

**The Disengagement Process from an Organizational Perspective:
applying punctuated equilibrium theory, game theory and Weick's
theory of organizing to the disengagement.**

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1. Introduction

The disengagement of Israel from the Gaza strip during the summer of 2005 was an important political and social event. Many members of the Israeli society were directly involved in the process: politicians, soldiers, police members, settlers from the West Bank, settlers from the Gaza Strip and protestors on both sides of the political spectrum. Those who were not directly involved were fixated on the news, eager to know how this process will end. This was a highly tense period in which the greatest fear was from an inside battle (brothers' war) between the supporters of and opposition to the disengagement.

Contrary to most other studies presented in this book, which focus on the specifics of the disengagement, our study takes a macro (organizational and theoretical) approach to analyzing the process of the disengagement. It combines a game theoretical approach with theories of inter-organizational processes and small group research. The study aims to understand how a process that starts with two conflicting disparate parties (the army and police versus the settlers), moves forward and reaches a stage in which despite the conflict, an extreme collision is prevented and tacit-informal collaboration seems to take place. We utilize three bodies of knowledge: the first is Weick's (1979) theory of organizing, introduced in section 2. The second is Gersick's (1988, 1991) punctuated equilibrium model, introduced in section 3. Finally, in section 4, we introduce insights from multi-player repeated game theory. To our awareness, this is the first time that these three theoretical bodies of knowledge are superimposed and examined in a real-life situation. In section 5 we present the data on the events that supports our analysis: we examine front-page headlines from three of the Israeli newspapers ('Haaretz', 'Yediot Aharonot' and 'Maariv') to find evidence to differences in the perception and the behaviors of actors as they are described throughout the disengagement process.

The paper is based on a few basic assumptions. First, we assume that the different actors in the disengagement are equally important participants in the process despite the fact that they are representing two sides of the conflict. Thus, we define the boundaries of the analyses to include the major actors: the military, the police, the settlers and to some extent, the media. Second, we assume that from a theoretical perspective, the different players in the disengagement are co-dependent on each other, despite them having different goals regarding the preferred 'end result'. This co-dependency is central to our analysis and we therefore use theories that examine co-dependency: game theory and theories that pertain to team processes.

In this paper, we place a special emphasis on the central phase of the disengagement, in which change in the parties' perceptions seemed to take place. Following Gersick (1988, 1991) we define this point as a 'punctuated equilibrium'. We argue that this turning point includes a shift from a stage of deep conflict between the two parties to a phase of tacit-informal collaboration, which can be described by a change in the strategies (or 'game') played by of both sides. Moreover, we argue that at the midpoint, a joint course of action is decided on and enacted, while prior to the midpoint, there are multiple courses of action, consistent with Weick's theory. While Gersick's theory focuses on small task-groups, we argue that the model can be applied to larger and more complex social processes such as the disengagement. Yet, in extending the theory, defining the midpoint in an ambiguous, complex environment is

especially challenging: the nature and the detailed aspects of this stage are opaque, and are only revealed in retrospect.

2. Weick's model of organizing

Weick's (1979) argument is that any theory of organizations must focus on the process of organizing, in which there is an assemblage of "ongoing interdependent actions into sensible sequences ... to generate sensible outcomes" (Weick, 1979:3). Weick uses a biological evolution metaphor in describing the organizing process, in that changes in the environment lead to an enactment of organizational actors. Thus, Weick introduces a temporal dimension to organizations: organizations are actively trying to make sense of changes in the environment, and in their sense-making, they pass through three qualitatively different stages.

According to Weick, the first stage of the organizing process, variation, is characterized by a plethora of different actions while organizational actors attempt to define the segments of the environment to which they respond. At this stage, multiple actors respond differently to the environment.

The second stage, selection, occurs when organizational actors aim at reducing the ambiguity in their perceptions of the environment by applying accessible cognitive schemes to the environment for the purpose of sense making. At this stage, a consensus is reached on the parts of the environment that should be considered as relevant and a single plan of action is selected.

The last stage is of retention, in which the successful results of the sense-making stage are retained and adapted. This stage allows for enlargement of the repertoire of cognitive schemes, and at the same time limits the possibility to notice additional changes in the environment (Czarniawska, 2005).

Thus, according to Weick, the organizing process is an ongoing encounter with the ambiguity and the challenges set by the environment and is a part of the larger effort to make sense of reality. The first stage is characterized by multiple voices and courses of action, the second phase is characterized by selection of action and a shared understanding of the situation, and the third stage is characterized by concentrated action while adapting to the further environmental changes.¹

3. The Punctuated Equilibrium Model

Weick describes three qualitatively distinct stages that every organization goes through. By extension, the theory can be applied to every group that has high interdependence and needs to respond to a complex environment to reach its goals. Weick's theory, however does not incorporate a clear temporal dimension. It is uncertain at what time one stage ends and a second begins. Gersick's (1988, 1991) punctuated equilibrium theory can be used to provide this temporal dimension.

