The Influence of the Threatening Transitional Context on Israeli Jews’ Reactions to Al Aqsa Intifada

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Analysis of the relations between Israeli Jews and Palestinians in the context of the Al Aqsa Intifada highlights a sad paradox. Even at the climax of the present violent confrontations, in 2002, the majority of people in both societies were ready for far-reaching compromises to peacefully resolve their conflict. A national survey in November 2002 indicated that about 70% of both Palestinians and Israelis were ready to undertake a settlement involving the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, if the violence would cease (Kull, Ramsay, Warf, & Wolford, 2002). At the same time, however, a majority on both sides carried extremely negative stereotypes of the rival and revealed fear and a deep mistrust, all of which prevented any possible negotiation and resolution. In addition, the majority in both societies supported violent acts against the rival, which only deepen mutual delegitimization and mistrust (Kull et al., 2002). These paradoxical views continue to be dominant in later years, until 2007.

This chapter is an attempt to explain this sad paradox from the point of view of only one society, namely, Israeli Jewish society. The first part of the paradox, Israeli Jews’ readiness to make substantial compromises, was well analyzed and explained in Oren’s (2005) wide-scope study. She describes the changes that Israeli Jewish society went through after 1967 in terms of ethos of conflict, including the readiness to withdraw from the territories occupied in the 1967 war and to approve of the establishment of a Palestinian state as part of
The Conception of Transitional Context

Concepts

Transitional context consists of the physical, social, political, economic, military, and psychological conditions, temporary in their nature, that make up the environment in which individuals and collectives function. These conditions may be either manmade (e.g., conflicts, revolutions, war, or peace) or natural phenomena (e.g., storms, earthquakes); they may also develop as a result of a combination of both types of factors (e.g., recession, famine). Our conceptualization of transitional context emphasizes the fact that social contexts are dynamic and constantly changing, even when the broad structural characteristics of a society and its environment remain relatively stable over long periods of time, altering slowly at an almost unnoticeable pace. A transitional context consists of observable and well-defined societal conditions that emerge as a result of major events and major information that influence the behavior and functioning of the individuals and collectives who perceive and cognize them.

A major societal event is defined as an event of great importance occurring in a society; such an event is experienced either directly (through participation) or indirectly (through watching, hearing, or reading about it) by society members, has wide resonance, has relevance to the well-being of society members and of society as a whole, involves society members, occupies a central position in public discourse and the public agenda, and implies information that forces society members to reconsider, and often change, their held psychological repertoire (Oren, 2005). Instances of major events are wars, revolutions, stock market crashes, earthquakes, famines, or peace agreements. Major events create new conditions that require psychological adaptation, cognitive reframing, attitudinal-emotional change, and behavioral adjustments, and as such they often have a profound effect on the thinking, feeling, and behaving of society members and on the functioning of the society as a whole (see also Birkland, 1997; Deutsch & Merritt, 1965; Sears, 2002, for other approaches to major events).

Another important factor that may create a transitional context and then have consequences for societal functioning is major societal information. This term refers to information supplied by an epistemic authority (i.e., a source that exerts determinative influence on the formation of an individual's knowledge; see Kruglanski et al., 2005) about a matter of great relevance and great importance to society members and society as a whole. It, too, resonates widely, involves society members, occupies a central position in public discourse and the public agenda, and forces society members to reconsider and change their psychological repertoire. Major information does not create observable changes in environmental conditions and therefore does not provide experiential participation, but affects the psychological conditions of the society by influencing society members' thoughts and feelings about their reality, which may eventually lead to changes in their behavioral intentions and courses of actions. For example, information supplied by American society's epistemic authorities — the president, government officials, and intelligence agencies — to the effect that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction in violation of UN resolutions and supports the terrorist activities of organizations such as Al-Qaeda, would be considered major information. This information was brought to the U.S. public shortly after the events of September 11, 2001, and served to mobilize American society toward a military attack on Iraq. It did not change the physical conditions in which most Americans live, but it has altered psychological conditions by evoking feelings of threat, fear, and anger. It is clear that subsequently many Americans began to support a war against Iraq — something they might not have done were it not for the major information they had received.

It should be noted that a transitional context can be formed either merely on the basis of major information, or only in response to a major event, or as a combined effect of major events and major information occurring simultaneously or following each other. For example, a leader, after first providing major information, may then initiate a major event. President Bush provided major information about
weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and then initiated war against this state. In addition, major events, especially those that are manmade or initiated (e.g., the bombing of Cambodia in 1970 or Al Qaeda’s terror attack on the US on September 11, 2001), may be accompanied by major information, provided to shed light on the events. Given the nature of these two defining components, transitional context is temporary in comparison to other types of more stable contexts.

Thus, our approach sees leaders, together with groups and societies, as active agents in shaping and altering the conditions in which they function, and not just as passive “recipients” who react to given environmental and/or psychological conditions. Leaders, with the support of society members, are the ones who most often decide to go to war, change a government by revolution, implement radical economical plans, sign peace treaties, or provide significant information about threats and the like. Such actions may lead to the formation of a transitional context, which may significantly affect the behavior of individual society members and the functioning of a society as a whole.

The present conception considers psychological conditions as part of the context. They emerge together with other conditions (physical, political, etc.) as a result of major events and information and become inseparable from the features of the environment. Specifically, major events and major information provide immediate signals and cues, and when these are perceived and cognized by individuals and collectives, they create the psychological conditions that affect society members. Examples of the psychological conditions that may be formed as a function of transitional context are threat, danger, stress, uncertainty, alienation, hardship, tranquility, harmony, etc. These psychological conditions in turn trigger perceptions, thoughts, ideas, and emotions, which lead to various lines of behaviors.

Propositions

We would now like to suggest three propositions regarding the effects of transitional context on collective behavior. First, transitional contexts vary in their intensity; this intensity is determined by the extent to which the major events and/or information touch and involve the society members. An intense context greatly concerns and involves almost all society members. Intense transitional contexts lead to extreme reactions, on the part of both individuals and collectives and on the cognitive, affective, emotional, and behavioral levels. They lead to change of thoughts, strong affect and emotions, and instigate courses of action. We suggest that the more intensive the transitional context, the more extensive and unidirectional its influence on individual and societal behavior is likely to be (see, e.g., Hobfoll & deVries, 1995; Shalev, Yehuda, & McFarlane, 2000).

Second, transitional contexts may have either a negative or positive meaning for society members and we suggest that transitional contexts that include negative psychological conditions are more intense than transitional contexts that include positive psychological conditions. This assumption is based on considerable evidence in psychology to the effect that negative events and information tend to be more closely attended and better remembered, and that they strongly impact evaluation, judgment, and action tendencies (see reviews by Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Kanouse & Hanson, 1971; Lau, 1982; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990; and studies by Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo, 1998; Wagenaar & Groeneweg, 1990). This negativity bias is an inherent characteristic of the negative motivational system, which operates automatically at the evaluative-categorization stage. It is also structured to respond more intensely than the positive motivational system to comparable levels of motivational activation. This tendency reflects adaptive behavior since negative information, especially related to threats, may require immediate adaptive reactions to the new situation.

Finally, we suggest that the influence of the transitional context also depends on the commonly held shared narratives of society members regarding their past and present, mainly shared societal beliefs of collective memories and ethos (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006; Connerton, 1989; Irwin-Zaaroka, 1994). This shared knowledge provides the basis for the perception and interpretation of the experiences and information coming from the major events and information. Thus, for example, memories of collective traumas greatly influence the understanding of present threatening events (Bar-Tal, 2007a; Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003; Volkan, 1997).

The above implies that the more intensive and negative the conditions, the more extensive, profound, and unidirectional their influence will tend to be on people. This indicates that a transitional context that involves extremely negative conditions may well powerfully affect the psychological repertoire of both individuals and collectives and lead to predictable behaviors. Negative psychological conditions often come about as a result of direct danger to the lives of society members, threats to the fulfillment of their basic needs, or to society’s very existence, its functioning, or its wellbeing and prosperity. In turn, they manifest themselves in negative experiences such as insecurity, fear, anger, or frustration. There is evidence
suggesting that a transitional context that is governed by negative psychological conditions, such as threat and danger, will result in reactions that are characterized by relatively little variation, because human beings are adaptively programmed to act in quite a specific way in such situations (see, e.g., Doty, Peterson, & Winter, 1991; Gordon & Arian, 2001; Hobfoll, 1998; Sales, 1973). Moreover, we suggest that this tendency will be strengthened, if a society carries central collective memories associated with trauma and threat.

Using the above analysis, we will now try to explain the views, feelings, and behaviors of the majority of the Israeli Jews since summer 2000 and during the Al Aqṣā Intifāda. We propose that a powerful transitional context for Israeli society unfolded in this period of time. We believe that observation and analysis of Israeli society’s behavior during this episode provides a useful illustration of how transitional context affects the behavior of collectives.

### Israeli Jewish Society in a Transitional Context

#### Background

The transitional context of Israeli Jewish society after fall 2000 consisted of major events and major information, together with the psychological conditions they created. This context involved a great deal of violence, which was perceived as highly threatening to the lives of Israeli citizens and to society as a whole.

In order to analyze this specific transitional context and its effects, we relied on data collected in several studies of Israeli society conducted in the relevant period of time, data from public opinion surveys published in the media, books analyzing this period, and media reports and commentaries.

The intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict has a history spanning about 100 years (Bar-Tal, 1998). It developed over the territory that two national movements claimed as their homeland: Palestinian nationalism and Zionism clashed recurrently over the right of self-determination, statehood, and justice (see Gerer, 1991; Morris, 2001; Tessler, 1994, for details). Only in 1993 came the historic breakthrough, when Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signed an agreement in which the PLO recognized the right of Israel to exist in peace and security and Israel recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people in peace negotiations (Hirschfeld, 2000).

Seven years later, in summer 2000, the two parties eventually convened to try to complete the final agreement and resolve all the outstanding issues peacefully. Many of the events and processes that occurred during the 7-year period did not facilitate the evolution of a peaceful climate of mutual trust, but it is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyze the nature of these developments.

We begin our analysis by describing the major events and information of summer and fall 2000 to show how their combination created a powerful transitional context. The period of time to be analyzed was marked by two major events in Israeli society: the Camp David conference with its unsuccessful ending, and the outbreak of violence in September 2000 (see Bar-Siman-Tov, 2007). Furthermore, during this time Israeli citizens were repeatedly provided with major information regarding these major events, by Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, their associates, and the army commanders, who were acting as societal epistemic authorities in this context. This information served as a frame for Israeli citizens’ interpretation of the events.

#### Major events and major sets of information

The first major event took place between July 11 and 24, 2000, when top-level delegations of Israelis and Palestinians met in Camp David, USA, with the participation of a U.S. team led by President Bill Clinton, to try to reach a final agreement ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the two sides did not succeed in reaching an agreement and the peace summit failed.

The first major information about this event was provided by Prime Minister Barak prior to the conference, when he built an expectation that with the July 2000 Camp David conference the time had come for crucial decisions in the negotiation process with the Palestinians (Drucker, 2002; Pressman, 2003; Sher, 2001; Swisher, 2004; Wolfisfeld, 2004). This implied that Israelis were ready for historical compromises and that this was the moment that would reveal whether the Palestinians were ready too, and really wanted to settle the conflict peacefully. Second, when these negotiations failed, Barak provided another major information by saying that he had done all he could, turning every stone in search for peace and making a very generous and far-reaching offer at Camp David; he further alerted that Arafat had refused to accept this offer and did not make any counter proposals. This left responsibility for the failure solidly on the side of the Palestinians (Drucker, 2002; Enderlin, 2003; Pressman, 2003;
Swisher, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 2004). This information was supported by statements from U.S. President Bill Clinton and from all Israeli participants at the Camp David conference. Subsequently, almost all the country’s political, social, and religious leaders, along with the mass media, intensely circulated this information (Swisher, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 2004). This had a major effect on the views of the Israeli people (Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2007). It implied that although Israel had made its ultimate compromise and “given everything,” Palestinians refused to accept this offer. Hence, Arafat, and the Palestinian leadership, were not interested in resolving the conflict through compromises and in a peaceful way, but were still striving to annihilate Israel, especially by insisting on the right of the return to the state of Israel of millions of Palestinian refugees.

The second major event began on September 28, 2000, when violent conflict erupted. In response to the controversial visit of Israel’s then opposition leader, Ariel Sharon (who later became Israel’s prime minister), to Jerusalem’s Temple Mount – where Muslim holy mosques are located – Palestinians began disturbances accompanied by stone throwing, demonstrations, and shootings. These were met with violent responses by Israeli security forces. In the first four days of the uprising, or Intifada, 39 Palestinians and 5 Israelis were killed; within a month the death toll rose to over 130 Palestinians and 11 Israelis. From the beginning of the Intifada until April 1, 2001, 409 Palestinians were killed and about 1,740 were injured, and at the same time 70 Israelis were killed and 183 were injured.2

As the violence began, major information coming from the Israeli government claimed that the outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada had been well prepared by Arafat and the Palestinian Authority (Dor, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 2004). This explanation was circulated even though at the beginning of the violence most of the security sources had a different interpretation of the events, suggesting that the Intifada had erupted from below, as an expression of deep dissatisfaction of the masses with the situation (Bar-Siman-Tov et al., 2007; Dor, 2001). But very soon, all security and government sources rallied behind this powerfully disseminated major information. As the violence continued, both government and military sources and much of the media kept providing information to the effect that the Palestinians aimed to destroy Israel, so that Israel was engaged in a war for its survival (Bar-Siman-Tov et al., 2007; Dor, 2004; Feldman, 2002). Other information provided by governmental and military sources continuously repeated that Arafat was personally responsible for every terror attack

and that the Palestinian leadership (especially Arafat and leaders associated with him) were no partners for negotiation because of their involvement in terror and their refusal to prevent terrorism.3

In the months that followed, Palestinians launched terror activities and engaged in violence, mostly in the occupied territories, and the Israeli army continued military attacks to contain the uprising and prevent terror. During the fall of 2000 and early 2001 continuous attempts at negotiation to end the violence and complete the agreement were still being made. The climax of these efforts took place in Taba, where the Israeli and Palestinian delegations made a sincere effort to negotiate the framework for a final settlement of the conflict (Matz, 2003; Pressman, 2003). But these attempts ended on February 6, 2001, with the election of Ariel Sharon as the prime minister of Israel by an overwhelming majority of Jewish voters.

After the election of Ariel Sharon, the level of violence on both sides increased and relations between Israelis and Palestinians deteriorated. The Palestinians increased their terror attacks, mostly through suicide bombings in public places all over the country. At the same time Israeli security forces, in an attempt to contain the violence and especially the terror, engaged in violent acts against the Palestinian Authority, assassinated Palestinians suspected of terrorist activity, imposed severe restrictions on the Palestinian population (severely affecting their daily lives), and made frequent incursions into the Palestinian territories. A climax of these activities was operation “Defensive Shield” carried out by the Israeli army in April and May 2002, which culminated in Israeli reoccupation of almost the entire West Bank (Reporters without borders, 2003).

Up until 2007, the violence claimed over 4,200 lives and 30,000 injured on the Palestinian side, many of them civilians, and 1,115 lives and over 6,000 injured on the Israeli side. Various attempts by external mediators, especially from the US and Europe, failed to stop the violence.

Having thus described the major events and major information, we will now show evidence that the information provided by epistemic sources was accepted as truthful by the majority of Israeli Jews. Thus, data from a survey carried out at the end of July 2000 showed that 67% of Israeli Jews believed the Palestinian side to be entirely, or in the main part, responsible for the failure of the Camp David summit. Only 13% thought that Israelis were either solely or largely responsible, and 12% thought that both sides were equally responsible for the failure (Peace Index, July 2000). With regard to the major
information about the outbreak of the Intifada, the polls showed that in November 2000, about 80% of Israeli Jews blamed the Palestinians for the eruption of the violence (Peace Index, November 2000), and in 2002, 84% of Israeli Jewish respondents thought that the Palestinians were solely or mostly responsible for the deterioration in the relations between themselves and the Israelis, while only 5% thought that Israel was solely responsible (Arian, 2002). Finally, with regard to major information about Palestinian intentions, 53% of Israeli Jews believed that the Intifada was aimed at harming and fighting Israel as such, and not in order to improve the terms of the agreement (Peace Index, March 2001).

The major events of the Camp David summit and of the eruption and continuation of violence, together with the major information about the causes of the failure at Camp David and about the reasons for the eruption of violence and its continuation, created powerful psychological conditions of threat that dramatically affected Israeli Jewish society.

Psychological conditions of threat

Violent acts carried out by Palestinians, and especially indiscriminate terror attacks against the civilian population all over Israel, together with major information claiming that the Palestinians strive to destroy the Jewish state and that the Palestinian leadership is involved in terror, created psychological conditions of threat among Israeli Jews. Already at the beginning of the violence, in a poll conducted in November 2000, 59% of Israeli Jews reported feeling personally threatened and 62% felt that Israel’s national security was under threat (Peace Index, November 2000). Also, while in 1999 less than 50% of the Israeli Jews thought that Arabs aspired to conquer the State of Israel, in 2002 68% thought so and in 2004 74% thought so. As the terror attacks intensified in 2002, 80% of Israeli Jews perceived the continued Intifada as a threat (Arian, 2002).

The above described transitional context with its psychological condition of threat was followed by changes in the psychological repertoire of the majority of Israeli Jews that included fear, delegitimization of the Palestinians, self-perception of victimhood, and sense of irreconcilability, together with support for certain modes of action, such as violent ways of coping with the Palestinians, support for forceful leadership, and unilateral steps to separate from the Palestinians. Each of these elements will now be described in detail.

Changes in Israeli Jews’ Psychological Repertoire in Response to the Powerful Transitional Context

Fear

Perception of threat evokes the emotion of fear (Gray, 1989; Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006; Rachman, 1975), and this was evident in the reactions of Israeli Jews to the described context of threat. In June 2001, 67% of Israeli Jews reported that they were “anxious about the future of Israel,” and 63% reported higher anxiety than in the past regarding their personal security and that of their family (Maariv, June 8, 2001). With the increase of violence, Israelis’ fear increased and influenced all aspects of life, in particular their behavior in public places and their use of public transportation (Klar, Zakay, & Sharvit, 2002; Lori, 2002). In the spring of 2002 almost all Israeli Jews (92%) reported fear that they or a member of their family might fall victim to a terrorist attack (in February 2004 the percentage decreased to 77%, while in 1999 this percentage was only 58% (Arian, 2002).

Delegitimization of the Palestinians and their leaders

Violence and threat perceptions arouse a need for explanation, to justify one’s own acts and differentiate between one’s own group and the rival. Delegitimization fulfills these functions (Bar-Tal, 1989; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). Indeed during the Al Aqsa Intifada systematic and institutionalized mutual delegitimization of Palestinians and Israeli Jews has been occurring (see Oren & Bar-Tal, 2007; Wolfsfeld & Dajani, 2003).

The delegitimization of the Palestinians began with their leader. Within a very short time after the eruption of violence, Yasser Arafat was presented by Israeli leadership and Israeli media as not being a partner for peace (Wolfsfeld, 2004). Later, Arafat was presented as a terrorist and he was blamed personally for every terror attack carried out by any Palestinian group. This line of delegitimization intensified after September 11, 2001, when the USA and other western states declared a “world war against terrorism.” In this context Arafat was equated with Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. The Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, said: “it is necessary to delegitimize Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority. It is necessary to make the connection between Arafat and terror, and destroy his image as a peace maker” (Ben, 2001, p. 3a). Finally, Arafat was presented as “irrelevant,” and contact between him and the Israeli authorities ceased. The Israeli public concurred
with this presentation. As the polls showed, already in October 2000, 71% of Israeli Jews thought that Arafat behaved like a terrorist, in comparison to 2 years earlier when only 41% had thought so (Peace Index, October 2000). Similarly, the Palestinian Authority was presented by the Israeli government as a “terrorist entity,” which initiates and supports terror attacks (Herald Tribune, 2001), and 67% of the Israeli Jews supported this view (Ma'ariv, December 7, 2001).

As for negative stereotyping of the Palestinians, while only 39% of Israeli Jewish respondents in 1997 described the Palestinians as violent and 42% portrayed them as dishonest, by the end of 2000 68% of Israeli Jewish respondents perceived the Palestinians as violent and 51% as dishonest. Also, in November 2000 78% of the Jewish public agreed with the statement that Palestinians have little regard for human life and therefore persist in using violence despite the high number of their own casualties (Peace Index, November 2000).

Finally, lack of trust, which goes with delegitimization, is clearly reflected in the following beliefs: 70% of the Israeli Jewish public estimated that Arafat personally lacked the desire, or the ability, to sign an agreement to end the conflict with Israel, even if Israel were to agree to all his demands – and that he would make additional demands aimed at foiling the agreement; and 80% believed that Palestinians would not honor an agreement (Peace Index, May 2001). Moreover, the great majority of Israeli Jews started to believe that the Palestinians were striving to destroy Israel and therefore peace with them could not be achieved (Arian, 2002).

**Self-perception of victimhood**

One clear effect on group life in the context of violence, perceived threat, and fear is the emergence of a sense of victimhood (Mack, 1990). This feeling greatly intensified in Israeli society during the period of time described, with the perception that the Palestinians instigated the violence in spite of the fact that, in the view of most Israeli Jews, Ehud Barak had made the most generous possible proposals to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As already indicated, the majority of Israeli Jews blamed the Palestinians for the eruption of the violence and thought that the Palestinians were solely or mostly responsible for the deterioration in the relations between them and the Israelis. It is not only the attribution of responsibility for the eruption of violence that set the scene for Israelis’ deep sense of victimhood. It was also powerfully underlined by the continuous terror attacks that claimed many Jewish lives, most of them civilian. The sense of victimhood came to dominate Israeli Jews, as every attack on Israeli Jews was viewed as terror and received immense exposure as such in the media. The Israeli media not only provided detailed accounts of terror attacks, the subsequent rescue actions, reports from hospitals and funerals; it also personalized the victims by describing their lives and publishing descriptions by those who knew them (Dor, 2004; Wolfsfeld & Dajani, 2003).

**Irreconcilability**

In addition, the above described context led to a sense of irreconcilability, which implied that the conflict would continue to be violent and could not be resolved peacefully. Public opinion surveys, taken before and during the relevant period, reveal a dramatic change in the percentage of Israeli Jews who thought that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could come to an end through a peace agreement: In 1999 the evaluations about a peace agreement were optimistic as 69% of Israeli Jews preferred peace talks over strengthening the country’s military capacity. 68% believed that peace between Israel and the Palestinians would be achieved in the next 3 years, 59% thought that terror attacks would be curtailed only through negotiations and a majority was ready to negotiate with the Palestinians on various core issues related to the conflict (Arian, 1999). But in 2002 this mood changed: 58% of Israeli Jews preferred increased military power over peace talks, 77% believed that war would erupt in the next 3 years and 68% thought that it was impossible to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians (Arian, 2002).

The above described psychological repertoire of fear, delegitimization of the Palestinians, self-view of victimhood, and sense of irreconcilability led further to a repertoire of behavioral intentions supporting harmful action against Palestinians, forceful leadership, and separation from the Palestinian people.

