Threat and the Majority Identity

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This study grapples with the question of majority–minority relations in conflict-ridden societies. The ethnographic study analyzed data gathered in a dialogue course conducted at an Israeli university among Jewish and Palestinian students, all citizens of the State of Israel. The authors identified 4 different and interrelated components of threat as these were perceived by the Jews participating in the dialogue: a permanent existential threat, the realistic threat from Palestinians, the threat to Jewish hegemony in the State of Israel, and the threat to the moral worth of the Jews' national identity. The authors describe each of these components, how they interrelate, and also the changes undergone by the Jewish participants in the dialogue.

Keywords: peace education, conflict resolution, national identity, identity threat, cross-cultural encounters

It's not that our identity requires a threat; it's that we have linked our identity to a sense of being threatened because we have no other way to identify ourselves.

Threat and Identity in Dominating Groups

Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (1999) identified four situations in which a sense of identity threat arises: when there is a negative categorization in contravention of the individual's wishes; when the uniqueness of the group is vague or disappears; when the stature of the individual within the group is undermined; and when the moral worth of the group is damaged, mainly in situations when dominant groups are challenged about the injustices they have perpetrated on minority groups—the more relevant situation for the discussion herein. Branscombe et al. found that the type of response to a threat to the value of the group identity depends on how strongly an individual identifies with his or her group. Those who identify more strongly with their group—some Whites, for example—respond defensively, justifying the past exploitation by their group and responding negatively toward the injured group. In contrast, people who identify less strongly as Whites, when exposed to the injustices their group has caused to the Black group, see their individual and collective self-image as diminished and feel group guilt.

Lickel, Schmader, and Barquissau (2004) distinguished in such situations between a sense of group guilt and a sense of group shame. First, a group feels collective shame when events attributed to it threaten its individual or collective self-image; later, if group members feel persuaded that the injustice was perpetrated intentionally by their group, and if they feel a connection to the group, they feel a sense of collective guilt. This distinction between shame and guilt is important because it is predictive; collective guilt will often evoke a motivation to work to remedy the injustice, whereas a sense of shame promotes an avoidance of coming to grips with the injustice.

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The developmental model of White ethnic identity as developed by Helms (1990) helps illuminate the inner processes undergone by Whites when they feel a threat to the moral worth of their identity. This model holds that Whites initially are in denial and lack awareness of their racial affiliation. The individuals' realization that the moral principles they believe in do not govern attitudes toward Blacks leads them to grapple with the moral dilemma of belonging to a privileged group. This dilemma evokes feelings of guilt, helplessness, and anxiety. The way to cope with this inner conflict is by reconnecting with White identity, including a sense of superiority over other groups, and generally alongside feelings of fear and anger toward Blacks. Then, when individuals can begin asking questions about their White identity, they can move on to the stage of redefining it in a way not based on racism or a sense of being threatened by Blacks, and they internalize it.

Threat and Prejudice

Stephan and colleagues (Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan, & Martin, 2005; Stephan & Stephan, 2000) offered a theory that links threat and prejudice; this they termed an "integrated threat theory of prejudice." They argued that threat generally leads to prejudice, and they defined four types of threat in situations of intergroup contact: realistic threat, symbolic threat, negative stereotypes, and intergroup anxiety.

Realistic threat was defined as a series of threats to the existence of the in-group, to its political and economic power, and to the physical integrity of the in-group. *Symbolic threat* is a threat to the worldview of the in-group arising from a perception of intergroup differences in morality, values, norms, beliefs, or attitudes. *Negative stereotypes* about the out-group are liable to create a sense of threat among members of the in-group. They feel threatened by the results of contact with members of the out-group. In the case of *intergroup anxiety*, people feel individually threatened by intergroup interactions because they are afraid of negative consequences to themselves from this contact with the other—feeling rejected, embarrassed, awkward, or ridiculed.

Edward Said (1978) also dealt with the connection between threat, negative images, and power. In his view, Europeans felt threatened by Islam; to overcome this threat, they created inhuman images of Islam, justifying their control of it. For the West, said Said, defusing this threat required a series of steps: First, people in the West had to become familiar with the Orient, then they went ahead and invaded it and became its masters, and then they re-created it. Islam helped define the West as its foil. This was knowledge that defined the ultimate, demonic other, the opposite of the Western experience, information obtained in service of conquest, control, and surrender.

Threat and the Negative Images of the Other in the Israeli–Palestinian Context

Research done since the 1990s on encounters between Jews and Palestinians in Israel has sought to elucidate and analyze the process itself, not just its outcomes. These studies also took into account the social–political context in which they were conducted (see, e.g., Abu-Nimer, 1999; Bar-On, 1999; Bekerman, 2002; Bekerman, 2009; Halabi, 2004; Katz & Kahanov, 1990; Maoz, Bar-On, Bekerman, & Jaber-Massarwa, 2004; Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On, & Fakhereldeen, 2002; Rouhana & Korper, 1997).

Bar-Tal and Teichman (2005) described comprehensively the psychological intergroup repertoire of Jewish Israelis vis-à-vis Arabs in the public discourse. They argued that this repertoire is extremely negative, and includes a variety of negative stereotypes, even delegitimization, evoking very negative emotions, notably fear and hate. Kelman (2001), who conducted workshops for Israeli and Palestinian academics in the United States, argued that the threat to collective identity is the central subject in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Not merely the acts of the other group, but the very identity and existence of the other are perceived as threatening to the identity of each of the groups. This situation, argues Kelman, leads to a zero-sum perspective not just about territory but about identity as well.

In a survey of research about encounters between Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel, Kupermintz and Salomon (2005) found that an individual's ability to articulate the narrative of the other side in the conflict and to change his or her perspective depends on the desire to shed traditional roles, the wish to stand in the shoes

of the other side, and the extent to which the individual is persuaded that if he or she adopts the point of view of the other in the conflict, his or her identity and sense of having justice on the individual's side will not be threatened. The connection between the Jews' sense of being threatened by Palestinians and the negative images the Jews ascribe to the Palestinians during a Jewish–Palestinian encounter in Israel is a subject that has hardly been investigated to date, and it is the focus of this study.

Method

Participants

The study focused on a group that participated in an elective course, "The Jewish–Arab Conflict as Reflected in Theory and Practice," given jointly by the School for Peace and one of the universities in Israel in 2000–2001. The participants included nine Jewish students working toward a master's degree in social psychology and social work; of these, two were men and seven were women, ranging in age from 23 to 36 years. Nine participants were Palestinian students working toward MA and BA degrees in various social sciences and in law; of these, five were men and four were women, with ages ranging from 22 to 30 years.[1]

The Course and the Method of the Group Facilitation

The purpose of this course is for students to learn about groups in conflict via the Jewish–Arab conflict. The learning process integrates experiential learning on a weekly basis, with theoretical lectures once every four sessions addressing issues of identity and conflict. Facilitation of the group process is open and done by a Jewish and a Palestinian facilitator. Participants are asked to discuss any subject of interest to them as it relates to the Jewish–Arab conflict. The discussion mainly takes place in a binational forum, with a uninational forum held every three sessions. The binational meetings are intensive and emotionally charged. Many conflicts arise; therefore, there are few processes of reflections and analysis. The purpose of the uninational meetings is to create a safe frame for group reflections on the processes they go through in the binational meetings.