¹ The characteristics of the sense making processes are further developed in Weick's later work (Weick, 1995), but these will not be explored in this paper.

Similarly to Weick, Gersick (1988, 1991) argues that work teams do not evolve in a steady, additive, linear fashion, but rather go through qualitatively distinct stages. According to Gersick, the changes in the performance of groups are characterized by relatively long stages of stability, punctuated by short periods of turmoil and change: she suggests that the evolution of work teams through time is characterized by concentrated bursts of revolutionary changes. The punctuated equilibrium model argues that the temporal midpoint in the groups' lifecycle is when this period of dramatic change occurs. Thus, if, for example, a project team has a lifecycle of 40 days (until they need to deliver a project), the midpoint (around day 20) is where the revolutionary change and turmoil occur. Such revolutionary periods occur due to significant changes in the environment that lead to wholesale upheaval where a system's deep structure comes apart, leaving it in disarray until the period ends and choices are made around which a new structure forms (Gersick, 1991).

In groups, this midpoint is associated with a sense of a clock that calls for members' awareness that their time is limited and thus, stimulating them to compare where they are with where they need to be and to adjust their progress accordingly – as it is the “time to roll” (Gersick 1988:34). Gersick argues that the consistent midpoint timing results from the awareness of the resulting time: usually, a group member realizes the time constraints and ushers the group to action. This is where the equilibrium is punctured – at this point, group members realize that they are far from where they ought to be, which then leads to radical innovation and action. While punctuated equilibrium theory has stemmed from small group research (i.e., work-teams), it has been applied to other areas as well. The general idea appears in the study of industrial innovation (Abernathy and Utterback, 1982), in theories of adult development (Levinson, 1978), and in theories of organizational revolutions (Miller and Friesen, 1984).

We suggest that the midpoint of disengagement will be a critical point in which an innovative breakthrough in both parties' strategic patterns occurs: different patterns of behaviour and opinions will be expressed and more focused and decisive strategies will be explored by both sides. However, contrary to Gersick's small group research, in which an specific individual in the work-team recognizes that half of the project life-cycle is over and notifies the group, we suggest that in a complex situation such as the disengagement evidence for the transition may be more subtle, or even available only after-the-fact. In lieu of Weick's theory, we argue that this stage will be the selection stage, in which parties redefine the environment and select a course of action which they will pursue (and adapt to) during the last part of the disengagement.

3. Game-theoretic approaches to the disengagement

Thus, Weick provides us with three distinct stages, and Gersick points to the midpoint of the disengagement as a critical point. However, these insights are all structural – they lack the actual content of the stages: what will be the parties' initial perceptions, and after the midpoint, what will these perceptions change to. In order to answer this question, we introduce insights from game theory.

Game theory is a mathematical language for describing strategic interactions and their likely outcomes. A game is defined as a set of strategies for each of several players, with rules for the order, the information and the outcomes players have when they

choose strategies. Common to all game theoretic approaches is the idea that the players are interdependent, as is the case with the settlers and the military/police – all citizens of Israel, all Jews, and all not wishing a devastating internal war. The rules in game theory are often described using a "payoff matrix".

Traditionally, game theory describes the behavior of individual players; however, it has been extended to multiple-player (n-player) games. As such, it is often used to model intergroup decision-making, especially in times of conflict.

The typical game theoretic experiment is conducted in a laboratory, where special care is given to assure that participants have no previous (or future) contact with each other. The payoff matrix is given to the participants, and they are allowed to play in these highly artificial situations. It is no surprise therefore that criticism have been raised about the appropriateness of extending the results from these experiments to real life situations (Camerer and Fehr, 2002): in real life situations the payoff matrix is seldom given, nor is it clear: one player's view of the payoff matrix may be different to that of another. Moreover, in real life situations, players often have a history and a future together, making their selection of strategies more complex.

The most famous type of social game is called prisoner's dilemma (PD). It is a non-zero-sum game in which two players can "cooperate" with or "defect" (i.e. betray) the other player. In this game, each individual player ("prisoner") is only concerned with maximizing his/her own payoff, without any concern for the other player's payoff. In the classic form of this game, cooperating is strictly dominated by defecting: no matter what the other player does, one player will always gain a greater payoff by playing *defect*. However, when both players *defect*, their individual rewards are smaller than if they would both *cooperate*, hence the dilemma.

A plethora of research has been conducted on PD in many disciplines (for a review, see Camerer and Fehr, 2002). In a recent review and critique of the game, Insko and Shopler (1987) suggest that two other games, both extensions of PD, may be more appropriate for real-life situations. The first game is called the "game of chicken" and the second is called the "assurance game" (or the "stag-hunt").

3.1 Game of Chicken ("Hawk-dove" game).

The game of chicken is based on a metaphor taken from the film "Rebel without a Cause". Two teenagers are driving their cars head-on towards each other at high speeds. As the cars approach, each driver has two options: to swerve, or not. If one driver swerves, that driver is the chicken and the other wins. If both swerve, then both are chicken, and if neither swerves, then a catastrophic collision takes place. By analogy to the PD, we call swerving *cooperation* and not swerving *defection*, but whereas in PD mutual defection leads to inferior outcomes, in Chicken mutual defection leads to outcomes that are not only inferior, but devastating. Like PD, solo defection yields the defector the best possible outcome, and mutual cooperation is better than mutual defection. In contrast to the PD, however, in Chicken mutual defection is *worse* than solo cooperation. Consequently, unlike the PD, which models individual versus collective concerns, Chicken is better suited to situations of bluff and blackmail (Nicolis et al., 1983). It has been applied to Kennedy and Khrushchev's behavior during the Cuban Missile Crisis, to the behaviors of parties at the California

energy crisis (California's Giant Game of Chicken, 2001), NATO (Hirsh, 1999), the Knight-Ridder and Gannett situation in Detroit (Zuckerman, 1988), and the investment market (Bornstein et al. 1997).²

The best individual strategy in a Chicken is to bluff – to fake one's power and determination, to make false threats, and to signal to the other party that one is absolutely determined to defect (i.e., to play hard and drive through). Moreover, in the game of chicken each side maximizes their efforts to guess the other side's behavior – speculations abound: both players want to do the opposite of whatever the other is going to do. For example, if the settlers believe the military is going to "cave in", it is in their best interest to amass more resistance and to "drive on". Similarly, if the military believes the settlers will eventually swerve (cooperate), it is in their best interest to amass more force.

Research suggests that in a team (as opposed to individual) game of chicken, different processes operate. In team games, the individual interests of team members may not (and usually do not) coincide with the interest of the team (Bornstein, 1992). As a result, intragroup conflict may emerge in tandem with intergroup conflict. The tension between individual- and team-interests can be conceptualized as a public goods problem: it is in the interest of the team to amass the most power it can (thus signaling to the other team that they are going to defect), and yet it is in the best interests of individual players to free-ride (i.e., not be heavily invested in the team effort, in case the disastrous collision occurs). Research in social psychology suggests that in such instances in which two groups are in conflict, and individual and team interests do not coincide are ripe for negative stereotype formation of the outgroup (the "other"), the emergence of strong leadership in the ingroup, and the ostracizing of free-riders will be ostracized (Marques, 1990). As a result of these processes, intergroup communication in Chicken is pointless and does not persuade group members of both teams to cooperate with each other (Bornstein & Gilula, 1997, p. 338): these processes make the conflict between groups escalate and "prevent either group from yielding, leading to an outcome disastrous to both groups".

Thus, we propose that when a social game is considered by players to be a game of chicken: (1) each side will attempt to persuade the other side of their determination and intent to continue fighting; (2) intergroup communication will be useless; (3) ingroup/outgroup biases will operate, causing symptoms such as outgroup (negative)

² The game is also called the "*Hawk-Dove*" game in biological game theory. In this interpretation two players contesting an indivisible resource choose between two strategies, one more escalated than the other. They can use threat displays (play Dove), or physically attack each other (play Hawk). If both players choose the hawk strategy, they fight and injure each other. If only one player chooses hawk, then this player defeats the dove player. If both players play dove, there is a tie in profit, but the profit is lower than the profit of a hawk defeating a dove. In this biological setting, playing the dove or hawk strategy is analogous to cooperating or defecting respectively.

stereotyping and outgroup homogeneity; (4) free-riders from both groups will be ostracized; and (5) a prototypical, strong leadership will emerge within each group.

3.2 The assurance game

Contrary to the game of chicken, the assurance game³ represents a situation in which the payoff matrix is such that it is best for both parties to cooperate with each other; everything is fine as long as the other player does not defect. Cooperation against defection, however, remains far inferior to defection against either cooperation or defection. The Assurance game thus represents a game of PD which highlights the conflict that may exist between what is best for society as a whole and the “rational” pursuit of individual needs. In fact, the main difference between Chicken and Assurance is what happens in the case of a tie – a situation in which both players defect. In Chicken, if both players defect (continue driving) they both lose. In assurance, if both defect, they both win something, but it is far less than what they would have had if they cooperated. In the case of the disengagement, if the settlers fear the military will compete (hunt a hare) they should defect (also hunt a hare, continue using forceful methods) otherwise they have invested their efforts in vain and get nothing in return. However, if both groups decide to cooperate (hunt a stag, resolve the issue peacefully), they both win more than if each of them competed with each other.

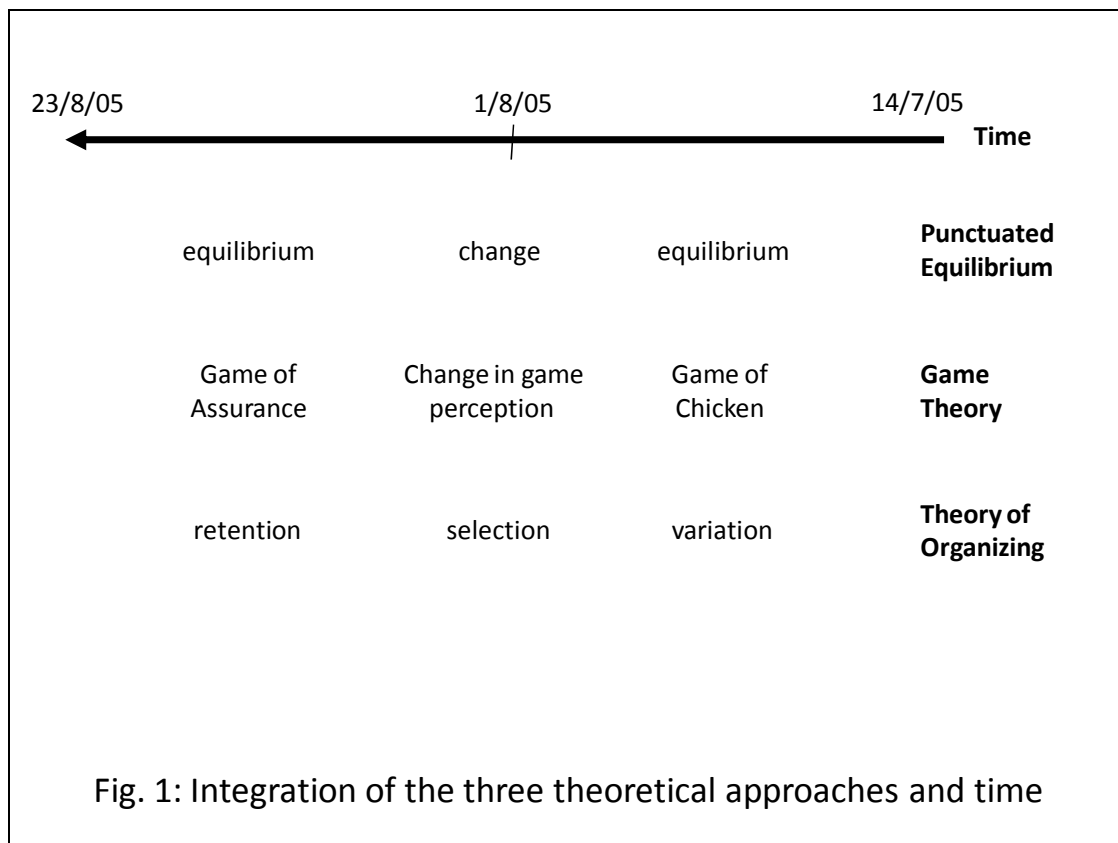
When examining team (as opposed to individual) games of assurance, Bornstein and Gilula (1997) found that ingroup communication increased individual contribution to the general goal. They interpret their results to suggest that the main motivation driving both groups to amass power is fear of the other. Bornstein and Gilula found, however, that differently to Chicken, between-group communication eased the tensions between groups and made a peaceful resolution possible – as communication increased, so did the amount of trust the groups had in each other. As a result, in a game of assurance, we expect communications between groups to be associated with an alleviation of the fear of the other group, which will eventually lead to a higher likelihood of a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Bornstein and Gilula conclude their paper by suggesting that social games are only theoretical models, and in real life it is rare that a clear payoff matrix is given to respondents, or that the game is conducted on a single issue. More importantly, we suggest that in real-life situations the game is defined primarily by the participants of the game (or by the media), and that a similar social situation may be defined as one game initially, and then re-defined as a different game, leading to different behavioral outcomes at a later stage. Specifically, the element that changes the game from Chicken to Assurance is the perception of what happens in the case that both parties continue to compete (and therefore tie). In Chicken, both parties encounter a catastrophic fate. In Assurance, they both win something. We argue that this redefinition of what happens in the case of a tie is what happened in the disengagement. A game that started as Chicken was transformed (possibly through intense intergroup communication) to a game of Assurance, leading to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, in which both sides win.

³The game of assurance is more often known as "stag hunt" or as the trust dilemma game, (Grim *et al.* 1999). We use these terms interchangeably.

4. The main argument:

Our main argument is presented in Figure 1. If the theories we presented are correct and given the time period we investigate, we should expect a shift in perceptions, consistent with a punctuated equilibrium at the mid point of the process. Thus, the process can be characterized by three separate periods, with relative equilibria at time points one and three, and a dramatic change in time point two (the midpoint in terms of time). We argue that the first period can be characterized as a variation period, in which multiple directions and voices are heard on both sides. Moreover, we suggest that this period is construed (at least by the media) as a "game of chicken" in which both parties attempt to amass power to show that they are committed to their cause, even if this leads to disastrous outcomes. The second time point, we argue, is the punctuated equilibrium. This brief period is characterized by selection of the dominant strategy on both sides, possibly because they realize that the "game of chicken" is no longer a suitable construction of reality and that "time is ticking". We suggest that the identification of this transition period in a complex social/organizational context such as the disengagement is only evidenced post-hoc. Finally, in the third time point, retention, the selected strategy is played out. As part of this process, the game the parties play can be construed as a game of assurance.



5. Method

5.1. Period covered

The study is based on the period that starts on 14th of July 2005 (the closing of the Gaza strip for Israelis) and ends on the 23rd of August, 2005 (the end of the disengagement when Gush Katif was cleared from all Jewish settlers). 41 days, during which the front pages of the Israeli newspapers reviewed and discussed almost solely news that related to the disengagement.

5.2 Data

We use reviews of events, statements, declarations and decisions as described in 'Haaretz' and 'Yediot Aharonot' daily newspapers throughout the events' period. We also reviewed all editorial sections and commentaries.⁴

The use of two newspapers exerts an obvious bias. First, newspapers do not always quote in exact words the statements or declarations made by the different actors. Second, newspapers take different stands in their perception of political events. To reduce this bias, we chose two different daily newspapers: 'Haaretz' is perceived as a left wing newspaper, while 'Yediot Aharonot' reflects opinions that are perceived to more 'neutral' politically. Third, newspapers are often important outlets of the political agendas of political actors. In this respect, the use of newspapers' data rather than interviews or observations provides social scientists with the construction (rather than the reflection) of reality. This is exactly what our study aims to depict. We aim to understand the 'construction of reality' in terms of the statements and actions taken by central actors and groups, as well as the 'construction or reality' suggested by commentators who provide a wider perspective and contextualize the events in larger frames. Thus, our decision to limit our insights to these sources is based on the assumption that this is the kind of data needed for studying the changes in the organizing process and in the social games played by actors.

Within each newspaper, we focus on two sources: headlines and editorials or commentaries. When we concentrate on headlines we preferred, when possible, to use direct quotes from the main actors as presented by both newspapers.

The editorial and commentaries are important, especially in analyzing large scale changes in events, processes and political arguments. They also give a retroactive account of events that are not depicted in "real time", because of the existence of an unobserved 'back stage' (Goffman, 1959). In his seminal work, Goffman divided the social establishments into what he terms "front" and "back" regions. The front is the meeting place of hosts and guests or customers and service persons, and the back is the place where members of the home team retire between performances to relax and to prepare. Examples of back regions are kitchens, boiler rooms, and executive

⁴ We note that we are not attempting a complete mapping of the various viewpoints of the key players in the disengagement. We are, instead, interested in examining how the media (and through it, key players) depict the events and constructs social reality. A more complete examination of the media coverage of the disengagement is presented elsewhere in this volume.

washrooms, and examples of front regions are reception offices, parlors, and the like (MacCannell, 1973). Although architectural arrangements are mobilized to support this division, it is primarily a social one, based on the type of social performance that is staged in a place, and on the social roles found there. In Goffman's own words: "Given a particular performance as the point of reference, we can distinguish three crucial roles on the basis of function: those who perform; those performed to; and outsiders who neither perform in the show nor observe it. . . . These three crucial roles mentioned could be described on the basis of the regions to which the role-player has access: performers appear in the front and back regions; the audience appears only in the front region; and the outsiders are excluded from both regions" (1959, pp. 144-45).

Following Goffman's logic, we can characterize the disengagement as such an event in which there were front stage events – as they were performed to the public, but there were also important back stage events that were at the time of occurrence known only to the involved parties and included secretive agreements that were not known to the public while they were being negotiated. Obviously, we must assume that even now, a year after the completion of the disengagement not all negotiations and agreements are known and published and thus, the picture we portrait can only be partial. We use later commentaries that reflect back on the disengagement to examine what happened backstage. Specifically, we argue that if Gersick's punctuated equilibrium model can be applied to the disengagement, the midpoint of the process would be one in which crucial activities happen backstage, leading to selection of a new strategy and to a change in the social game that is played.

6. Evidence

6.1 First period

On the 14-7 the Gaza strip was closed to the entry of Israelis. Against this action: "*The Yesha leadership: thousands will be marching to the Gush*" (Haaretz, 14/7). This ends a period of many activities of both sides in which no agreement seemed to be reached: "*despite the police ban, the settlers will start a mass march to Gush Katif*"; "*the army fears violent confrontations*" (Haaretz, 18/7). The government has established the Nitzanim program, in which a quiet evacuation will be rewarded by new settlements within Israel. There is pressure on the settlers to agree to this plan, but only a few settlers participate. At the same time, extreme right wing settlers move into a deserted hotel in Neve Dekalim and the army fears that the place will become a symbol for those disagreeing with the disengagement. By the 3/6 only half of the farmers in the Gaza Strip have reached an evacuation agreement.⁵ From Prime Minister Sharon's office we learn that the progress in the execution of the disengagement is not as planned. The army declares on taking a hard stand against the settlers, and especially those who will act against army soldiers: "*the political right decided: instead of a march, infiltration into the Gush. The army: 'they just want to exhaust us'*" (Haaretz 21/7).

⁵ The primary source of income for many of the settlers was farming. The disengagement meant that they were to give up their primary source of livelihood for a negotiated alternative.

Two large walking demonstrations of settlers took place during the framed period. The first one started on the 18th of July and the second on the 1st of August. The first demonstration was massive in numbers (estimated at thousands), while army and police forces of 20,000 were sent to prevent them from entering the Gaza Strip. The police eventually gave up and allowed the demonstrators to stay in Kfar Maimon for the night. Later, the demonstrator refused to leave the Kfar and the army argued that the demonstrators were planning to exhaust them. We are clearly in a game of Chicken – both parties attempt to show their power whilst amassing support for their cause.

In term of Weick's variation, we can see that there is a lot of activity by all sides of the conflict, and there is no clear direction as to how the disengagement will further develop. Both settlers and Military/Police are giving mixed messages. Some settlers opt for a peaceful evacuation, others suggest mass marches that would add more settlers to the settler task force, others yet suggest individual infiltration and the extremists suggest a hold-up. On the other side, the army/police's statements and actions range from determined actions, efforts to negotiate an agreement or to accommodate the settlers' demands.

Despite this variation, the essence of this stage, as we have argued above, is one of "Game of Chicken": The perception is one of "us versus them" – either the military wins or the settlers win, and there is a feeling of imminent doom. Internal leaders are created, symbolic actions are performed (e.g., the occupation of the hotel in Neve Dkalim), and negative stereotypes of "the other" are formed: *"For me, Sharon was the son of God, now he is the son of the Devil"* (Yediot Acharonot, 3/8). The outcome of these processes is that on both sides the tension from the unknown outcomes is building up.

7.2 Midpoint – punctuated equilibrium

The period we are covering involves 41 days. Therefore, according to Gersick's punctuated equilibrium model, the critical period in which strategies change should be around the midpoint – day 20, August 1-2. Yet as we have argued in the introduction, in a complex social situation such as the disengagement, it is likely that the shift in perceptions will occur backstage, and will only become public knowledge in retrospect.

The second mass settler demonstration started on August 1st – close to the midpoint of the process. The plan was to walk from Sderot, Netivot and Ofakim – the three large cities in the area and to penetrate the metal fence set by the army. The army claimed on August 1st that they anticipate an extreme conflictual event on that day and that hundreds of people will try to cut the fence. The negotiations that took place that day ended with no results, and there was a lack of agreement as to the number of demonstrators that will be in the main city – Sderot. We are still deep in the "game of chicken".

However, the front page of Haaretz on August 2nd describes the agreement that was reached by the police and the leaders of the settlers regarding the event in Sderot, but they lacked agreement regarding the meaning of the agreement – the settlers' leaders argued that there is no limit on the number of demonstrators while the police argued

that the demonstration is limited to only a few thousands and that it will take place in the local stadium and then, the demonstrators will stay for the night in Ofakim. Both sides agreed that the demonstrators will return to their homes on Friday. The Yesha leadership were also quoted saying that they will negotiate again the continuation of the demonstration from Ofakim and that their "*goal is to enter Gush Katif but not at the price of violence*" (emphasis of authors). Compared to the demonstration on August 1st and 18th July, a new voice is heard – one that provides both sides with an opportunity to win something though perhaps not what they initially wanted or expected. The situation has changed from a game of Chicken to a game of Assurance. It is also noteworthy that this change has occurred as a byproduct of intense negotiations – backstage processes that the public is unaware of.

Another piece in the front page argues that this demonstration is probably the last stage of the struggle that takes place outside of the Gaza Strip, yet, at this stage, the goal definition of the opponents of the disengagement is not unified. This is a result of different evaluations of the “possible and impossible”: while many of the Yesha leadership doubt the possibility of entirely preventing the disengagement (while not admitting this publicly), they want to have this last event imprinted in the memory of the public as an event that should never re-occur. In other words, they prefer a resolution to the conflict in which they receive something (game of assurance), instead of the catastrophic collision that leaves them and the other side with nothing (game of chicken). Despite this, the more militant opponents to the disengagement, including Feiglin, called their members not to comply with the activities planned by the Yesha leadership. Eldad, a parliament member of the Ihud Leumi party, called his people to arrive independently to Gush Katif and not take part in the formal planned demonstration.

This stage seems to be characterized by a different form of variation in which multiple voices have equal weight. "Backstage" information, which is provided only in retrospect (see Section 7.4) informs us that this has been the point at which informal collaborative meetings took place between representatives from the settlers and the armed forces. These encounters were informal in the sense that the information was kept secret from the public and the media. We suggest that in this phase both sides collaborate since they realize that they ought to reach an acceptable agreement to ending the conflictual process. We suggest that they realize that the "game of chicken" that they are playing can be equally devastating to both sides, and by changing the strategy into a "game of assurance" they can both gain something, albeit not what they initially wanted.

7.3 Final period – the disengagement

According to Weick, the third period is expected to be characterized by retention of the selected outcome, a shift in the nature of the game chosen by the sides, and the beginning of the disclosure of the ‘back stage’ events (as characterized by Goffman) that took place at the midpoint. While this stage is still characterized by continuous resistance, it lacks the energy of the initial stage. A resolution in which both sides continue to "play their role" leading to no loss-of-face on either side is achieved, and a peaceful resolution of the conflict follows.

The final stage starts on the 14-08-05. Starting midnight, the Gaza Strip is closed down to the public. The police start blocking the roads, and the settlers claim that they will block the settlements from entry. From this stage on, anyone who remained in the Gaza Strip was announced illegal (Maariv, 23/8 coverage of the whole period). An army representative claims that the next 72 hours will determine the end of the struggle. The settlers do not sound ready to give up on their struggle. The head of the settlers' struggle, Rafi Seri was quoted "The army builds on our departure in the next two days....we will not collaborate with this – will not leave and make them easy lives..." (Haaretz, 14/8).

The 15th is the first day of the disengagement: all the settlers in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank receive a personal 'evacuation letter' from the Army. The opinion section of Haaretz claims that "*the game is over...beyond the next 48 hours there will be no waste of time in power struggle and secret negotiations.*

On the 16th about half of the settlers are planning a voluntary evacuation, and Zeev Shif, a commentator for Haaretz, claims that the critical point in which the struggle was re-defined, has been reached: "*There is no need to define the evacuation of the settlements as another war. The other side is not an enemy that needs to be confronted, hurt, taken in prison or take revenge of. These are Israelis that we need to keep living with, but under different terms and other circumstances. It is a struggle that needs to be clearly ruled, with no compromise but clear cut decision, even if the army will have to use force*".

The period between the 17th and the 23rd is characterized by a collapse of the resistance of the settlers and a gradual evacuation of the Gaza Strip. The army and the police move from one settlement to another and gradually evacuate the remaining settlers. Moderate and determined force was used and no significant events are evident. Those who did not evacuate voluntarily are carried by multiple policeman and army officers. They all act peacefully and sensitively, and are lead to the busses awaiting them while other policeman and soldiers pack their belongings and ship them to the places in which they were resettled.

A final statement by Orit Shohat on August 19th was: "*There are those who say that from the very beginning it was all a well staged play. Each one of the sides knew its role and played it. "The settlers knew that the Gush will be evacuated but allowed their youth to express their energies and to prevent total embarrassment of their leadership"* (Haaretz, 19-8-05). The 'front stage' behavior reflected the required elements of the actors as established in the 'back stage', while the outcomes were well rehearsed by the actors on both sides.

7.4 After the fact – new and insightful information on the disengagement

Obviously, 'real time' newspaper accounts are not providing us with all the information. Some information becomes apparent only after the fact when central actors or journalists disclose additional information on what took place during the events. This is especially true for the midpoint, the point at which the equilibrium is punctuated and a shift to a new game pursues.

On the 8th of September we learn from Haaretz that on the 8th of August – right after the second demonstration in Sderot, there was a secretive meeting between Rabbi Tal in Neve Dkaim and the minister of defense. During this meeting the Rabbi promised a peaceful and quite evacuation while the minister of defense, Mofaz guaranteed aid in transportation, an infrastructure for an alternative Yeshiva in Yad Binyamin and compensation to families even if they will not evacuate by the final data announced by the government. While Rabbi Tal's reputation is of an uncompromising, post-Zionist extremist, he still chose to act pragmatically, realizing that continuing the game of chicken may not be as valuable as switching to a game of assurance.

On the 26th of August, after the disengagement ended, Nachum Barnea, one of the sharpest journalists of Yediot Acharonot claims: *“Now, after the struggle has ended, it is agreed by all that it was finished during Kfar Maimon. Thousands of opponents of the disengagement were impressive in their numbers and in their dedication to their goal.”* *“We thought that you will go to the government and tell them, the army can not conduct its task against such opposition”* said to the Chief of Staff to one of the Yesha leadership. *“To their surprise, they confronted massive and equally dedicated forces. In Kfar Maimon they realized that they will not be able to win the struggle with the army.”* Thus, in the kfar Maimon demonstration the first "reality test" occurred. It forced both sides of the conflict to reassess their position: Both settlers and military did not anticipate such a large, dedicated, force. The realization that the "clock is ticking" (Gersick, 1991) has started to dawn on both sides, as did the realization that a game of chicken may have dire consequences to both sides. The phase of variation and the strategy of chicken had to give way to something new. The "backstage" negotiations between parties (held on August 1st and again on August 8th) assisted in the change of minds (or, as we argue, a change in the organization and in the game played by both parties) that happened between Kfar Maimon and Sderot. The equilibrium was punctuated, and a (potentially tragic) game of chicken was transformed into a (much more conducive) game of assurance.

8. Conclusions

It is rarely the case that historical events provide evidence that take the form of a 'quasi-experimental design' in which there is no control group, but there is rich information on the process, before and after, and there is a critical shift in the process. As social scientists, we face the challenge of trying to exert theoretical insights from historical development and apply these to our understanding of organizing systems.

In the current paper we examined three theoretical bodies of knowledge, and implemented their prediction on such a real-life situation - the disengagement. Each of these bodies of knowledge has its strengths; we believe that by superimposing them we have arrived at a more complete description of evolving social processes, one that includes not only a description of the timeframe in which the process occurs, but also highlights when change is likely to occur, and suggests how the change will be enacted. As part of this effort, we have provided empirical, 'real-life' support to all three theories.

To our knowledge, this paper is the first time these theories are superimposed on one another and applied to large-scale, real-life, complex social situations. It is encouraging to see that overall all theories received support. Especially striking was

the strong corroboration for Gersick's theory – the exact midpoint of the process is where the strong shift in perceptions and actions occurred.

Weick's theory of organizing received mixed support: While overall the disengagement progressed through three qualitatively distinct stages – variation, selection and retention, there is some mixing of stages: even after the selection of a strategy (which we argue was the selection of "game of assurance" in which everyone can win something), there are still pockets of resistance that continue playing the "game of chicken". These mixed strategies probably reflect the fact that the settlers did not act as one unified organization, but were in deep disagreement regarding the most effective strategy for their struggle. Clearly, real-life is more complex than theoretical models, and the importance of clearly communicating changes in strategy to all participants is essential in progressing through Weick's stages.

The current case study contradicts some of the findings that relate to team-level chicken and assurance games. Contrary to Bornstein and Gilula (1997), we found that intergroup communication did in fact alleviate the tensions, and resulted in a transition to a different social game. We propose that the difference between our finding and Bornstein and Gilula's is related to the fact that we are dealing with real-life situations, whereby their study was constructed in a laboratory setting in which participants only interacted during the experimental session. One of the important insights of this 'real life' study is that the need to live together in the same country and hold a continuous positive relationship may be important in altering perceptions of the participating parties may be important in altering perceptions of the participating parties: In the current context, the need to live together as citizens in the same nation may have had a significant impact on the midpoint turn of practices and the relatively peaceful end of the process.

By taking a macro level longitudinal follow-up on the disengagement while focusing on the crucial periods of the process, we could highlight the unique features in the structure of the disengagement process. Our theoretical synergy of game theory, the group-process theory of punctuated equilibrium and the theory of Weick of the process of organizing was shown to provide the needed added value for our arguments and examination of evidences.

We argue that theories of complex organizing should further aim at exploring the emerging structure in field event such as the case chosen here. Such events can offer researchers a nexus of multi-theoretical perspectives and a deeper understanding of natural situations of conflict, adjustment and conflict resolution.

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