**Support of violent means to cope with the Palestinians**

When group members believe that the other group initiated violent confrontations, perceive threat, experience fear, and delegitimize the rival, then they tend to support aggressive ways to cope with this state of affairs, especially when they believe that they have the ability to withstand the enemy (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998; Lake & Rothchild, 1998). In this line Israel’s Jewish population began to support violent acts taken by its government against the Palestinians after the eruption of the Intifada in the fall of 2000 (the support was consistently
about 70%). In March 2001, 72% of Israeli Jews thought that more military force should be used against the Palestinians (Peace Index, March 2001). A survey poll of February 2002 revealed that 75% of Israeli Jews thought that the Intifada could be controlled by military action; and 57% thought that the measures employed to put down the Intifada were too lenient, and 34% thought that they were appropriate, while only 9% thought that they were too harsh (Arian, 2002).

With regard to specific actions, in April 2002 about 90% of Israeli Jews supported operation Defensive Shield in which the Israeli army reconquered the West Bank cities that had been under the control of the Palestinian Authority (Peace Index, April 2002); in 2002 90% supported so-called “targeted assassinations” of Palestinians suspected of terrorist activity (Arian, 2002), and in July 2002 62% of Israeli Jews supported such assassinations even if this would cause Palestinian civilian losses (Peace Index, July 2002); 80% supported the use of tanks and fighter planes against the Palestinians, 73% supported use of so-called “closures” and economic sanctions, and 72% supported military invasion of the cities under the control of the Palestinian Authority (Arian, 2002). Still in February 2004, 44% of the Israeli Jews thought that governmental policy to ensure quiet in the territories was too soft and that there was a need for harsher methods: 45% thought that current policy was appropriate and only 11% thought that it was too harsh.

Support of a leader who projects forcefulness

Situations of violent intergroup conflict cause people to look for a leader who projects determination to cope forcefully with the rival and can assure security. Israelis went to the polls on February 6, 2001, and elected Ariel Sharon (with a 60% majority), the Likud party candidate, over Ehud Barak, of the Labor party (Dowty, 2002). This outcome was not surprising in view of the fact that the majority of Israeli Jewish voters believed that Barak had not only made the Palestinians an overly generous offer (44% thought so already in July 2000, Peace Index, July 2000, and 70.4% thought so by January 2001, Peace Index, January 2001), but also had been too lenient in handling the crisis that had led to the increased Palestinian violence (70% of Israeli Jews thought so, and even 51% of Barak’s own supporters accepted this view, Peace Index, January 2001). The newly elected prime minister, an ex-general, had been involved in all of Israel’s major wars, was behind the building of many of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and took an extreme hawkish position, vehemently opposing the Oslo agreement. In Israel and outside it, Sharon had come to stand for forceful activities and a powerful determination to curtail the Arabs, and especially the Palestinians. In his campaign he promised peace and security, and on taking office he stopped negotiations with the Palestinians and insisted on cessation of Palestinian violence as a precondition to any political negotiation. At the same time he outlined the contours of an eventual conflict resolution proposal, which promised Palestinians very minimal political gains (see the interview with Sharon in Ma’ariv, April 13, 2001). During his first 3 years of incumbency the terror and violence increased and Israel stuck to a policy of forceful and violent “containment” of Palestinian violence. In his own constituency, Sharon gained great approval (about 60-70%) and consistent support for his security position, policy, and action (Barzilay & Levy-Barzilay, 2002).

Support of unilateral steps for separation from Palestinians

One result of violence, threat perception, fear, delegitimization, self-perception as a victim, and sense of irreconcilability is the tendency to draw clear distinctions between one’s own group and the rival (Kelman, 1978; Staub 1989). Thus, the Israeli public first of all differentiated psychologically between themselves and Palestinians by perceiving the latter negatively as rejectionists, as having ill intentions, as perpetrators of violence, and as having generally negative characteristics, as described above. In contrast, Jews were perceived as victims, with predominantly positive characteristics.

Moreover, the violence led many Israeli Jews to support physical separation between Jews and Palestinians. The notion that “we are here and they should be there” was propagated by politicians from the entire political spectrum, who suggested at least nine different plans for unilateral separation in the relevant period (Galili, 2002). This reflected not only a desire for self-defense but also a wish for psychological differentiation from the Palestinians (Baskin, 2002; Nadler, 2002). Among the Israeli public, at least 60% supported separation from the Palestinians by physical means (Peace Index, May 2001), and 56% preferred it over an agreement with the Palestinians (Ma’ariv, May 10, 2002). The direct reflection of this desire was the construction of a fence intended to separate Israelis from Palestinians and at the same time prevent terror attacks (Rabinowitz, 2002). The government eventually yielded to public demand and in the summer of 2002 decided formally to create physical separation between Palestinians and Israelis, which included building the fence and other
physical means of separation. A survey poll in February 2004 showed that 84% of Israeli Jews supported the separation fence. About 66% believed that the fence should be built to meet Israeli security considerations and 64% believed that the suffering of the Palestinian people should be a secondary or negligible consideration in this matter.