There are 17 meetings, each includes 2 sessions each for 1 hr 15 min. Of those, there are 4 uninational sessions, all in the first session of the meeting. The intervention method used by the facilitators relates to the meeting as an intergroup encounter; the focus is on the relations that exist between the two identities or the two national groups that are parties to the conflict, rather than to the interpersonal relations between participants as individuals. In addition, the students participate in a dialogue at a 2-day workshop, halfway through the course, with students from a similar program at another university in Israel.

The Social and Political Context in Which the Course Was Conducted

This particular course took place during a difficult year for Jewish–Palestinian relations. It opened in October, immediately after the outbreak of the Intifada of October 2000, which resulted in the deaths of 12 Palestinian citizens of Israel, about 700 wounded, and hundreds arrested. This was perhaps the worst crisis of recent years in the relations between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel (Reinhart, 2005; Report of the Or Commission, 2003; Yeshouvi, 2001).

Procedure

We chose a qualitative interpretative method as most appropriate for studying dynamic intergroup processes dealing with identity, images of the other, and conflict (Charmaz, 1995) because it allows for a serious consideration of the interactants' perspectives and because it stresses the investigation of the nature of, and the stories associated with, a given phenomenon or process (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). A grounded theory analytical approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used, stressing the importance of discovering theories, concepts, hypothesis, and propositions directly from the data rather than from a priori

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[1] In the psychology department, there are not many Arab students; therefore, the course is offered to other departments in the university. The course organizers keep an even numbers of Jews and Palestinians, which is most important, and also try as much as possible to balance the course gender-wise.

assumptions of an existing theoretical framework. For the analysis of the data, we adopted an approach that resembles that of Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998), who proposed methods for analyzing life stories that deal with their psychological and social dimensions. In the present study, we did not deal with personal life stories of individuals, but rather with stories of the life of a Jewish–Palestinian encounter group. In our analysis, we addressed both the content and form of the discussions, including dynamic processes both conscious and unconscious, particularly relating to the power relations within the group. We also used an interpretive ethnographic approach in an attempt to uncover discursive practices (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 1999), which entailed the analysis of recorded and transcribed speech, looking closely at the use of language and the role it plays in the construction of meaning, context, and identity.

Last and given that this study was dealing with a group process as a whole, group theory concepts were integrated in the analyses of the texts. The most relevant concept adopted from group process theory was the notion of the *social unconscious* first propounded by Fromm (1962). The term refers to the areas of repression shared by most members of a society. Generally, these repressed elements involve certain contents, which a given society cannot allow its members to be aware of it if it wishes to function successfully. Likewise, Foulkes (1973) attributed great importance to the recognition of social forces and their analysis in group processes, and argued that one cannot distinguish between inner reality and external reality. His main innovation was in arguing that the group is not an amalgamation of the unconscious processes of its individual members, but rather has a shared system of unconscious meanings constructed through communications, to which each individual makes a unique contribution. According to Hopper (2001), the term *social unconscious* relates to the existence of constraints, of social and communication-related agreements of which people are unaware.

After securing the explicit agreement of all participants, we videotaped all the course sessions, gathered the written work of the students, and conducted in-depth interviews before and after the course with all Jewish participants. The first interview took place during the 2 weeks prior to the first session of the course, and the second interview with the same interviewees took place approximately 2 or 3 months after the end of the course.

All group sessions and interviews were then analyzed. A number of steps were taken to ensure internal validity, credibility, and reliability (Mason, 1996; Strauss, 1987). We monitored our first interpretive efforts through peer debriefing, paying special attention to the ways in which we as researchers allowed or did not allow preliminary coding to be influenced by our prior expectations or theoretical inclinations, and we used negative case analysis to gain confidence in the hypotheses proposed. We carefully analyzed the data, looking for patterns and thematic issues of relevance, which were then coded as to allow for further analysis. Coding data was performed in a number of stages. The first stage was an accurate transcript of all the videotaped group sessions and all interviews. After each group session and each interview were transcribed separately, open coding was conducted (Strauss, 1987) in two stages. During the first stage, coding was done on the vertical axis, examining relations and content similarities and differences between the preliminary categories defined in each group session and each interview and outlining more general categories. During the second stage, the horizontal axis was analyzed, examining vertical axis categories in depth and comparing them among all group sessions and interviews. Finally, categories were formed according to connections of similarities and differences between categories (Strauss, 1987).

Each codification, prepared independently by each of the three researchers involved, raised multiple categories (>40) that needed to be narrowed down for further analysis. A second reading of all recorded materials allowed us to systematically reduce the categories by combining like terms and eliminating redundant ones. High levels of agreement between the coders were reached after thorough discussions (Glassner & Loughlin, 1987). Thus, we arrived at four identifiable themes from which we created our final coding system. Throughout the process, intercoder reliability checks showed strong agreement between the coders and high reliability for the coding scheme. Moreover, and in line with naturalistic critical perspectives (Carspecken,

1996), the final coding scheme was further checked for validity and reliability through member checks.

Methods of documenting social interaction are never transparent: That all of them involve a human culturally biased, interpretive, and selective process has been widely acknowledged by sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists (Ochs, 1993; Raley, 2006), conversation analysts (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Psathas, 1995), and ethnographers (Raley, 2006). Being continuously aware of their limitations and maintaining an ongoing self-reflexive stance toward our work were essential to the research process (Ashmore, Myers, & Potter, 1995).

Results

In our analysis, we identified four different and interrelated components of a sense of being under threat: a permanent existential threat, connected with the identity of the persecuted Jew who has undergone a holocaust, but transferred to Arabs and Palestinians; the realistic threat from Palestinians; the threat to Jewish hegemony in the state; and the threat to the moral worth of Israeli Jews' national identity. We describe each of these components using exemplary excerpts from the many found throughout the long transcripts. We then describe the changes that the Jewish participants underwent vis-à-vis each of them. Although the various components of threat are intertwined throughout the process, we chose in describing the findings to address each component separately for the sake of clarity. This is largely an arbitrary classification, however. Bear in mind that, in reality, the components of the threat are interrelated.

The Holocaust Becomes an Eternal Experience, So the Conflict With Arabs is Seen as a Continuation of It

This was evident in statements by eight of nine Jewish participants in the preprocess interviews.

> *Sigal (J):* I am a Jew, meaning that my family went through the Holocaust and we are a persecuted people everywhere and we have to have somewhere to be. The Holocaust for me is my identity; it's almost the identity of a Holocaust survivor . . . . I was born into a reality where all kinds of nations hate me: . . . the whole world

hates us . . . . I need a strong, strong place to have as a home . . . .

In this statement, Sigal related to the present in terms of perpetual and unchanging existential danger. There is no distinction here among types of enemies or among different periods of time. This conception views time and destiny as determined. The times are different, the enemy is not the same enemy, but the sense of being in danger of extinction, this time from the Arab enemy, is alive and well.

"If you don't have a country, you'll have a Holocaust again." The existential threat appears again and again throughout the process. In the dialogue below, at the 11th session during the uninational forum, one may discern a persistent clinging to the existential threat and also, among some participants, a liberation from it.

> *Sigal:* You think they get it that we are in existential danger?
>
> *Smadar (J):* They understand; we are telling them.
>
> *Ido (J):* No, no, no, I don't think they understand.
>
> *Sigal:* This is what drives the Jewish people, the existential danger. This is totally what we are . . . .
>
> *Noa (J):* No, our group also tried hard to hang onto the question of its victimhood as something that somehow reinforces the justice of our cause . . . it isn't about existential danger. Existential danger looks to the future; victimhood looks to the past.
>
> *Ofra (J):* Victimhood is proof that we are in constant danger. Victimhood in the past reinforces the feeling that we are in constant danger. If you don't have a country, then you'll have a Holocaust again.
>
> *Sigal:* I, you are really confusing me here . . . . It's very dangerous to be a Jew. I don't know, it seems self-evident, kind of axiomatic . . . that it's dangerous, that we have been and will continue to be victims if we don't watch out for ourselves . . . . We don't want to conquer anybody . . . . We do everything to protect our existence as a Jewish people.
>
> *Noa:* At least that's what the Zionist indoctrination has made us think.

In contrast to the unity concerning the existential threat from the Arabs, which was typical in the Jewish group before the process began, here we have a disagreement within the Jewish group. Noa and Smadar looked critically at the Zionist narrative that constructs the existential threat. Despite their attempt to distinguish between past victimhood and the current threat and to put the current threat in perspective,

Sigal and Ofra blurred the distinctions between past and present and future. The danger in the past is tied to the current danger, which is constant. In their view, if the Jews do not have a country, there is a chance that the Holocaust will recur, and this time evidently perpetrated by the Arabs. The inhuman image of Arabs, expressed throughout the process in endless statements made by the Jewish participants while expressing their conviction that Arabs do not only identify with terrorism but are ever ready to join it, creates the existential threat, and the existential threat amplified in the imagination was what enabled them at that moment to present the occupation and control by their group as justified.

The radical image of Arabs and Palestinians was raised, and attributed to the Palestinian group, very early in the process:

> *Ido (J):* From the start, really from the first meeting, they said, "We are Palestinians" and to me it felt subversive . . . . I said how could [you] be Palestinian. Palestinians are at war with us . . . . When they said "Palestinian," I heard "terrorist."

Later in the process in the sixth binational meeting, the Jews blamed the Palestinians for supporting terror and even willing to join terror, although the Palestinian group presented a different point of view more complex:

> *Nur (P):* You think that we are part of it?
>
> *Ido:* That it wouldn't bother you to be part of it. Not just that you support it, but that you would plan terror attacks.
>
> *Abeer (P):* The army also harms civilians, and you were also in the army.
>
> *Walid (P):* No, she meant that there is something reciprocal. Let's say that a state, let's say like Israel, that bombards Gaza in the middle of the night, this is not called a terror attack even though everyone there relates to it as a terror attack. I definitely think that it's not justified to hurt any side if they are innocent civilians, let's say he blows himself up on a bus or that a state like Israel bombards.
>
> *Abeer:* Everyone has different means.
>
> *Ido:* Who is what, this is not my question. Am I sitting with people who could plan terror attacks?
>
> *Walid:* He (Ido) already thinks that we are in favor, and could we also translate this being in favor into something active in terms of planning.
>
> *Nur:* I condemn, in every way, any form of terrorism involving killing innocent civilians . . . . But I can't ignore what is happening there in the territories and in

Gaza when the Israeli army is attacking them all the time . . . .

> *Sigal:* I want to say that I do not intend to sit in the same room with people who justify attacks on civilians, in no situation does that seem to me something that I have to do.

Although the Palestinian group presented a complex position concerning the terror attacks, a position that both condemns the killing of civilians and explains the context in which this killing is happening—as a tool of the weak, and also notes that the army also kills civilians—the Jewish group hangs on to the image of the Palestinians as supporters of terror. The image of the Palestinians as inhumane is stronger than what the Palestinian group is trying to say in the encounter.

An image of Arabs as extremist or even terrorist existed prior to the process and was reinforced continuously by the Jewish group for over more than half the process. Despite repeated and varied attempts by the Palestinian group to shed this radical image and persuade the Jews that they are not extremists, the Jews kept returning to and even intensifying it. For more details on the struggle over who is more human, see Sonnenschein, Bekerman, and Horenczyk (in press).

The Realistic Threat Posed by Palestinians and Arabs

Among the threats cited by the Jewish participants in the group were several involving the way the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians manifests itself on a daily basis. In the group, people spoke about a fear of riding buses or going to restaurants because of suicide bombings. One woman had lost her cousin in a terror attack, and some of the participants lived in cities where there had been bombings that same year. One participant had traumatic childhood memories of rockets being fired at his town.

We did not extend the time spent discussing realistic threats because they are the best known and most discussed in Israeli society. The problem is that, too often, the discourse typically does not distinguish between the various categories of threat; the sense of threat grounded in reality colors the entire spectrum, and everything acquires the aspect of an existential danger.

The Threat to Hegemony

The sense of a threat to Jewish national hegemony is the hardest one to alter, and the Jewish group grappled with this during an extended process with the Palestinian group. We examine three ways in which this subject came up in the group: (a) as the subject of debate about the threat of losing Jewish hegemony; (b) in the readiness of the Jews for equality on the dynamic process level, in terms of the power relations between the groups; and (c) in the initial attitudes of participants concerning the definition of the state, as they emerged in the preinterviews and after-course interviews.

The subject of debate about the threat of loosing Jewish hegemony. In the substance of the debate, it was difficult for the Jews to give up Jewish hegemony in the state, whether national or cultural. In the 11th session, during the uninational meeting, when the participants were asked by the facilitator what they were afraid to concede in the negotiations over the definition of the state, the following dialogue developed:

> *Ido:* But I think that my fear . . . is a fear of disappearing. It's a fear that in another 50 years, there will be no one here . . . there will be a Holocaust again.
>
> *Noa:* But it's not our physical survival here that we have always been trying to rely on . . . . I do think that I'm negotiating with myself about this question of identity and not about my physical survival, and they are two different things.
>
> *Ido:* What would happen if there were a different identity; if we take away the aspect of the threat and we open the door to thinking about a changing identity, and we don't unite around the combative, victimized Judaism? . . . How would a binational state look, one where Arabs also rule and there are Arab cultural symbols here? . . . For me, it really makes me despair.

Noa distinguished here between physical survival—the existential threat that the group is trying to hang on to—and the national–cultural character of the state. Ido understood, on the one hand, that because the Jews are captives of an identity grounded in threat and victimhood, there can be no negotiating around these issues. The threat looming so large in the national identity was impeding an examination of, and buffering individuals against, new options. And yet he tried to look at additional options, and took fright. Admitting the Palestinians into full and equal partnership from a national and cultural standpoint would feel like another Holocaust, a

response promoted by the less than human images of Arabs that the Jews harbored. The Jews were perceived as masters of the country, and the entry of the Arabs, in a national and cultural sense, as equals was not yet accepted at this point.

The group moved on from there to discuss the *cultural identity* of the state:

> *Noa:* This is culture.
>
> *Ido:* A completely different culture will develop; the Jews and the Arabs will be—
>
> *Noa:* The culture is ours.
>
> *Ido:* Together, there will be a state here. What will it be called?
>
> *Noa:* Like, no more Hanoch Levin.[2]
>
> *Smadar:* Why not? Certainly, Hanoch Levin.
>
> *Ido:* There will, there will, but Jews won't be able to come here. It won't belong to the Jews, it will belong to some other people too.

Loss of ownership over the state was frightening to the Jewish participants. They wondered how, if they were to lose their ownership, the cultural character of the state would change; they feared that there would be no place for their culture, evidently a Western, secular, critical, and perhaps Ashkenazi culture, as personified by Hanoch Levin in this instance. They wondered if a Hanoch Levin could create plays in a state with a cultural character that is not Jewish–Israeli. The new character, whose nature was unclear as yet, evidently Arab, would cause them to leave, to emigrate. There was no option here for a cultural negotiation or for a more equal status for the respective cultures. The suppression of Arab culture in the Jewish state was translated in the imagination to a situation even more extreme in reverse should the power relationship change. Their view was that, not only would their culture be suppressed, it would have no right to exist.

The readiness of the Jews for equality on the dynamic process level. Assertive Palestinians were perceived as an existential threat. The next

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[2] Hanoch Levin (1943–1999) is one of Israel's foremost playwrights. Many of his plays (56 in all) were satires, trenchantly critical of Israeli society, articulated in his special language and unique staging. At first, his works provoked sharp criticism, but as time went on, his creativity was lauded and he won many awards. During his lifetime, 33 of his plays were staged in Israeli theaters.

dialogue, between Ayelet and Noor, from the eighth meeting, demonstrates the pattern of response by the Jewish participants to changes in the relative power positions, in practice, between the two groups in the process. Ayelet explained to Noor that outside the workshop, she did want to give rights to Arabs and to defend them, but within the room she felt very bad and was frustrated because she felt pushed into a corner. Noor responded:

> *Noor:* Maybe the power of the Arab group here, the Palestinian group, [is] to bring things, like, to the same level, and you feel that there's a group here that has rights . . . . Maybe you have that sense of a threat.

> *Ayelet (J):* But on the outside, I want very much to give rights to the Arab group. But I feel that you [the Palestinians] don't give me rights; let's say I feel that, if it were the other way around and you were the ones ruling, you would kill us, like.

> *Walid:* Why do you think you're more human? Do you feel you are more human?

> *Ayelet:* I don't feel you are acting humanely toward me.

> *Noor:* I think that if you were on the outside, in the same circumstances, the same situation . . . [where] we have power and we are expressing our wishes and battling for our rights, you would behave the same way there too.

This dialogue illuminates the connection between the threat, the dehumanization, and the power relationship. The association that came to mind for Ayelet was that, were the Palestinians in reality strong like the Palestinians in this group, they would kill the Jews or kick them out of the country. A strong, assertive Palestinian group evoked images of massacre. The Palestinian's strength, manifested in assertive speech, the expression of anger, and equality in the process from the standpoint of the power relationship in the room, connected with the existential threat and made the Jews feel weak. Via the inhuman images of Arabs harbored by the Jews, the threat was associated with killing and annihilation. The next step was the conclusion that the (strong) Palestinian group in the room was inhuman. Ayelet constructed her humanity via the contrast with the inhumanity of the Palestinian group. Perhaps this was her attempt to save herself from the distressing reflection of her own people as immoral (see below), and in fact she did come to seem more human in her own eyes.

The expertise and articulateness of the Palestinians in the room, evoking a sense of inferiority in the (Jewish) listeners, were also perceived as an existential threat. Ayelet, in an interview after the course, told of her feelings when the Palestinians analyzed what was happening to the Jews in the group:

> *Ayelet:* It's not pleasant to feel inferior, when they are analyzing you, overall it really gives a feeling of being less. It sounds funny but I felt that my life was threatened during those segments. I mean, it connects with the feeling from before, the threat of their wanting to kill me . . . as if showing me the outside, that if they are so strong, they will start a war and kill us . . . .

The sense of inferiority, alongside the knowledge demonstrated by the Arabs and their analysis of the Jews' experience, connected with what would happen in reality if the balance of power were to shift and the Jews were to lose their "intellectual and cultural superiority." This loss was perceived in the group as more threatening than a war, and was experienced as an existential threat.

The attitudes of the Jewish participants about preserving Jewish hegemony in the country, prior to the process. In the interviews prior to the encounter process, seven of the nine Jewish participants were completely unaware of a problem between the majority and the minority in Israel. The other two participants mentioned that the definition of the state as a Jewish state represented a problem. Seven of the interviewees saw the main problem as being with the Palestinians from the territories, and believed that if this problem were to be resolved, it would influence Palestinians inside Israel. The same interviewees said that inequality must be resolved on the level of funding, of community infrastructures, but not structurally on the national level, which determines who will have power in this country.

> *Ronen (J):* The desirable solution in my view, in very general terms, looks like coexistence with the Arabs of Israel and nearly total equality . . . [as] citizens of Israel, of course . . . . But I would really want them to see themselves as part of this state as it is, accept this fact that the state of Israel exists and will exist as a Jewish state of course.

The Threat to the Moral Worth of Their Identity

This section deals with the fourth type of threat we identified: the threat to the moral

worth of the national identity. The developmental model of White ethnic identity developed by Helms (1990), presented in the introduction to this article, helps us understand the responses of the Jewish group herein, which demonstrated its perception of a threat to the moral worth of its identity. The following subsection reviews the inner processes (both individual and intragroup, generally not revealed in front of the Palestinians) constructing the identity of the Jewish group.

Patterns of denial and defensiveness and saving face. It was hard for the Jewish group when they heard, at the first session, the Arabs' account of innocent Palestinian citizens killed by Israeli police during the upheavals of October 2000—nearly concurrent with the start of the course. The Jewish group responded with defensiveness, denial, and an attempt to justify the motivations of the police in order to save face morally on behalf of Jewish society.

> *Sigal:* If they are coming to kill you, I justify it.
>
> *Hatem (P):* One policeman was injured; what policeman was injured?
>
> *Sigal:* Self-defense; it's so simple.
>
> *Hatem:* So can you simply explain to me the results? Do they seem balanced? Thirteen people?
>
> *Sigal:* It isn't balanced, I don't think it's okay that this happened, and it upsets me, too. You can't persuade me that our police and soldiers just showed up and shot Arabs [for no reason], you can't persuade me . . . .

Note how the violent image of the Palestinian demonstrations temporarily resolved the inward dilemma of the Jewish participants, and eased the pain of their group's loss of the moral high ground. On the one hand, they do not favor killing people, and they perceived themselves and their people as moral. On the other hand, people were killed, so the way out was to believe that the Arab demonstrators behaved violently or with the intention to kill and to explain the shooting by the police as self-defense.

The disintegration phase. Once the Palestinians in the encounter raised examples of the discrimination and oppression they have experienced in Israel, the injustices of the 1948 expulsion, the killing of Palestinians in the territories, there was confusion in the Jewish group. We can see that the Jewish participants began to sense a threat to the moral worth of their identity. This is where they entered the second stage of constructing their identity as the majority, what Helms (1990) calls *the disintegration phase*, during which individuals begin to recognize that they are members of a majority group and to realize that they derive advantages, that they profit thereby. These dilemmas evoked feelings of guilt, frustration, and helplessness, all characteristic of this stage. The sharing of guilt feelings earlier in the process generally happened in the uninational forum, not in front of the Palestinian group, to avoid an appearance of weakness.

> *Noa:* This makes us awfully frustrated because we were attacked at the beginning, and our feelings were not given legitimacy. And we felt terribly guilty. And that's what we kept feeling, and in the end we had no way to fix the situation. We were blamed and our hands were tied.

Feelings of group guilt and shame arose during the process at various stages and their development can be identified. At this early phase of the process, at the peak of the struggle over their humanity, the guilt feelings were very distressing to the Jewish group participants. They felt that the information presented by the Palestinian group contradicted their positive moral self-image and they felt that their self-image was threatened.

Discovering such things about one's own people is a difficult experience. Thus, this stage of the process is characterized by internal emotional turmoil, featuring confusion, uneasiness, and pangs of conscience. Self-respect is eroded as the collective moral self-image deteriorates. The statement Ronen made during the post-course interview is indicative and represents all Jewish participants:

> *Ronen:* Frustration is a powerful feeling. I would say, I don't know what to call this—pangs of conscience? Thinking about this as you get into bed and it's on your mind . . . and why are things this way? And how should things have been different? And we're not such innocent, good . . . . Like, it's uncomfortable, like it was more comfortable to be in that place of, like, everything is sort of clear.

The participants were confused because their traditional identity was questioned. The way things were before was much easier for them: They did not worry about these dilemmas, things were clear, the group's traditional identity was morally worthy, and it had justice more clearly on its side.

The next phase was a strong identification with their national Jewish Israeli identity. Participants expressed strong identification with their national identity:

> *Sigal:* And here let's say I feel that way. I have never felt more Jewish and Israeli than I do in this group. And really, most of the things I think here are tied to that.

In fact, through the encounter with the national identity of the other, Sigal discovered national components of her own identity that she hitherto had denied. Most of the Jewish participants experienced such a phase during their extended encounter with the Palestinian group.

At this stage, the demand to close ranks intensified. The Jews felt themselves a weak, threatened minority, and hence that they ought to unite. The split in the Jewish group bothered some of its members; they felt that this weakened them vis-à-vis the Palestinians. In the uninational forum at the third encounter, each national group gathered in a separate room with the facilitator from its own national group.

> *Ayelet:* I have a problem with our group.
>
> *Noa:* We aren't showing solidarity with people.
>
> *Ayelet:* Their big advantage is that they are really very together, more or less . . . . But anyhow, with no connection to them, I have a problem with our group [laughs], um, that's it, so really I will let both of you [Noa and Smadar], you can go move to their room, that's one thing [laughter], the other thing is that people really are not speaking out and are not really committing themselves.
>
> *Noa:* But Ayele, . . . it's hard for me to be in solidarity with us.
>
> *Ayelet:* It's really hard when half of our group is thinking like them [the Arabs].
>
> *Ofra:* But she isn't thinking like them. I'm sure that Noa also doesn't want there to be a Palestinian state here, all the way to the sea.

Throughout the meeting, Noa and Smadar were speaking more critically about Israeli society and its behavior toward the minority. Their voice was described as "an Arab voice"; in other words, the boundaries of the Jewish discourse were delineated. This was said half in jest, but we can also see here an attempt to define the boundaries of what constitutes legitimate national discourse.

The Jews' desire to win Arab approval of their humane and moral qualities remains un-

fulfilled, and is projected back onto the Arabs and interpreted as personal hatred. Other patterns of moral face-saving on the part of the Jewish group were characterized by paternalism. In the next discussion in the uninational forum in the sixth meeting, Noa described the Jewish–Arab conflict as a conflict between an abusive father and an abused child.

> *Noa:* They feel a desire to belong here and receive the rights of a citizen. They feel discriminated against because in an analogous way . . . a minority that feels oppressed is like a child who feels oppressed by his parents and still hopes to receive their love.

This image of the father and child was another way of coping with the threat they felt to the moral worth of their identity. The image posited a power relationship in which the Jews had an advantage (father vs. child—an abusive father, true; but still a father).

And in the binational forum at that same session:

> *Noa:* Last week after our meeting, I went to a lecture on the subject of the targeted assassinations and I sat there and I just got really emotional. I had all the desire in the world to get up and do something out of identification with the Palestinian side . . . . And now I come here and they hate me—me, Noa. Here, I really feel personal loathing from the Arab group here [very upset].

The Jewish participants were very frustrated because the Palestinian participants did not see their humanity; the Palestinians treated them as part of the oppressive Jewish majority, and this they found even more frustrating after they had changed in the encounter and taken steps to identify with the Palestinian side. The Jews' desire to earn the Arabs' good opinion of their moral worth and humanity, when it was not fulfilled, was projected onto the Arabs and reinterpreted as personal hatred.

Changes in Participants' Sense of an Existential Threat

In this and the following sections, we focus on the processes of change undergone by the four types of threat identified in the first part of the article.

Developing awareness of the roles played by the sense of existential threat in the national identity. Gradually during the course, and especially after the weekend workshop at which the Jewish

participants took ownership of their power, the sense of the Holocaust-related historical existential threat diminished and transmuted into a fear of the Arabs, but it did not entirely disappear. As the course went on, the participants achieved increasing awareness of the central place that this sense of threat has had in their national identity, of the uses made of it in various situations, and of the patterns in the way it is invoked.

Development of an awareness of the ease with which the existential threat is raised and the justification it offers for aggression toward the Palestinians.

> *Ido:* There is an external threat. We are not completely making this up, but I noticed . . . that I have not been able to really listen to them I was so afraid that [what they were saying] wasn't what they really meant, that they meant something else. And then, yes, when someone said that certain phrase, the state of all its citizens or Greater Palestine, it merges with the overall threat that really it is impossible to believe them and impossible to develop some kind of relationship of trust with other people who are more moderate . . . . There is a threat but we give it power and in places where there is no threat we, maybe let's say there is a threat like this [gestures to indicate something very small], in some places we tie together everything into something all-encompassing . . . . And after we amplify the threat, we say, well okay, we have to be aggressive, we have to defend ourselves.

Ido's statement in the interview after the course bears witness to his transition from someone who behaved as if threatened to someone with an awareness of how the threat is inflated and how that process leads to aggression toward the Palestinians. For the Jews, this pattern of empowering the threat was an obstacle to building trust with the Palestinians and to making precise distinctions. A minor catalyst was inflated to major proportions until an aggressive stance toward the Palestinians seemed the only option. The first step in neutralizing this vicious circle was the awareness that participants developed of the role played by the threat in their Jewish–Israeli identity.

Awareness of the threat as a prop to unity, a way of defining identity and a justification for aggression. This emerged clearly in a post-course interview among all interviewees:

> *Dalia (J):* The threat defines for you who you are. This is comfortable to some extent, and when you take it away, you don't know what to do . . . . Something else has to be put together instead, and that's hard. You have to start over and create new values and beliefs.

For these Israeli Jews, the threat defined who they are. This is the glue that held them together and united them in their Jewish–Israeli identity versus their common enemy and justified aggression toward that enemy. Without the threat, there was a vacuum in the national identity—a difficult situation because it demanded that something new be created instead.

Halfway through the course, Ido offered a metaphor for the situation in a paper he had written. This metaphor embodied the circular trap for an Israeli Jew in needing this threat as part of his national identity:

> *Ido (in writing):* From all my experience so far, it seems to me now that I have talked and behaved in extreme ways in order to more sharply define this threat. My role as a rightist fueled the creation of aggression and more extremist positions on both sides. Why did I behave that way? Maybe because the place where we come together when we are upset and threatened is experienced by us in a relative sense as more secure. I imagine this place as a fortress. A fortress where everyone inside is identified unequivocally as standing with me, and together we can cope with the threat from the outside. The worse the external threat becomes, the more intense our sense of internal unity along with the sense of belonging and of my own identity. So, the fortress provides an identity: . . . Will my Jewish identity and my physical existence be preserved if I stop fighting?

Ido portrayed here the circularity in the need of the Jewish–Israeli group to embrace the existential threat so as to ground and defend its identity. The Jewish Israelis, feeling threatened, closed ranks and became aggressive toward the external threat (in this case, the Palestinians).

Summing up. Evidently, the continuing existential threat associated with the Holocaust and transferred to the Arabs remained present in the group, although it diminished progressively as the group came to understand its power. Meanwhile, the participants became aware of the uses made of the threat and of its place in the Israeli–Jewish identity. This enhanced awareness is the first substantive stage in dismantling the need for the existential threat.

Changes in Participants' Sense of a Realistic Threat

The Jewish participants did not stop being afraid to get on a bus because of fears of terrorism, but their overall attitude about terror attacks changed. They could understand the

context in which such attacks occur, a context of ongoing occupation, rather than seeing them as part of Arab culture, as Ayelet said in the interview after the course:

> *Ayelet:* Now their culture does not seem as different from ours. I mean they are basically students like we are, and we all take exams. Before, I thought it was this culture like the Bedouin. What stands out more for me is the situation they are in as opposed to the situation we are in, and not the cultural markers, but that they are in a situation of the minority, of occupation, of a very hard daily reality . . . .

Changes in the Sense of a Threat to Jewish Hegemony in the State

In the postcourse interviews, there was a change in the desire to preserve Jewish hegemony in the state. Major differences emerged between the material from the two pre- and postinterviews. As noted, in the precourse interviews, most of the participants thought that the discrimination against Arabs should be redressed on condition that the Arabs accept the State of Israel as a Jewish state. In the interviews after the course, a different and surprising picture emerged. All nine interviewees explicitly gave voice to an awareness of the problematical nature of the contradiction between a democratic state and a Jewish state. The issue was conspicuous. When the participants were asked what they considered a desirable solution, five of them conveyed an express willingness for a solution involving more equitable division of power, which amounts to relinquishing the definition of the state as a Jewish state.

> *Ronen:* I discovered that, on the one hand, I am very ready to give up the things connected with my identity, symbols, the desire that this connection between the state and the people, that this state is only mine. Before that, it was very clear to me that this state is mine and only mine and something here moved a little . . . .

When the group identity and the identity of the state were separated and they no longer saw the two areas as identical, the same five participants were willing to relinquish hegemonic status and live in a state of all its citizens with a cultural character that is not Jewish, but rather is determined by the two sides. Two other participants hesitated between preserving the Jewish state or inclusion of the Palestinians as equal citizens.

> *Noa:* It's hard for me to give up the feeling that this is my home and only mine, I mean, something very

childish, kind of like only I am entitled to this. It's a sign of maturity to give that up . . . . I think I'm in a process that is progressing more and more in the direction of really including the Palestinians in this country.

The dilemma for the two participants who hesitated is internal: between the principles and values they believe in and the desire to be sole masters of the state. Their motivations are not hidden. This state of uncertainty is indicative of the process that the Jewish participants in the course have undergone.

The two other participants who expressed their desire to preserve the Jewishness of the state also suggested substantive changes in it, mainly from the standpoint of giving more rights to the Palestinian minority in Israel.

> *Sigal:* I think that they should get like the status of a national minority and all the rights . . . . Not to turn them into Israeli Jews. They should have representation in everything; have their own autonomy.

Summing up. The picture that emerges here is clearly a complex one, in terms of the response to the threat to the Jewish hegemony in the state. On the level of behavior, on the level of the balance of power, an assertive Palestinian group evoked images of annihilation and this caused the Jewish group to cling to its power. On the level of solutions, we see that there was a shift among the Jewish participants in the direction of choosing a more egalitarian civil solution.

Change Regarding the Threat to the Moral Worth of an Identity

Abandoning the discourse of victimhood and face-saving and taking responsibility. As the process continued, all Jewish participants encountered a dilemma: How to respond to things that uplift the Palestinian group—accept them, or be defensive? This emerged in the paper that Ofra wrote halfway through the course:

> *Ofra (in writing):* Subsequently, more indecision is created about how I should respond to the new revelations. On the one hand, there was a desire to shout, against what was said, to deny, since agreeing with those things would require confessing guilt. Members of the Arab group presented a difficult picture and agreeing to see myself in that mirror was painful . . . as part of the Jewish people would prefer not to see, and to a great extent before these meetings I actually did not see. It was possible to take more extreme positions in opposition. At the same time, they evoked empathy

and reality, the meetings themselves did not permit me to totally deny the things that were said . . . to ignore the injustice. So the option of taking even more extreme positions was abandoned by me and I was left with the not simple choice of attempting to show empathy and identify insofar as possible.

It turned out that the perseverance of the Palestinians in articulating the difficult reality of the majority's attitude toward the minority brought the Jewish participants to a feeling of empathy and identification with the minority, which overcame the defensiveness or denial that had emerged initially. The Jewish participants now moved beyond the stage of defensiveness, denial, and victimhood, and gradually assumed responsibility for the situation.

As they freed themselves somewhat from the sense of threat and recognized their own power, the Jewish participants felt a kind of emptiness in their national identity, a vacuum that had to be filled with new content. The participants then engaged in a search for a new and positive description of Jewish–Israeli identity that did not rely on superiority or racism. The focus was not on changing the Palestinians but rather on changing the Jews. We try to describe different aspects of this sometimes painful process as they emerged in the interviews and during the course, mainly in the uninational meetings.

Internalizing the guilt.   The reality seen in the mirror that the Palestinians presented was so powerful that it overwhelmed the Jews. They were frustrated by their inability to deal with this and to repair the distortions. In the 11th uninational meeting, the group together with the facilitator tried to understand this complexity:

> *Ido:* They have very, very tough accusations that I sit and think about afterward . . . it's not really clear to me how much I'm really able to look in the mirror. To say we, I, not "someone," did this to them . . . that's not easy.

> *Smadar:* I feel like there is some kind of feeling that what is hard is to be within this experience and this process of internalizing. That is, there are two possible responses: either to say it is really us, we are the murderers . . . . And the other response is that it isn't us at all, and they are awful and terrible and like that.

Here, the participants are talking very openly about the main difficulty that emerges when they take responsibility for their power and stop evading the blame. The main difficulty is to internalize the blame, meaning accept it or at least some of it, and take responsibility for the

injustices done to the Palestinians; not to lash out or be defensive, as they initially did, not to just pay lip service to accepting what the Palestinians say, not to defend their honor, but really to accept responsibility, even personal responsibility, for the immoral aspects of what their group has done to the other group, and thereafter to stay in that uncomfortable place. We see here a process of transformation undergone by the Jewish group, from a place of defensiveness to one of internalization, more accepting, more hesitant, and more responsible.

Acknowledging the injustice.   In prior stages, the sense of being threatened was blocking the ability to acknowledge the injustice. Recognizing the fact that they have been living at someone else's expense creates a feeling so terrible that the resolution taken is to jump to the conclusion that, if they were to confess to injustice, they would negate their right to exist here. This immediate link to a negation of their right to exist gets in the way of their absorbing that sense of injustice that the Palestinians are raising. The ability to make more of a distinction in this regard came later on.

> *Ronen:* Today I am ready to hear because I see that this does not hold up against that. As soon as you take . . . all kinds of guilt, it's a lot harder for you to keep on justifying your place. But I think that on the individual level, this is some kind of growing up, that you know that you can be guilty, not perfect, and still you can stick to your position, or give some different shades to your position. But that doesn't mean that your whole position breaks down . . . that the Jewish people had done bad things to the Palestinian people doesn't necessary mean that there is no justification to my existence here.

The distinction Ronen made between acknowledging injustice and the Jews' right to exist in Israel was important to the Jewish group. It liberated them to acknowledge the injustice without worrying that this acknowledgment would destroy the justification for their existence in Israel. In their postprocess interviews, all the participants in the group talked about acknowledging the injustice.

> *Ido:* I really did not come there with a feeling that we perpetrated an injustice on them. I came with the feeling that today, some solution has to be found, but not based on any injustice we had done to them. I got in touch with the historical manipulation we do on ourselves, conveying certain half-truths and not all the information. We always were the victims. This acknowledgment let me understand that I have historically some kind of responsibility toward the Palestin-

ian people . . . . It wasn't easy for me to understand this, to accept this . . . [silence]; but it horrifies me on the level that I understood where they are at, and what we as Jews did . . . . I feel that until then, until the weekend, I didn't, like, didn't really get it, I didn't really absorb this, I didn't really let myself take it in.

We see that the Palestinians' persistence in bringing up the injustice done to them finally was bearing fruit. At a midyear workshop at Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam, when the Jewish group clearly acknowledged its power, the group felt less threatened by the Palestinian group and was able to free a space in which to admit that Israeli Jews had committed an injustice against the Palestinians.

We view this process as the fundamental dynamic of the workshop and this milestone as perhaps the most important turning point for the Jewish participants. Acknowledging the injustice and taking responsibility for it was experienced as a painful and difficult process, yet at the same time it somewhat resolved the uneasiness about the threat to the moral worth of the group identity. The ability to see things from the Palestinian point of view helped the Jewish participants to cope with their fears and with the feeling of being threatened, and especially helped them take back their own humanity.

> *Miri (J):* And I think that this is part of some idea that really did change, and everything I see now, there's the side of looking through their eyes. Every time now on the news, something that is around every day, every time I listen this is part of how things are perceived . . . . It's much better for me, because it's also really less threatening . . . . I'm a slightly better human being.

The meaning of taking responsibility. Taking responsibility includes internalizing, nurturing, and actualizing the redefinition of the majority group identity in the Israeli reality once it has been emptied of the sense of being under threat. This is about the ability to accept responsibility for the injustice without getting defensive or attempting to put a better face on things; to be real, to acknowledge its power in the asymmetrical relationship; to stop feeling superior and pretending to be liberal, above the fray; to decide to act and stop sitting there wringing one's hands—these are what typify the redefinition of the majority group identity. These would seem to be the new content, values, and beliefs that all Jewish participants used to reconstruct their national identity.

Noa: This gives me a responsibility, first of all, first of all certainly not to present myself as weak, as a manipulation. This places a responsibility on me to influence, to be more political, to go to more demonstrations, to go to activities of all kinds of . . . . And I feel easier with myself now, it's comfortable for me to accept responsibility directly, in a mature way . . . . I could stop stepping on you and say that I wasn't stepping on you at all, that's the worst.

Summing up. One can argue that, among the types of threat we have mentioned, the threat to the moral worth of the national group identity is the area in which the Jewish group discovered a route to serious change. The group used this route to reorient its identity in a mature, positive direction that no longer relied on the sense of threat or on racism.

Discussion

The findings in this study point to the central role of a sense of threat in the construction of the national identity of the majority Jewish–Israeli group. Feelings of being threatened fill the Jewish–Israeli identity and provide a feeling of unity vis-à-vis the common enemy. The encounter with the other, as we have seen in this case, was able to erode something of the Jewish participants' reliance, in their national identity, on a sense of a common threat. The participants were able to reexamine the function of threat in their national identity in terms of their relationship with the minority group.

The Holocaust and persecution made up a central and significant component in the national identity of the Jewish participants and were mentioned repeatedly in the precourse interviews. In fact, the persistent appearance of the existential threat during the dialogue and the apprehension that new options for defining the state would amount to a new holocaust point to the success of a broad existing process of education and indoctrination, a process that has constructed the Holocaust and the existential threat as key components of the identity of Jewish Israelis, and has transferred all that to the conflict with the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Bekerman & Zembylas, in press; Zafran & Bar-Tal, 2004; Zartal, 2002; Zimmerman, 2002).

The processes that empowered the threat also prevented the Jews in this study from seeing the vulnerability of the Palestinians, and developing

trust in Palestinians, becoming able to listen to them, to make distinctions, and to examine new alternatives.

A strong and assertive Palestinian group was experienced by the Jews as an existential threat and evoked the specter of massacre, aided by inhuman images of what Palestinians were like. This aligned with the Jewish participants' fears of losing Jewish hegemony in the country because, as they saw it, if the Palestinians were to become more powerful than the Jews, as seemed to be happening in the group, the Palestinians would gain control and would try to exterminate the Jews. When members of a minority group behave assertively, often members of the majority group feel threatened and respond defensively and aggressively (Simon, Aufderheide, & Kampmeier, 2003).

What comes first? Is the threat the reason for the prejudice, or does the prejudice foster, or even sometimes create, the threat? Stephan et al. (2005) have argued that the threat in its various aspects generally causes the prejudices to evolve. In the present case, we have seen that the phenomenon in the Jewish–Israeli group is bidirectional. Sometimes indeed the threat evokes harsh images of Arabs, but often the harsh and inhuman images of Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular feed the sense of threat, amplifying it, and sometimes even *creating* the sense of threat.

