see in what ways these findings would overlap. My impression (from online news articles and conversations with Israelis) is that many Israelis think of Palestinians as potential terrorists that want to eliminate the Jewish community and therefore they have huge troubles of imagining and working for a future in peace. However, the few Israelis (none of them larppers) that I did encounter and talk to during my travels around Israel, also expressed an enormous curiosity about Palestinians, the Palestinian cities and the Palestinian culture. Even if the distance in kilometers between these two societies is minimal, it is obvious for anyone visiting both societies that the actual social distance is huge. I think that it could be worth looking into if larp could be used in a similar way on the Israeli side, encouraging Israelis to play Palestinian characters and stories. To my knowledge it is far easier to view a person as an enemy when you can’t understand them or their actions and as the old quote goes “you can never fully understand someone until you walked a mile in his shoes,“. Through the art of larp we now have this amazing opportunity, to actually walk a mile, live some days, and experiencing events, through the perspective of the other. I believe that this is what makes larps so special, and that is why they deserve to be further researched and empirically tried out as tools for conflict transformation and peacebuilding.
7. Bibliography

Interviews
Interview with “Yousef”, Ramallah, April 9, 2014.
Interview with “Waseen”, Ramallah, March 30, 2014
Interview with “Shams”, Ramallah, April 7 and April 10 2014.
Interview with “Rasha”, Jerusalem, April 9, 2014.
Interview with ”Rami”, Ramallah, March 13, 2014.
Interview with ”Loui”, Ramallah, March 13, 2014.
Interview with ”Leila”, Ramallah, March 31, 2014.
Interview with ”Khalid”, Ramallah, April 1, 2014.
Interview with ”Batman”, Ramallah, February 25, 2014.
Interview with ”Amal”, Ramallah, February 27, 2014.

Secondary sources


Bergh, A. (2010). *I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing: Music and Conflict Transformation*,


Levin, H. (2012). Democratic effects of role-playing in participatory art – participant reflections from the larp till death do us part in Ramallah 2012. Unpublished Bachelor, University of Gothenburg; Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion,


Misje, H., Nielsen, M., & Myhre, A. Larping in lebanon. The Cutting Edge of Nordic Larp, 93.

Önnerfors, A. (2013 (Forthcoming)). Extending the horizon: How to advance the study of freemasonry. Unpublished manuscript.


Pettersson, J. Larp for change. The Cutting Edge of Nordic Larp, 71.


**Internet**


Ludography


**The unforgettable holiday** 2012, Aleinikova, O., Franskevich, A., Smaliak, T.


**So you think you can dance** (2013). Mustafa, R. & Rabah, M. Performance: Larp.

---

**Appendix I**

**Interview guide**

Informed consent. ” Hello! So my name is Tindra, and I’m a student within the field of peace and conflict, but also a larper. Thank you for meeting me. Before we start I just want to tell you a bit more about what it is all about. The deeper purpose of my research is to evaluate if and how larp could be used as a tool for conflict transformation. But in this the focus will be on Palestinians experiences of larp. The study will result in a master thesis at Malmö University and will also be published online. Perhaps it will also be used for writing some articles to be published in a peer reviewed journal. I will not publish your real name anywhere and nicknames will be used for everyone participating. However, there is a small chance that people within the larping community, that has played larps with you, will be able to understand who you are. So knowing this, are you still willing to participate in this study? ”

What nickname would you like to have in my study? Please write it down!
**Personal**

(Male or female?)

How old are you?

What is your occupation?

Are you married? Do you have kids?

If yes... (How does that work with larping?)

Would you tell me a bit about your background?

**Larping experience**

How did you first get in contact with larping/? Why did you decide to start larping?

Could you tell a bit about your first experience of larp?

How many larps/games have you participated in?

Which one was your favorite and why?

Could you tell me about your best larping experience?

**Larping in this context**

Did you have any other hobbies before you started larping?

What does your family/friends think and say about your hobby? Do they know?

How is our everyday life effected by your Hobby? If at all?

What does larping mean to you today?

What do you believe that you have learned through larping?

How would you describe the larping community in Ramallah? / Could you tell me a bit about the larping community here? Is it a strong community?

Would you say that the occupation is effecting you as a larper? If yes, in what way?

What are your thoughts of the occupation?/ How does it affect your everyday life?
What are your thoughts of the future? How do you think life in Ramallah will look like in 5 years? How will your life look like in five years?

Is there any dream scenario that you would wish to be able to play one day?

(Do you believe that larps could be used as a tool for transforming society? How?)

Is there something that you would like to add?
## Appendix II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Originally from</th>
<th>Social status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yousef</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Software engineer</td>
<td>Jordan/Jenin (PA)</td>
<td>Not Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waseen</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Trainee lawyer</td>
<td>Ramallah (PA)</td>
<td>Not Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shams</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Journalist and Human Rights activist</td>
<td>Bedouin town close to Jericho (PA, born in Jerusalem)</td>
<td>Married, two children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasha</td>
<td>(28?)</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Nazareth (IL)</td>
<td>Not married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rami</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Small village called Jish, close to the city of Safed (IL)</td>
<td>Not married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loui</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Consultant working with soft skills training</td>
<td>Ukraine/Ramallah (PA)</td>
<td>Married, two children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leila</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Junior project manager within the field of development</td>
<td>Small village close to Hebron (PA, Born in Gaza)</td>
<td>Not married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khalid</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Hairdresser (studied psychology at the university but changed his mind)</td>
<td>Jenin (PA)</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batman</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Youth Worker</td>
<td>Small village close to Ramallah (PA)</td>
<td>Not married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amal</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Unemployed (studied hotel management)</td>
<td>Jordan/Ramallah (PA)</td>
<td>Not married</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix III