

Social Representations in Use: Israeli and Palestinian High School Students' Collective Coping and Defense

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Israeli and Palestinian high school students are members of opposing ethno-national groups in a situation of intractable and violent conflict. We hypothesized that 16-year-old Israeli Jewish (N=1138) and Palestinian (N=1099) students share a collective representational field which serves them well in coping with the violent situation, but impedes them from taking alternative routes out of it. Collective (vs. individual) coping and defense are defined by the concepts of social representations (SR). The hypothesis is demonstrated on data taken from "Youth & History", an international European project of historical consciousness (Angvik & von Borries, 1997). Our results show a similar pattern of SR among Israelis and Palestinians. Both attribute high importance to a combined facet of personal and ethno-national values, justify war as a means of achieving national independence, and exhibit either extremely optimistic (Israelis) or extremely pessimistic (Palestinians) historical consciousness. In addition, both groups were more reluctant than Europeans to pay a price for peace and both isolated their SR of war and peace from other parts of their representational field. Finally, speculations are suggested regarding the roots, function and the dynamics of change of this pattern.

The following study describes social representations (SR) of Israeli (Jewish) and Palestinian high school students as an illustration of collective coping strategies under a situation of intractable ethno-national and territorial conflict. The study is based on data from the research project of "Youth and History," which included representative samples of 16-year-old participants from 27 countries in Europe and the Middle East (Angvik & von Borries, 1997).

Responses of Israeli and Palestinian students were compared with those of Europeans who were not involved in a similar conflict.

Effects of Collective Violent Conflicts on Adolescents: A Review

Oddly enough, only lately have social and developmental psychologists begun to examine the effects of social phenomena such as war and violent ethnic and national conflicts on people in general, and on children and adolescents in particular (see Ladd & Cairns, 1996, for review). Even when these issues received scientific attention, individual rather than social questions were mainly investigated, and individual theoretical constructs were used to arrive at answers. For instance, Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) investigated the effects of exposure to violence and fathers' arrest on the psychological *symptomatology* of Palestinian children. Other studies examined whether anxiety, behavioral disorders, cognitive malfunctioning or psychosomatic disorders were more prevalent among children undergoing violent ethnic conflicts than those living under "normal" conditions (Baker, 1990; Cairns, 1987; Dawes, Tredoux & Feinstein 1989; Dodge & Raundalen, 1991; Kinzie, Sacks, Angell, Manson & Rath, 1986; Punamaki, 1989; Straker, 1988).

While these investigations have undoubtedly contributed to our understanding of the effects of social conflicts on young individuals, they overlook the role played by the social meaning that individuals and collectives attribute to these events. For instance, most Israeli children do not experience the violent Israeli-Palestinian conflict directly, and for the most part, their daily routine is not interrupted. The conflict is represented in their mind from social messages regarding the conflict by listening to family and public discourse and watching television. Should we expect similar children's outcomes from this kind of indirect, socially mediated violence as from direct experience? Perhaps, watching and hearing of violent scenes becomes habituated and part of social style (Cairns, 1996; Cairns & Dawes, 1996; Miller, 1996; Punamaki, 1996). An additional meaning-related, approach has been suggested by Punamaki (1996). He found that the emotional mood of Israeli children, whose parents were "settlers" i.e., politically committed people who chose to live outside the Israeli border of 1967 within the territories of the "promised land", was not negatively affected by personal experiences of violent political-ethnic terror, compared to those who did not experience such terror. It seemed as if the parental ideology shielded them from psychological harm. These results suggest that distinctive effects can be found when violence is socially represented as wrong, cruel and involving victimization, on the one hand, or as an act of self-defense and war in the service of a noble cause, on the other.

An understanding of the effects of violent social conflicts on young individuals should also embrace the historical perspective of the events. Preliminary evidence of the effects of the historical collective perspective has been reported. For example, this has been used to explain two opposing mood reactions—an extremely pessimistic and an extremely optimistic one—recorded among children facing violent episodes between blacks and whites in South Africa. Cairns and Dawes (1996) suggest that the optimism and hope perceived by the black children in regard to the conflicts was related to their group's gain in political power, while the pessimism and despair that white children felt in regard to the same events was linked to their group's loss in political power.

An additional important feature of ethno-national conflicts is their collective meaning. Violent actions are not aimed at persons as individuals, but rather at their ethnic group or nation. Hence, when effect of a violent ethnic or national conflict is the main issue of a research, the study needs to focus on the collective phenomena and processes in the minds of the individuals

involved. The following describes our endeavor to capture the collective social meaning of the long-term Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Conceptual Framework: Intractable Conflict, Social Representations, representational field, organizational principles, and collective defense.

The present perspective of collective social messages regarding the Israeli-Arab conflict is similar to Rouhana and Bar-Tal's (1998) theoretical concept of widespread belief. These researchers have suggested that, under situations of violent ethnic conflict, efficient and successful collective coping act as a boomerang diminishing the motivation to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. Bar-Tal (1996) supported this hypothesis empirically in his research of how the wide-shared beliefs of Israelis regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were represented in Israeli school textbooks of history from 1948 to 1995. (unfortunately, we did not find a similar research regarding Palestinian textbooks). Our research has to do with the other side of the same coin, instead of detecting the messages children get, we investigated the construction of the conflict in the minds young people. We managed to include not only Jewish students from Israel but also Palestinian students (Muslims and Christians) from the Palestinian territories and from east Jerusalem. This kind of comparison is unique, because no study in psychology, we are aware of, compared the ideas regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the perspective of adolescents from populations of both Israeli (Jewish) and Palestinian from the Palestinian territories¹.

We assume that Israelis and Palestinians sense the hundred-year violent ethnic conflict, between Jews and Palestinians and between Israel and other Arab countries, as a serious life-threatening situation. The threat is fortified because the conflict has been consensually perceived as irresolvable (we do not know yet whether, and to what extent, this perception has been changed with the ongoing process of peace making beginning in the wake of the Oslo Peace Treaty signed in 1993). This kind of situation serves us as an opportunity to carry out a case study of how collectivities fare with a threat defined collectively as a prolonged, violent, irresolvable national-ethnic conflict.

Stress-related theories (e.g., Lazarus, 1985) have taught us that when individuals experience a threat to their physical or psychological wellbeing, they often cope by altering the stressful situation (e.g., running from a fire or extinguishing it). However, when individuals find the stressful situation to be chronic, pervasive, and uncontrollable, involving irreversible loss, they may experience feelings of helplessness and depression (Seligman, 1981). A coping method in such a case may include internal cognitive and emotional defensive reorganization. It may include denial of at least some part of the painful reality, suppression of some of the negative emotional reactions to the situation, and re-framing (restructuring) of the threatening reality in ways that make life endurable and daily functioning possible (Lazarus, 1985). Each of these defensive measures share a paradoxical common denominator: when the defensive measure is effective, the tendency to look for a real solution to the problem is diminished; consequently, the tendency to act in order to change the stressful situation itself is reduced as well. Phrased differently, an *efficient defense bars or hinders modification* in the interactions and communication between an individual and his or her stressful surroundings, resulting quite often in the cessation of endeavors to solve the original problem.

¹ About 20% of Israeli citizens are Palestinians. This group was not included in the present research because their social setting is different from that of both Israeli Jews and Palestinians in the Palestinian Autonomy. In contrast to the latter they live in a situation where their ethnic group is in conflict with the country they were born and live in. Their attitudes and beliefs compared to the other two groups have been dealt with in a special manuscript (Rodoy-Blattman, Bar-On, Sagi & Orr, 1999).

We can quite easily see the analogy between an individual facing a prolonged stressful situation and ethnic groups and/or nations (such as Israelis and Palestinians) entrenched in an intractable conflict (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998; see also Bar-Tal, Raviv & Freund, 1994). Consequently, it is tempting to use the concepts of coping and defense as a model for understanding the ideas, values, attitudes and actions of Israelis and Palestinians regarding peace and war. These concepts, though, were developed within an individual cognitive-emotional theoretical context. Therefore, hypotheses regarding collective coping and collective defensive strategies cannot be developed via automatic extrapolation. Rather, we need a theoretical framework, which focuses on collective construction of reality, and on the dynamics by which individuals co-construct their collective worldview including their in-group and inter-group relationships. It seems untenable to assume that most individuals under a situation of a collective threat react in a similar fashion, unless we presuppose a kind of communicational dynamics by which concerted shared construction of the social reality takes place. Moscovici's (1984, 1988) theoretical concept of Social Representations (SR) makes it possible to describe cognitive-emotional construction of reality carried out through communication among individuals within a collectivity. This concerted construction occurs all the time through a variety of communicational routes: for instance, while discussing news and historical, political and social programs in the media, by teaching and studying the school curricula or through formal and informal public discourse. Social representations are the human symbolic world of meanings. They are kind of cognitive-affective schemata, which we construct, reconstruct and share to a large extent with others inside our group during interpersonal and public encounters. Social representations enable social communication and their main functions are making sense of the unknown or the unintelligible and to maintain group identity. Their defining feature is not simply that they are shared and become a common knowledge (D'Andrade, 1981). They should serve the interests of groups, and the function that they are serving should predict the internal structure of the representational field and the extent it varies among and within recognizable groups (Breakwell, 1993, pp. 180).

We followed the conceptual model suggested by Doise (Spini and Doise, 1998) in which three aspects of social representations are to be studied: the content of the *representational field*, the qualitative and quantitative *organizational principles* of differences between groups or individuals, and their *anchoring* in related systems of symbolic meaning. Concerning the *representational field*, we were interested in how individuals within groups construct the specific social context of the Jewish-Israeli -- Arab-Palestinian conflict. The concept of *organizational principles* of inter-individual or inter-group differences was introduced by Doise with the aim of measuring systematic differences in the principles of organization, and the quantitative directions individuals and groups attribute to these organizational units, and by which they represent the situation (in our case, the conflict). These parameters, however, are not isolated, they are likely to be inter-woven and anchored within the preexisting organization of the representational field regarding the life and history of the two groups.

In sum, under conditions where groups sense a severe threat to their physical and psychological wellbeing, the *collective defense* should be explored by the representational field, and the organizational principles of ideas regarding the conflict; and by its social anchoring in the two involved parties compared to its anchoring in the representational field of uninvolved countries.

Firstly, we asked of whether values regarding individualism within the two groups were enmeshed (organized together) with collectivist values. Under the conditions of such enmeshment it is highly likely that individuals experience a threat to the collectivity as a personal threat. Therefore, we expected, to find a combined constellation of personal and ethno-national values within the representational field of the Israeli and Palestinian high school students,

whereas differentiated constellations were expected for other groups who were not involved at the time in a violent ethnic conflict.

Secondly, in order to maintain the wellbeing of group members under the threat caused by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the negative aspects of the conflict should be reframed (reorganized) as including positive aspects. Thus, we expected that, in contrast to European high schoolers, Israeli and Palestinian high school students would structure war as a legitimate mode for achieving national goals; and ignore the benefits of the missing peace by underpinning the cost of peace instead of its benefits. That is, if life can go on smoothly in spite of unending war and one has to pay dearly in order to achieve peace, than better to do without it. Our paradoxical final expectation, then, was to find more optimistic perspective for the future compared to the past for both the Israeli and the Palestinian high schoolers, compared to European students.

As mentioned at the outset, documentation of the social representations of the conflict was gleaned from relevant data collected for the project of "Youth & History" (Angvik & von Borries, 1997). The project research participants did not agree on an exact theoretical definition of social consciousness. They shared, however, the notion that historical consciousness is mainly the complex combination of the social representations regarding the interpretation of the past, perception of the present and expectation of the future. The criterion for including items into the present study was their straight forward relevance to issues of war and peace. Our general expectation was that the two groups in conflict, those of Jewish high school students in Israel and that of Palestinian adolescents in the Palestinian territories would demonstrate a similar pattern of war-peace related representational field. We expected also that it will be different from those of European adolescents who were living, at the time (spring, 1995) within a relatively peaceful situation. Specifically, we hypothesized that compared to European adolescents: 1. The representational fields of the two research groups would show a combined constellation of ethno-national and personal values; 2. They would be more reluctant to pay meaningful costs for peace, and would show lower consensus regarding the cost of peace 3. They would represent war as justified in order to achieve national independence; and finally, 4. In spite of the violent conflict they would represent optimistic historical perspective;

Method

Participants and Context

Respondents included Israeli (Jewish), Palestinian (from the Palestinian territories) and European high school students who participated in a comparative European Survey on Historical Consciousness and Political Attitudes among Adolescents ("Youth & History") (Angvik & von Borries, 1997). The Israeli sample consisted of 1,138 adolescents (50.1% females), aged 16 ($M=15.78$, $SD=0.49$). It included all the students in a randomly chosen sample of classes from high schools operated under the auspices of the Israel Ministry of Education: 16 classes out of 184 in the religious section, and 35 classes out of 311 in the secular section. The data did not include 165 classes of extremely orthodox religious schools, which comprised about 17% of the Israeli Jewish high school population. These were private schools and their authorities did not give us the permission to enter their site. About one third (30%) of the students came from large cities, 56% from small urban settings, and 14% from rural settings. We did not find significant differences in any of the variables of interest between the responses of males and females, self-reported social economic status, nor between those living in large cities and in peripheral areas; therefore, the sample was treated in its entirety. Israeli students who defined themselves as religious, or those who studied in religious schools

were found to be different from those who defined themselves as non religious or studied in secular schools in some of the research variables (Sagi, Orr, & Bar-On, 1999). However, controlling for religiousness did not have significant effects on any of the international group comparisons.

We had much less information regarding the Palestinian sample. In spite of this limitation, one should bear in mind that no other research in psychology offered a similar wide scale comparison groups of Israeli and Palestinian adolescents. The Palestinian participants consisted of 1,099 sixteen-year-old high school students (47% females) in 32 classes from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. About a third were Christians and the rest were Muslims. We did not find significant differences between students from the two faiths, and all the students defined themselves as religious. Whereas most Jewish children in similar age groups in Israel attended high school, only 28% of the Palestinian population of this age group in the Palestinian authorities did so (Awwad, 1997).

The European sample consisted of 27,972 students (52% females) from 24 countries. Those included Northern Western, Central, Occidental Mediterranean and East European countries (e.g., Norway, Germany, Britain Czech Republic, Russia, France, Greece and Turkey). The mean age was somewhat lower ($M=15.21$) than that of the Israeli and Palestinian samples. Specific national coordinators collected the data during spring 1995 either by country-wise random or representational samples of high school classes. The raw data was sent to a central processing center in Hamburg, and the data set in its entirety was available to each of the participant coordinators (for more details, see Angvik & von Borries, 1997).

Instruments

Data was collected by a 48-item, Likert-like questionnaire (with responses along a scale of 1 to 5) developed by the "Youth & History" researchers (for full details, see Angvik & von Borries, 1997). The content of the items selected for the present investigation, are described below, together with their results. The Hebrew and the Arabic versions of the questionnaires were translated from the English version and back to English by two pairs of independent bilingual undergraduate psychology students. Discrepancies were resolved and the present authors made the corrections.

Procedure

School principals of the selected schools in Israel were contacted and advised about the nature of the project, which was authorized by the Israeli Ministry of Education. Questionnaires were administered to students by a professional interviewer and by two undergraduate psychology students who were trained for this role. The procedure took place during the second school semester of 1995, in the classroom, and was completed in one normal class session. School principals were subsequently provided with feedback about the study and some of its main findings. Similar steps were taken with the Palestinian and European samples (for details, see Awwad, 1977, and Angvik & von Borries, 1997, Chapt1).

One should bear in mind the political context of the time within which the data was collected. In a sense, hope for peace was at a high point. The PLO and the Israeli government had signed the Oslo Treaty and some of the points of the agreement had begun to be implemented. At the same time, however, fanatic oppositions from both sides of the conflict were killing hundreds of people. There were violent terrorist actions against the Jewish civil population within Israel and against Palestinians in the occupied territories (e.g., the assassination of Muslims at prayer by Goldstein during spring, 1993). Notwithstanding these events, Prime Minister Rabin, the Israeli peace initiator, was still alive, the imminent difficulties of the conflict were yet somewhat

submerged, and a spirit of hope seemed to prevail within at least part of the Israeli and Palestinian populations.

Methods of Analysis

Three statistical methods were used: 1) MANOVA to compare group means; 2) Pearson pairwise correlation between notions of peace, war and other elements in the representational field; and 3) Similarity Structure Analysis to compare groups' representational fields (see Canter, 1985; and Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990, for more details regarding the SSA).

Results

As we did not find significant within group effects of gender, social status or religious faith on any of the resulting international comparisons, further analyses were performed on each ethno-national group in its entirety. Thanks to the large size of the samples, all two way MANOVA (item, group) were significant at the level $p < .001$, and a great many comparisons between means were found significant as well. However, since a great number of post-facto comparisons were performed, it was difficult to assess their true significance. Therefore, in order to simplify and clarify the presentation of results, we do not report each group or item comparison. Instead, we report in the text only the significance of mean differences of interest.

Our general hypothesis was that the representational fields of values of Israeli and Palestinian adolescents was structured to deal with a violent, continuous, irresolvable conflict. This structure, we claimed, was built by organizational principles of 1, combined constellation of positive ethno-national personal values; 2, war justification; 3, reluctance to take peace risks; and 4, optimistic historical perspective. The social representations of peace were not assessed by a simple straightforward method. Assuming that everyone wishes for peace, we did not expect differences among individuals and national groups to be found in the sheer desire for peace. Rather, we envisioned a more realistic notion of peace as related to the price that group members are willing to pay for it. This was operationalized as the risks one is willing to assume, deduced from two indicators, the *cost* one is willing to pay; and the correlation between peace and other values in the representational field. For example, if a high value is attributed both to peace and to one's country and there is a positive correlation between "peace at any cost" and "my country". This implies that both peace and one's country are important values shared by many group members, and that those who attribute more importance to their country are more willing to take risks for the sake of peace. Conversely, a negative relationship between the two highly valued variables indicates that those who attribute high importance to their country are less willing to take risks for peace. In the first case, the country is expected to gain from peace; in the second, peace at any cost is perceived as a threat to the country. Each of these cases indicates a consensus regarding the relationships between peace and patriotism. Lack of a correlation between peace and one's country would indicate *a lack* of consensus between respondents regarding the relationships between the cost of peace and one's patriotism.

The representational field of ethno-national and personal values

Our first step was to ascertain participants' national identity. Accordingly, students were required by an open item in the questionnaire to indicate their nationality. The Jewish students identified themselves as Jewish or Israelis, whereas Arab students identified themselves as Palestinians. We did not find differences between those who identified themselves as Jewish or Israeli on any of the following results. Therefore, they were treated as one group.

To investigate the collective representational field of ethno-national and personal values, students were required to evaluate the importance (from 1=very little to 5=very much) they ascribed to various items. These included value-items along (1) *Individual Vs. collective* dimension: such as hobbies, wealth for one's self and my friends vs. one's country, ethnic/national group and religious faith and (2). *Particularly mine. Vs. Universal-self-transcendence* values such as family, solidarity with poor people in one's own country vs. democracy, freedom of opinion for all, peace at any cost, solidarity with poor people in the Third World and environmental protection. As can be seen in Table 1, the family held the utmost importance in the three groups, but the family one's country and religious faith were more important for the Israelis and Palestinians than for the Europeans. One's country and religious faith, thou, were significantly more important to Palestinians than to Israelis. These findings imply that one's country was an important element in the representational field of the Israeli and the Palestinian students. It was more important, though, for the Palestinians, may be because Palestinians still fight for their national independence, whereas the Israelis, in spite the threat to their national security, already own a state. As to the religious faith, the ultra orthodox Jewish schools refused to participate in the project, still the importance of the religious faith was significantly stronger among Jews, compared to Europeans, but stronger among Palestinians than among Jews. This difference is difficult to interpret because it could be attributed either to the under representation of religious adolescence in the Israeli sample, or to a real difference between the populations.

The Palestinian adolescents appeared as attributing less importance to personal items than the Israelis and the Europeans (friends, hobbies, and wealth for me) but, surprisingly, the Israelis attributed importance to the personal items even more than the Europeans. Israelis attributed, also, more and Palestinian attributed less importance than Europeans, to liberal values such as democracy and freedom of opinion. Oyserman (1993) also notified this combination of collective and individual values within her sample of Israeli university students. (Table 1)

Table 1
How Important are These Things to You? Means and (SD)

	Israelis	Palestinians	European	F	Post hoc sig.
Family	4.76 (0.61)	4.42 (1.05)	4.69 (0.65)	92.6	All
Friends	4.52 (0.75)	4.29 (0.89)	4.50 (0.68)	46.8	Palestinians vs. others
Hobbies	4.26 (0.75)	4.08 (0.95)	4.10 (0.82)	19.8	Israelis vs. others
My country	4.19 (0.91)	4.29 (0.94)	3.81 (0.99)	192.7	All
My ethnic/ national group	3.91 (1.13)	3.93 (1.03)	3.44 (1.14)	183.3	Europeans vs. others
Wealth for me	3.88 (0.96)	3.49 (1.15)	3.56 (1.05)	54.6	Israelis vs. others
My religious faith	3.43 (1.28)	4.30 (0.98)	3.09 (1.36)	438.5	All
European cooperation	3.14 (1.12)	2.49 (1.25)	3.16 (1.12)	181.0	Palestinians vs. ot
Democracy	4.04 (1.08)	3.47 (1.31)	3.43 (1.22)	134.3	Israelis vs. others
Freedom of opinion	4.35 (0.88)	4.10 (1.01)	4.28 (0.94)	21.3	All
Peace at any cost	2.87 (1.43)	3.28 (1.47)	4.29 (0.98)	1481.0	All
Solidarity with poor: own country	3.51 (1.04)	4.23 (0.89)	3.96 (0.97)	155.2	All
Solidarity with poor: 3 rd world	3.06 (1.16)	3.66 (1.14)	3.75 (1.09)	204.8	All
Welfare & social security	3.69 (1.06)	3.85 (1.06)	4.01 (0.93)	76.6	All
Environment protection	4.17 (0.92)	4.40 (0.89)	4.40 (0.89)	37.6	Israelis vs. others

Notes: Significant ANOVA at $p < .001$ was found for each of the items. On the table's right colon Duncan's Post-Hoc pair comparisons.

The most important differences, regarding these items, between the Europeans and the present two research groups were, to our mind, the organizational principles of the items, as they were revealed in the Similarity Structure Analysis (SSA, Guttman, 1968, 1982). As illustrated in Figure 1. (two-dimensional SSA plots, with an acceptable Coefficient of Alienation of .20 and .15. for Israelis and Palestinians, respectively).² As mentioned earlier, the two dimensions deduced for our specific list of values were individual *vs.* collective and particular *vs.* self-transcendence. Supporting the first hypothesis regarding enmeshment of the personal and the collective, the Israeli and the Palestinian spaces appeared quite similar: in both, the individual and collective values were aggregated into one facet (factor), with one's family and country at its center. In each of the SSA spaces the self-transcendent items were located outside the combined individual/collective (ethno-national) facet. That is, in both groups, the individual items merged with the collective ones, with one's country at the center (see also Table 2). We did not find this kind of structure in the SSA of any other European country. The individual the collective and the self-transcending items appeared, there, as differentiated constellations, and "peace at any cost" was included in the self-transcending values (SSA plots of any country in the project can be obtained by request from the first author).

Table 2
Pearson Corr. Between "Peace at Any Cost," "My Country" and Other Values

	Peace at any cost		My country	
	Israelis	Palestinians	Israelis	Palestinians
Family	.01	.02	.36	.46
Friends	.05	.08	.30	.40
Hobbies	.10	.16	.27	.43
My country	.03	.04	1.00	1.00
My ethnic/national group	-.13	.12	.61	.50
Wealth for me	.09	.18	.10	.12
My religious faith	-.16	-.01	.33	.37
European cooperation	.18	.29	.22	-.03
Democracy	.00	.31	.23	.14
Freedom of opinion	.04	.20	.14	.30
Solidarity with poor: own country	.10	.13	.18	.34
Solidarity with poor: 3 rd world	.26	.24	.13	.15
Welfare and social security	.08	.33	.17	.16
Environment protection	.11	.15	.18	.27

Note: $r = .07$ is significant at $p < .05$; $r > .10$ is significant at $p < .001$

² The logic of our framework requires a technique that facilitates inference of conclusions from the overall structure of the inter-relationships among skewed variables in a multi-variable content universe. Such a technique should enable a simultaneous perception of the predictive power of each variable vis-a-vis all the others, allowing us to arrive at conclusions regarding the entire set of ideas, thereby revealing both homogeneous and widely varied relationships among units. We therefore adopted the technique of Similarity Structure Analysis (SSA, more commonly known as Smallest Space Analysis), which obtains a graphic display of the relations of each variable vis-a-vis all the others. The SSA unit is the weak monotonicity coefficient (μ_2) whose absolute value is greater than that of the Pearson coefficient. In the SSA method, the computer locates the variables as points on a map according to the strength of the correlation among them: the stronger the positive correlation between two variables, the smaller the distance between the points representing them; the weaker this correlation (or the stronger the negative correlation), the greater the distance between points. The extent of accuracy whereby spatial distances on the map reflect actual relationships is expressed by the coefficient of alienation (COA): the smaller this value, the better the fit. A coefficient of .15 is considered a near accurate fit. Conclusions are derived from the relative proximity among all variables (rather than merely from specific pair-wise relationships), namely, from the entire structure of inter-relationships. Support for the hypothesized structure is achieved by replicability of the pattern of results, rather than by conventional significance terms. (For an extensive discussion on the value of this method and illustration of its application, see Canter, 1985.)

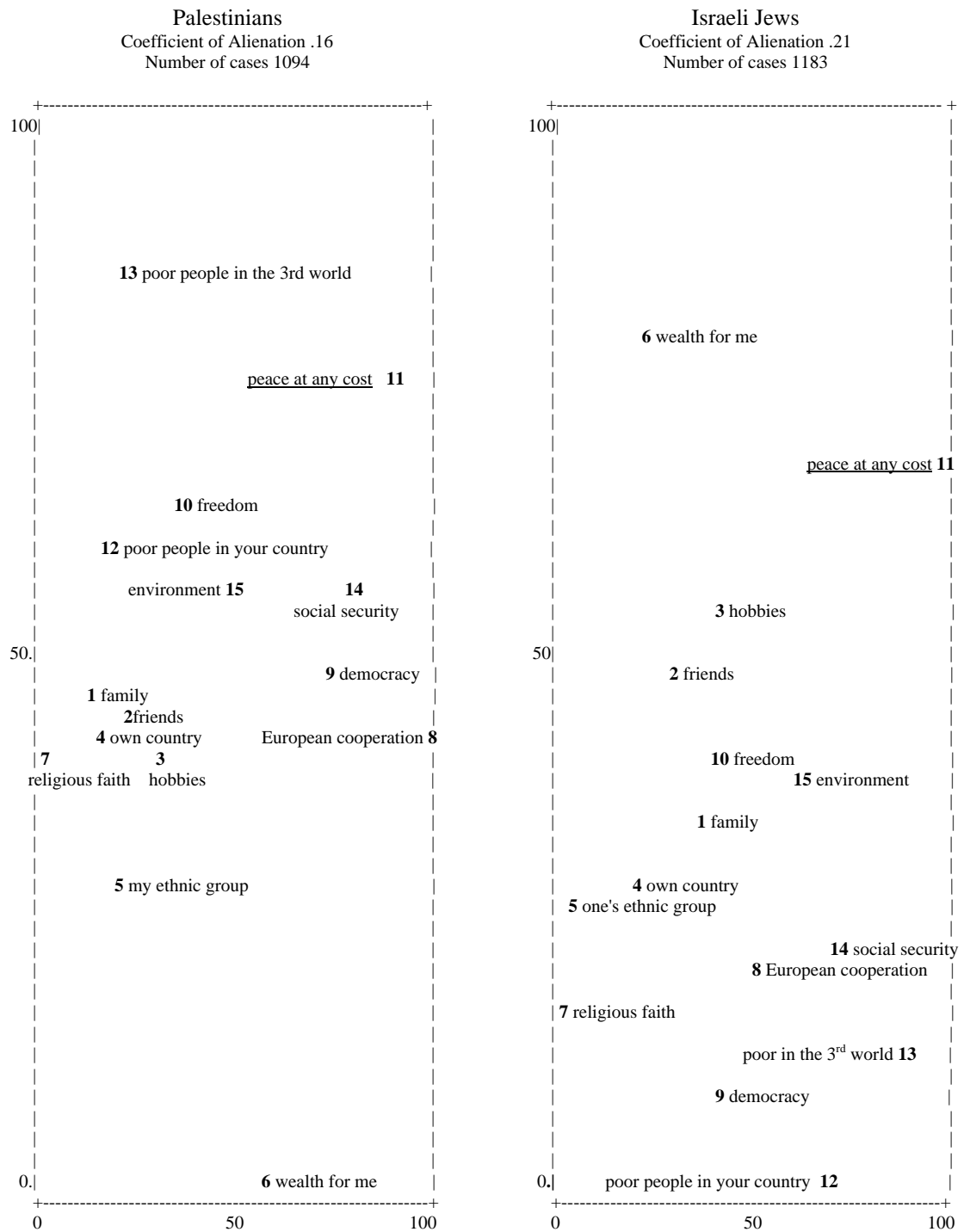


Figure 1
Smallest Space Analysis diagrams for Palestinians in the Palestinian Autonomous Region and for Israeli Jews.

Legitimization of war

According to our hypothesis Israeli adolescents were likely to ignore the benefits of the missing peace by underpinning the cost of peace instead of its benefits. As mentioned earlier, “peace at any cost” was one of the 15 items whose importance was evaluated by respondents (Table 1). It was assigned the lowest value (below the neutral value of 3) by the Israelis, and ranked as second lowest (somewhat above the neutral value) by Palestinians. “Peace at any cost”, as could be expected, was evaluated as more important by Europeans than by Palestinians and Israelis. More surprisingly however, the latter were even less willing than Palestinians to pay a price for peace. The variance, within this item for Israelis and Palestinians was higher than the variance of any other item, indicating, a relatively low consensus among Israeli and Palestinian highschoolers regarding this issue. Peace at any cost: 2.87 (1.43), 3.28 (1.47), 4.29 (0.98) compared to My country: 4.19 (0.91), 4.29 (0.94), 3.81 (0.99), Israelis, Palestinians and Europeans in that order, S.D. within brackets.

In the SSA of both Israelis and Palestinians (Figure 1), the item “peace at any cost” was isolated; i.e., it was correlated with neither the national-collective facet or with any other facet. The SSA plots are based on the Weighted Monotonous Correlation between each item and all other, and whose central value is based on the *distribution* of the row scores of each item (Guttman 1968, 1982). The same pattern was replicated within random split-half samples and within samples split along the dimensions of sex of both the Israeli and the Palestinian samples. The MDS (STATISTICA package) showed also a similar pattern. The more conventional Pearson pair-wise correlation, between “peace at any cost” and the other items revealed the same phenomena in more detail: peace was hardly correlated with any other value for Israelis and Palestinians alike. These findings are even more striking in comparison to the high correlation found between the importance attributed to “my country” and that of each of the other items (see Table 2). The interpretation of these findings will be discussed later. We also failed to find a significant correlation between the peace item and the following items regarding war. *Legitimization of war*

Our next hypothesis was that Israeli and Palestinian high school students would structure war as a legitimate means for achieving national goals. Our question was phrased as "What are your views on nations and national states?" Two items out of the original six were relevant to our hypothesis: "National states are the main cause of wars in the recent centuries", and "National groups have the right to go to war to make their own state"..³ As Table 3 shows, all three groups agreed that wars break out because of national interests. Israelis however, were significantly more—and Palestinians were significantly less -- willing than the Europeans to agree with this statement. The differences though were quite small. As expected, the two groups of highschoolers in the Middle-East were significantly more willing than the Europeans to regard war as legitimate and to agree with the right of nations to go to war in order to create their own state. The Palestinian mean was also significantly higher than that of the Israelis, but this was smaller than the differences between each of them and the Europeans.

³ The rest of the items were as follows:

"Nations are born, grow and perish in history, just like everything else".

"Nations are natural entities, unified by common origin, language, history and culture". "Nations represent a will to create a common future, despite cultural differences in the past".

"National states should give an essential part of their sovereignty to supranational organizations".

Table 3
Ideas Concerning Nations – Means (SD)

	Israelis	Palestinians	Europeans	F	Significant differences
Nations as main cause of wars	3.52 (0.91)	3.30 (1.05)	3.40 (0.88)	15.1	All
Right to go to war to make own state	3.09 (1.05)	3.18 (1.14)	2.64 (1.10)	197.8	All

Notes: Significant ANOVA at $p < .001$ was found for each of the items. On the table’s right colon Duncan’s Post-Hoc pair comparisons.

Israelis’ and Palestinians’ justification of war as a means for achieving territorial goals was also apparent in responses to an additional item which painted the following scenario: “Suppose that the imaginary territory Newland was occupied by your country A from 1500 to 1900. From 1900 till today Newland has been occupied by country B. Your country A wants to have Newland back, and puts forward several arguments for its case. How much weight would you give these arguments?” One of the arguments was “We have the military power and we will use it to get Newland back under our control”. As Table 4 shows, Israelis and Palestinians were more willing to use this argument than European students. It seems as if their historical experience was crystallized in this social representation of a cynical international “justice”⁴

Table 4
Military Power as an Argument for the Annexation of “Newland” - Means (SD)

	Israelis	Palestinians	Europeans	F	Significant differences
We have the military power and we will use it to get Newland back under our control.	3.33 (1.24)	3.55 (1.26)	2.88(1.27)	127.9	All

Notes: Significant ANOVA at $p < .001$ was found for each of the items. On the table’s right column: Duncan’s Post-Hoc pair comparisons.

Optimistic Historical Perspective

The next part of our hypothesis suggested that the representational field of Israeli and Palestinian adolescents was not only nationalistic, but also consisted of optimistic sense of historical of continuity. Since we conceived of the historical optimism as a collective *defense*, we expected it to be higher than that of the Europeans, although we were more hesitant with this prediction in regard to the Palestinians. The social representation of Palestinians regarding their history in the second half of the 20th century has been that of a catastrophe (*Nakba*, Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998) Is it tenable to suppose that they hope for the opposite in the near future? We did not find in the literature relevant data regarding this problem, and left it unresolved, hoping to be able to benefit from our empirical findings.

⁴ The rest of the items were as follows:

"The people of Newland speak our language and share our culture".

"Newland was under our control for longer period (1500-1900) than it has been under the control of B (1900-1994).

"Settlers from our country came to Newland in the year 1500, whereas people from B did not settle in Newland until 1900".

"An international peace conference has examined the case, and recommend that we shall have Newland back".

Two kinds of data provided the information regarding optimism: the respondent's general ideas regarding historical directionality, and his/her predictions of the collective life of their group 40 years ahead in comparison with 40 years ago. Historical optimism was inferred from findings that the future would be better than the past. On the whole, Israelis were found to be more optimistic about the future than Europeans, but Palestinians were less optimistic than both.

Historical directionality was measured by the question, "People often see history as a line in time. Which of the following lines do you think best describes historical development? Mark only one line." The alternatives were, an upward line (Things generally get better), a straight line (things generally do not really change), downward one (things generally gets worse), an undulating line (things generally repeat themselves) and finally, zigzag (things generally go from one extreme to another). As Table 5 shows, more Israelis than both European and Palestinians expected the line of history to improve (25.0% vs. 20.4% and 16.0%, respectively), whereas the Palestinians were most likely to expect it to worsen (23.0% vs. 8.8% Europeans and 3.0% Israelis, with a highly significant Chi Square).

Historical optimism was also assessed by a pair of questions: respondents were asked "How do you think life was like in your country 40 years ago?" followed by "What do you expect life to be like in your country in 40 years?" For each question, they were asked to evaluate the likelihood (1=highly unlikely to 5=highly likely) that life was/will be: peaceful, exploited by a foreign state, prosperous and wealthy, democratic, or torn by conflicts between ethnic groups. This series of questions permitted us to analyze the content of historical representations within two perspectives: theme (items) and time (past and future).

Table 5
Lines of Historical Development (percent of respondents)

	Israelis	Palestinians	Europeans
Get better	24.8	15.6	20.3
Get worse	2.8	23.2	8.5
Don't really change	8.3	11.0	8.3
Repeat themselves	40.8	33.9	29.9
From one extrem to another	23.3	16.3	33.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Chi Square = 475.3, $p < .001$

Israelis evaluated their past as *less peaceful* than Europeans (see Table 6). This answer seems rather realistic considering that Europe (at least Western Europe) has enjoyed relative peace and prosperity during the last four decades, whereas five major wars and numerous violent events have occurred in Israel since its inception in 1948. The relatively negative evaluation of the past is also apparent in each of the other four items. With the exception of "democratic", they were each, evaluated more negatively by Israelis than by Europeans. An opposite trend was revealed regarding the future. The Israeli adolescents predicted that within 40 years their country will be more peaceful, wealthy and democratic, less exploited by other countries and less torn by ethnic conflicts than did their European counterparts. The differences between analogous items were significant as well as the summaries across items. The overtly optimistic trend was expressed not only by the sheer values of the future, but even more so by the difference between the past and the future. The Israeli past-future discrepancy was the largest of all the countries that took part in the project (Angvik & von Borries, 1997).

Table 6
Your Country 40 Years Ago and in 40 Years—Means and (SD)

	Israelis		Palestinians		Europeans		F time x group	Post Hoc
	last 40	next 40	last 40	next 40	last 40	next 40		
Peaceful	2.19(1.01)	3.08(1.13)	2.83(1.25)	2.58(1.18)	2.90(1.10)	2.95(1.11)	213.1	All
Exploited	3.06(1.20)	2.20(1.05)	3.74(1.19)	3.39(1.18)	2.87(1.25)	2.61(1.08)	82.9	All
Wealthy	2.08(0.99)	3.39(0.88)	2.66(1.18)	3.21(1.07)	2.49(1.03)	3.04(1.02)	151.9	All
Democratic	2.90(1.19)	4.14(0.92)	2.55(1.21)	3.12(1.16)	2.73(1.19)	3.49(1.03)	66.8	All
Ethnic conflicts	3.17(1.18)	2.88(1.10)	2.96(1.18)	3.33(1.16)	2.88(1.11)	3.07(1.09)	67.5	All

Notes: Significant ANOVA at $p < .001$ was found for each of the items. On the table's right colon Duncan's: Post-Hoc pair comparisons.

While optimistic historical perspective of continuity was the hallmark of the Israelis, Palestinians structured history Pessimistically (Table 6). The Palestinians described the past, similarly to the Europeans, as peaceful, wealthy, and democratic, but unlike Europeans, as more exploited by other countries. Their future, however, would bring only modest economic and democratic improvements. It would be less peaceful than the past and more torn by ethnic conflicts. While the benefits of optimistic continuity is quite obvious, the value of pessimistic continuity for the Palestinians was less clear, and will be elaborated on later (see Discussion).

We also failed to find a significant correlation between the extent of optimism or pessimism of Israelis and Palestinians and their ideas regarding war and their willingness to pay the cost of peace.

Discussion

The present research makes an innovative theoretical contribution by suggesting that SR is an appropriate concept for re-framing individual coping (and defense) as a collective construct. The notion of collective coping with intractable conflict was suggested earlier elsewhere (Bar-Tal, 1996; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998), but the term *societal belief* was used there, whereas we used the more specific concept of *social representations*. Both concepts share the assumption of a shared collective cognition. The latter, however, implies also that the newly shared common sense (or knowledge) is created when people talk to each other in public, and that groups structure this commonsense for their specific social use (Wagner, 1998).

According to Moscovici (1984), the main function of SR as shared knowledge is to make the unfamiliar familiar. Moscovici does not mention motivational constructs, but the epistemic function of making common sense out of unknown reality is compatible with recent notions in social psychology. For instance, it is similar to the suggestion that groups provide an epistemic function for their members (Shah, Kruglanski & Thompson, 1998; Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999), and that the awareness of one's own death arouses a deep anxiety which is buffered by validating the world views and values that a culture provides. That is, death terror management is achieved by increased social consensus (Greenberg, Solomon & Pyszczynski, 1997). While this latter approach seems to imply that social consensus is pursued by individuals, and mainly under specific stress situations, SR theory implies that reaching consensus is a normative collective activity which occurs through a variety of kinds communication taking place within groups. Nevertheless, in order to speak of SR as collective coping, we need to expand its function of coming to terms with the *unfamiliar* to include also the enigmatic or *irresolvable* (such as intractable violent ethnic conflicts).

The notion of similarity in the pattern of responses of the two rival groups of Israelis and Palestinians may take one initially by surprise. Only on second thought one comes to understand it as a shared pattern of coping. Both parties anchored their personal values within their collective representational field. Both justified war as a legitimate route for achieving independence; both were relatively unwilling to pay the cost of peace, and for both the notion of cost of peace was not systematically related to other important and relevant components (e.g., ones country) of their representational field.

The relative reluctance of the Israeli and Palestinian students to take high peace risks is quite understandable. For the European students, most likely, such risks appeared abstract and unlikely to be put to the test, whereas the independence of their country seemed to be at stake in the minds of Palestinians and Israelis. Thus, under the specific historical circumstances of the Middle East the reluctance to take dangerous risks seemed to many students an appropriate coping measure. This interpretation seemed to be supported by a comparison with the group Palestinian high schoolers.

The group of Palestinians in Israel was not at the center of the present paper and a specific paper dealt with the character of this group (Blattman-Rudoy, Bar-On, Sagi & Orr, In press). The differences between the SSA of this group, however, and the two present research groups is highly illuminating. The SSA plot of the Palestinians in Israel was highly similar to that of the Palestinians in the territories, and the Israeli Jews, with one notable exception. “*Peace*” was posed at the center of their ethno-personal facet whereas “*My country*” was unrelated to the other items. This organization reflected, most likely, the conflicts of Palestinians who are simultaneously Israeli citizens and a part of the “enemy”, i.e., the Palestinian nation. Under these circumstances it seemed that peace between these groups might solve the conflict, so the Israeli Palestinians were willing to pay a price for peace, and this price was anchored in the ethno-personal facet of their representational field.

The high variance of the “cost of peace” and the lack of correlation between this item and other elements in the representational field does not imply a lack of connections between the two ideas in the minds of *individuals*. It does suggest a state of *diffusion within a collectivity*. It means that in the public discourse, at least among these groups of adolescents, systematic relationships between these organizational categories hardly have existed. A low social relevance may be responsible for representational diffusion and a low consensus (Orr, Assor & Cairns, 1995). That is, when specific issues are constructed by a collectivity as not realistic or not important, the chance for dealing with it publicly are slim, and therefore, the probability for a shared co-construction is low. Lack of consensus and diffusion of specific themes, however, may result also from a situation of social change. When a new or a fundamentally modified idea are introduced within a society, one should expect, also, a state of diffusion and a lack of consensus. In this case, however, we should expect the formation of a new consensus in the future. It is difficult, though, to decide of whether the diffusion of the idea of “cost of peace” had to do with a mixed pace and discordant social change, following the Oslo Peace Treaty. It is equally likely that it had to do with an imminent diffusion resulting from the low relevance of the idea of cost of peace where the situation is socially represented as an intractable conflict.

The above exposition regarding the SR theory demand methodologies that assess both in-group and inter-group variations and commonalties. The Similarity Structure Analysis (SSA, Guttman, 1968, 1982) allowed us to assess both. Observed commonalties of in-group members should reflect a shared co-construction of the situation of conflict, observed individual variation in the construction should reflect diffusion and a lack of consensus regarding the situation. Observed similarities among groups in conflict may result from a similar construction of a similar situation, but it may also reflect a covert communication between the two parties, taking place by watching each other, reading the watching the other parties productions

appearing in the national and international media. The SSA of the Israeli and the Palestinian groups appeared to reflect similar principles of organization of their representational field regarding both commonalities and diffusion. The two groups differed, however, on one important aspect that of their historical perspective.

Israelis expressed a highly optimistic sense of historical continuity (brighter future), whereas Palestinians expressed a strongly pessimistic one (better past). Both, however, expressed the most extreme historical notions within the entire sample of countries. The extreme magnitude of either optimism or pessimism seems to point to their defensive nature. The opposing directions may be related to the collective self-perception of Israelis as winners and Palestinians as losers (Rouhana & Fiske, 1995).

The coping gains of this pattern of SR and the price the two national groups are paying for its defensive nature will be dealt with shortly. First, however, we proceed with some reservations regarding the findings due to some limitations of the study.

Methodological Considerations

When trying to design the present research, we were faced with the same methodological problem described by the authors of the Youth & History project (Angvik & von Borries, 1997). The research aimed to achieve two seemingly incompatible goals. In order to compare nations and cultures, a large number of questionnaires were administered to reasonably large representative samples of respondents. This goal was achieved by the construction of a closed-ended questionnaire that enabled the processing of efficient and fast coding procedures. On the other hand, in-depth interviews and open narratives seemed more appropriate methods for the assessment of the participants' representational field.