In sum, we have shown that the powerful transitional context of the Al Aqsa Intifada had significant effects on Jewish Israelis' psychological repertoire, as well as their willingness to support certain courses of action. At this point, it is important to note that the above described specific repertoire of Israeli relations with Palestinians, which was assessed during the Al Aqsa Intifada, did not just appear out of nowhere. It is based on the ethos of conflict, collective memory, and collective emotional orientation of fear, which have dominated Israeli Jewish society throughout decades of intractable conflict with the Arabs, and with the Palestinians in particular (Bar-Tal, 1998, 2000, 2007b). Israeli society's ethos and collective memory are dominated by societal beliefs about the justness of the Israeli cause, by delegitimization of Arabs and particularly Palestinians, a positive self-collective view and a self-perception of victimhood. Societal beliefs about the justness of one’s own cause deal with the reasons, explanations, and rationales of the goals that are at stake in the conflict and, foremost, justify their crucial importance; societal beliefs that delegitimize Arabs deny the adversary's humanity; societal beliefs supporting positive self-collective image concern the ethnocentric tendency to attribute positive traits, values, and behavior to one's own society; and societal beliefs about one's own victimization concern self-presentation as a victim (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006). These societal beliefs are shared by society members, circulate in public discourse, including the mass media, are expressed in cultural products, and feature in school textbooks. Their presence became somewhat abated during the peace process in the 1990s, but they resurfaced with the latest cycle of violent conflict that started in the fall of 2000 (Sharvit & Bar-Tal, 2007). Recent laboratory studies with Israeli Jews have demonstrated unequivocally that a threatening context causes activation of this repertoire (Sharvit, 2007).

Furthermore, anyone who tries to understand the psychological repertoire of the Israeli Jews in times of threat has to consider the focus of the held Jewish collective memory about their persecutions in the Diaspora and especially their climax in the form of the Holocaust during World War II. The Holocaust, in which 6 millions Jews perished just because of their Jewishness, became the master symbol of the Jewish identity and the major lesson for the Jewish people. Every situation of perceived collective threat is automatically associated with these collective memories, which arouse feelings of fear and a strong motivation to overcome the threatening rival. Specifically, it leads to suspicion, sensitivity, group mobilization, hostility, and defensive courses of action that may even disregard international behavioral codes (Bar-Tal, 2007b; Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Elon, 1971; Kelman, 2007; Liebman, 1978; Segev, 1991; Stein, 1978; Zafran & Bar-Tal, 2003).

Thus, transitional context, powerful as it may be, does not operate in a vacuum. Its effects are dependent upon and moderated by the existing characteristics of society, and the existing psychological repertoire of its members.

Conclusions

The psychological repertoire that emerges in times of conflict serves the continuation of the conflict and in fact it operates as part of the vicious cycle that characterizes the intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007a). Considering that this process is mirrored by the two parties in the conflict (Israeli Jews and Palestinians), it is obvious how the vicious cycles of violence operate. As the conflict evolves and intensifies, each of the opponents develops a negative psychological repertoire, which fulfills important roles on both the individual and collective levels. With time, however, this repertoire comes to be one of the factors determining the course of policy and action taken by each side in the conflict by serving as the major motivating, justifying, and rationalizing factor. The negative actions taken then serve as validating information to the existing negative psychological repertoire and in turn magnify the motivation and readiness to engage in conflict. The behaviors of each side confirm the held negative psychological repertoire and justify harming the rival – and so the cycles continue.

These vicious cycles of intractable conflict between Israelis and Palestinians are detrimental to the wellbeing of both the individuals and societies involved, as well as posing a danger to the world. The negative psychological repertoire plays an important role in these cycles. It is, therefore, vital to change this repertoire, in order to change the nature of relations between the rival groups (Bar-Siman-Toy, 2004). Changing the psychological repertoire of societies involved in intractable conflict is a necessary condition for advancing a peace process and stopping the violence.
The present conception clearly suggests that the psychological repertoire can change with the evolvement of new transitional context. The transitional context is responsible for and maintains the negative psychological repertoire that feeds continuation of the violent conflict. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to change this psychological repertoire without changing the context. Thus the major challenge is to change the transitional context of violent conflict. In order to accomplish this change, it is necessary first of all to cease the violence, since it constitutes the fundamental part of the context, as its major event. We realize that cessation of violence must take place together with another major event—namely, the beginning of negotiations.