The problem was resolved by constructing a relatively large number of key themes and including a relatively large number of specific items in each theme. These items were drawn from the public and scientific discourse regarding each theme. For instance, the theme of the interest adolescents have in specific historical elements consisted of eleven varied items, including daily life, historical figures, violent conflicts, exotic cultures, nationality, democracy, family stories and so forth. The respondents were not requested to choose between these elements, but rather to indicate how interested they were in each. In this way we were able to document a wide variety of adolescents' historical ideas and interests. Clearly, the method fell short of an ideal choice: one may always find something which adolescents were interested in and which was not included in the list of items, but that was not our main concern. The most severe shortcoming of the method was suggestibility. We could safely assume that the adolescents would have reacted with a much smaller number of spontaneous answers to any question, compared to the number of items we had provided them with. We were convinced that part of the repertoire of answers included in the questionnaire were new ideas to the participants. The answers reflected what they thought, once the full repertoires of optional answers were available to them, and not what they spontaneously thought beforehand. Nevertheless, our reservations were tempered by the results. Only a small number of missing values was found, and the construct validity of the pattern of answers exposed response patterns with impressive internal validity rather than an artificial and arbitrary range of responses.

The second problem we had to face was anchored in the *non-specific* nature of the original "Youth & History" questionnaire. That is, our interest was the effects of the *specific* violent conflict of our region. For instance, one item from the theme of nationality expressed the attitude that nations are entitled to fight and declare war in order to gain their independence. Our assumption was that the Israeli and Palestinian respondents thought about the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict when they responded to the item. But we did not check this assumption, and it was not clear which country each respondent had in mind while jotting down his/her answer. This knowledge was important because the referent country in the mind of the students was not necessarily the same one. Respondents could use double standards for own and other countries. They might have been more permissive when they answered about their own political independence, and less so when that of other nations was the case on their mind. The centrality of national independence should also have been different for those who already gained it, compared to those who were dominated by others. Finally, the social representations of national independence are not simple denotative concepts. The independence of one group may be conditioned on the destruction of the autonomy of another group, and what may be called autonomy by one group may be called lack of it by another.

Our standpoint, though, was that the parts of the data that were already analyzed in the “Youth & History” project were highly meaningful. Therefore, we continued with the analysis, bearing these methodological problems in mind during the interpretative phase of the results. The Questions we included in this study, were all those that were relevant to the subject. Moreover, we are currently involved with the analysis of an Israeli replication project, which consists of both general and specific questions. Our first impressions of the preliminary findings support our assumption that at least, Israeli students had their own country in mind while responding to the questionnaires.

Our last reservation concerns the issue of how representative the samples were. We do not know of how similar the SR of high school students is to those of the adult population; and our sample did not include the ultra-orthodox section of Israeli students. More important, it represented less than 30% of the entire Palestinian age group, those who attended high school. But even with these reservations in mind, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict gained a very small attention from social psychologists. The concepts of the SR theory is well suited to deal with the issues involved in this conflict, but no research regarding the conflict implemented it, and we feel that our data is highly valuable and should be taken very seriously.

Speculations regarding Collective Coping and Defense and their Social Implications

The relative reluctance of Israelis and Palestinians to take high peace risks is quite understandable. For the European students, such risks appear abstract and unlikely to be put to the test, whereas national independence, permanent borders and the sense of insecurity seemed to be at stake in the minds of Palestinians and Israelis. The reluctance to take dangerous risks may seem an appropriate coping measure under the specific historical circumstances of the Middle East.

Nevertheless, representing war as an appropriate means for achieving independence, the lack of a shared representation regarding the cost of peace, glorification of the past, or “inflating” the future, although constructed to deal with the conflict, seem to bar the way to its productive and peaceful solution.

We want to end this paper with some speculations regarding the sources of the present pattern of the representational field, its coping merits and the price the conflicted groups are paying by holding it. The present sample of Israeli and Palestinian high school students was not lucky enough to encounter a peaceful social situation in their lives. They were born somewhere between two international wars (the October 1973 war and the Lebanon war of 1982). The Palestinian uprising and the conflict between Palestinians and Jewish settlers over the land have been the context of their upbringing. An unpublished review, performed by students of the headlines appearing in the major Israeli newspapers (including those for teenagers) between 1985 and 1995 showed that only rarely did they deal with the compromises Israel has to make

in order to achieve peace with its neighbors. The potential gains involved in such a peace was not mentioned either. Issues of war and armed conflicts pervaded the headlines even during 1992 and 1993, when peace talks between the Israeli government and the PLO were taking place. A review performed by Bar-Tal (1996) of history textbooks used in Israeli schools from 1948 up to 1995 showed a similar pattern. Unfortunately, we know of no comparable surveys of Palestinian newspapers and textbooks. The lack of organizing principles regarding peace in the public discourse probably left Israeli youngsters “disabled”. They grew up within societies that did not talk peace. Thus, an important venue of potential coping with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was blocked for them.

Why is it that these children, of nations, which sacrificed hundreds and thousands of their members to war, refrained from constructing peace ideas? Our modest contribution to an explanation of this dilemma is the speculation that they constructed a representational field, which helped them to cope successfully with the intractable violent conflict but impeded their representational field regarding peace.

Israeli high school students seem to construct their lives as a success story in spite of the context of war. Weaving precarious dreams of peace might endanger this fake euphoria. Palestinian students, for their part, delve in the fantasy of a glorious past—one that cannot be restored by negotiating compromises. Only a war that would remove Israel from the map could reinstate that past. Endeavors to consider a down-to-earth peace may endanger the nostalgic fantasy, which is probably an important source of Palestinian collective esteem. The pessimism, however, may reflect hopelessness stemming from the gruesome political and economic present, as perceived by Palestinians. In that respect, their defense is analogous to that of individual depression, where the negative prediction is experienced as something familiar, a sense of control which is, perhaps preferred to vague invalidated optimistic predictions (Seligman, 1981).

Is there a way out of this kind of collective defense, which bars those, involved from seeking peaceful solutions to the conflict? Further investigations are needed in order to replicate the present findings, and for follow-up. The SR of Israelis and Palestinians today, a number of years since the peace negotiations between the parties began, may tell us of whether and how the realistic costs and benefits of peace and war have penetrated the discourse and the representational fields of members of the two parties. We end here with a pledge for further psychological research in this direction.

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