The primary condition for progress toward peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is negotiations between the rivals, which will allow development of a mutually acceptable agreement. Without negotiation it is impossible to make any progress toward conflict resolution, and thus to reduce the violence significantly. But it is obvious that even when such negotiations begin, it will be necessary to take concrete conciliatory steps. The steps consist of such actions as improving life conditions, performing acts that imply good will, and meetings between representatives of the two groups, including leaders. These steps contribute further to the establishment of a new transitional context that is conducive to the peace process.

Of special importance for creating a new transitional context are new sets of major information. First of all, Israeli Jews and Palestinians have to generate well-formulated major information about peace. This should include a presentation of peace as a supreme value and goal, the formulation of beliefs that provide a clear and strong rationale for this goal, the outlining of realistic ways and means to achieve it, and of the required compromises (which meet the minimal requirements of the rival). The information should be specific and concrete, also stipulating the costs and sacrifices for achieving peace and not only the expected rewards and gains.

In order to reinforce this information, personalizing and legitimizing the enemy is also required. These new beliefs present the former enemy as a human being with whom it is possible to make peace. Through personalization, Israeli Jews and Palestinians can begin to see each other, after years of denial, as human beings, who have personal lives and who can be trusted. Legitimization allows viewing each other as belonging to the category of acceptable groups with whom peaceful relations are desirable and who have legitimate needs and goals.

We realize that the creation of a new transitional context is a very difficult undertaking, because it is impossible simply to stop violent expressions such as terror attacks on civilians, military encounters, aggressive rhetoric, or agitation. There are powerful groups among the Israeli Jews and Palestinians who object to a peace process and use all possible means to obstruct such development. Hostile acts and aggressive acts cannot stop at once, but usually continue for years, with a downward slope. In such a situation the reaction of leaders and the media to the threatening cues is crucial. When they frame the violent events in support of the fear orientation and the general delegitimization of the rival, then a peaceful transitional context has a very low chance of evolving. But when, in contrast, the leaders and media on both sides explicitly condemn both the violent acts and their perpetrators and repeat their commitment to peace goals, then the chance is high that a peaceful transitional context will continue to evolve and even gain momentum.

We thus conclude this chapter by affirming that both a transitional context of violent conflict and transitional context of peace process are manmade and therefore their creation depends on the will of the leaders and peoples. It is they who decide whether the context supports suffering, violence, human loss, threats, fear, and hate, on one hand, or peace, security, prosperity, cooperation, and hope, on the other. We hope that Israeli Jews and Palestinians will choose the latter way.

Notes

1. Major events are not the only factors that influenced the views of Jewish Israeli society. Obviously additional factors such as democratization and globalization are also responsible for these changes (Oren & Bar-Tal, 2006).

2. The numbers of the Palestinian casualties were taken from the Palestine Red Crescent Society (www.palestinesrcs.org), and of the Israelis, from the Israeli Foreign Ministry (www.mfa.gov.il).

3. It should be noted that all the described sets of major information provided to the Israeli public should be viewed at best as presenting a particular one-sided perspective. Over time, numerous publications have appeared that questioned and refuted the validity of these sets of information (see, e.g., Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2007; Bar-Siman-Tov, Lavie, Michael, & Bar-Tal, 2007; Dori, 2004; “Lessons of Arab-Israeli negotiating,” 2005; Pressman, 2003; Shamir & Maddy-Weitzman, 2005; Swisher, 2004).
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Peace Index. (The project is conducted by The Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research at Tel Aviv University. The data appear on the Tami Steinmetz Center’s website at www.tau.ac.il/peace.)


8

Why Do States Kill Citizens? Or, Why Racism is an Insufficient Explanation

Patricia Marchak

The prototype of all genocides and other massive crimes against humanity is the Holocaust. The assault on Jews by the Nazi regime has long been understood as an event caused by racism and more specifically by anti-Semitism. Following the war, the United Nations adopted the term “genocide” as proposed by a Polish Jew who survived, Rafael Lemkin, in the 1951 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Much of the original definition was scrapped away in the debates of the time, where many nations feared too sweeping a convention were it to denounce mass murders for any reasons other than race. Thus the definition adopted in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Article 6, as of July 12, 1999), consistent with the Convention, is “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.” Much outstanding scholarship since that time has concentrated on racism, stereotyping, demeaning, and dehumanizing “the other” as causes of episodes of state crimes against citizens, and it is these that I refer to in short form as racism. (e.g., Adelman & Suhre, 1999; Fein, 1990, 1992; Kuper, 1981; Staub, 1989; Van den Berghe, 1990).

However, in the past century many mass murders committed by states have had no obvious relation to nationality, ethnicity, race, or religion. Moreover, even where ethnic labels are used by way of rationalizing murders, the actual differences between perpetrators and victims have been minimal and some were invented by state propagandists shortly before the onset of the crimes. Taking these