Among the various threats, the Jewish group evidently had the most difficulty in liberating itself from the threat to Jewish hegemony in the state. When the Jewish group's national identity and the identity of the state itself were perceived as identical, the Jewish participants felt that if they lose Jewish hegemony in the state, they lose their own identity and their national existence, to the point where losing Jewish identity of the state is perceived as another Holocaust. The difficulty in relinquishing Jewish hegemony in the country was expressed mainly in the conception that there is a complete overlap between national (Jewish–Israeli) identity and the identity of the state itself. The problem with this perfect overlap is that it excludes Palestinian citizens of the country from any partnership in it, and gives the Jewish participants the feeling of being the privileged group, the masters of the country.

The Palestinian group tried to differentiate between the collective national group identity of the Jews and the identity of the State of Israel, arguing that the problem is with the Zionist definition of the state and not with the Jewish Israelis. Eventually, the Jews were able to differentiate between acknowledging the injustice done to the Palestinians and a nullification of any justification for their own existence in this land. These two distinctions helped ease the sense of threat evoked by the idea of the loss of Jewish hegemony in the state. Later still, the Jewish participants were able to differentiate between their national Jewish–Israeli identity and the identity of the state.

We have seen that on the level of process, the experience of equality was very fragile. When the Palestinian participants accumulated enough power in the process to express themselves assertively, it was perceived as an existential threat; meanwhile, on the level of the Jewish participants' conceptions, there was a major change between their starting point and where they were when the course ended. At the outset, it was clear to most of the Jewish participants that they needed to preserve the status quo regarding the definition of the state as a Jewish state, and they did not entirely relinquish this position during the dialogue course. Yet, when the course was over, most of these same Jewish participants expressed the view that the solution lies in the direction of a state of all its citizens.

One possible explanation for this divergence may be the fact that during the course itself, when confronted with an assertive Palestinian group, the Jewish group felt impelled to preserve its power, to compete for it, and in this situation there was little willingness to make concessions on the spot or to be open to changes. Concession was understood as a gift they did not wish to bestow. But evidently, inwardly, there was a change taking place in the participants' thinking, and this was expressed in the interviews after the course ended at a remove of 2 months from the group process itself.

This change should not be slighted because, on the macro level, the situation is very different. The state, its institutions, and its values express very well the national interests and national–cultural mood of the Jewish majority; as a consequence, the state continues to relegate the Arab minority to the margins of citizenship (Rabinowitz, Yiftahel, & Ghanem, 2001). In that light, the changes in outlook and attitudes

among the Jewish participants in the group studied here are all the more notable.

On the cultural plane, the encounter with an assertive Palestinian group—protesting the injustices done to it, but also knowledgeable, smart, and articulate—created a problem and a sense of threat to the boundaries of the cultural identity of the Jews in the group. The smart, articulate Palestinians threatened the Jews' image of themselves as culturally superior. Hence, the dismissal of Arab culture in the Jewish state translates, in the minds of the Jewish participants, into a much worse situation should the balance of power be reversed. The fear was not just that Jewish culture would be dismissed, but that the Jews would have no right to exist here. The assumption was that they would prefer to emigrate rather than remain in a society with an Arab, or mixed, cultural character. This condescending approach makes cultural questions nonnegotiable. One cause of this situation may be a misleading mixture of paradigms (Shochat, 2001). The image of articulate and knowledgeable Palestinians disturbs the commonly found dichotomy in Israeli discourse between "us" (the Jews) and "them" (the primitives, the less advanced). The Palestinians' new image as smart and outspoken disrupts the boundaries of cultural identity as currently drawn in the Israeli discourse, and hence awakens anxiety in the Jewish Israelis in the group concerning their own identity. Palestinian expertise in the room is threatening, overtly, to the hegemonic cultural discourse.

The threat to the moral worth of the group identity of the Jewish group and the path it followed in responding to that threat create one of the central processes in the reconstruction of the Jewish participants' identity in the ongoing encounter with the Palestinian group. This is the most difficult task with which the Jewish group must grapple in an encounter of this kind, and it is via this struggle that the greatest change will come of all the dimensions of threat we have mentioned. Most of the process is very powerful but largely invisible to the Palestinian group, and the work is done mainly in the uninational forum. Perhaps this pattern explains the inconspicuous profile of the symbolic threat among the groups with power that Stephan et al. (1999) found in their research. This is a developmental process with several stages, reminiscent of the developmental theories of White identity explored by Helms (1990) in the United States, which can help us conceptualize what is happening in our case here.

The early stages feature defensive patterns, such as denial. Societies whose internal minorities do not enjoy full human rights develop varied and elaborate mechanisms of cultural denial (Cohen, 1995). Cultural denial refers to situations in which an entire society exists in collective denial but is not subject to a totalitarian regime. Without anyone telling them what to think or what not to think, and without punishing those who know what it is forbidden to know, societies come to an unwritten consensus about what can be acknowledged publicly. People learn to behave as if they actually believe the information that they inwardly know to be untrue, but they will never admit this. This may well be the same process we have witnessed in the group process in this study.

Next, when the Palestinian group persevered in articulating the injustices done to its members and its people, the Jewish participants grappled with inner dilemmas around their liberal self-image versus the reality that contradicted this image of their group.

The inward conflict was very disturbing and led them to embrace the nationalistic elements of their identity, elements of which they have been largely unaware, so that now they felt that they were becoming more extremist. They were not really becoming more extremist, as we noted earlier, but they were reconstructing their identity against the other, and in this process, they were discovering more nationalistic elements within themselves.

As the process progressed, all the Jewish participants developed greater awareness of the central place that the threat holds in their national identity and the uses to which it is put. The Jewish participants developed an awareness of the circular dynamic, a trap with no way out, inherent in their need for an existential threat and victimhood as part of their national identity. The circularity is embodied in the fact that the threatened identity is where they tended to close ranks during a crisis, and where they felt safer. Closing ranks led to aggression toward the Palestinians. When the Palestinians did not cave in but instead responded to the aggression directed toward them, the Jews felt threatened and organized in turn to respond aggressively once more toward the Palestinians,

thereby strengthening their own (Jewish) national identity. The struggle with the sense of threat uses the threat as a resource; for a similar description, see Butler (1997).

Later in the process, the entire Jewish group, and not just individuals within it, abandoned the patterns of behavior designed for collective moral face-saving and began to accept responsibility for being the stronger group in the conflict. When the Jewish participants acknowledged their power and felt less threatened, they were able to see the vulnerability of the other. It is worth reiterating here that the acknowledgment of injustice, acceptance of responsibility for the injustice, and attribution of illegitimacy to the injustice make up perhaps the most significant turning point for all the Jewish participants. This is a process that constitutes identity in the workshop: It was able to liberate the Jews from the role of victim and partially restore their humanity.

We differ with the reasoning of Branscombe et al. (1999), who argue that ascribing negative images to the other group and the nonacceptance of the exploitative past of the group to which the members of the dominant group in the encounter belong rest on the degree of identification of the individual with their group (in our case, national) identity. We are not persuaded that we are dealing here with two types of people—those who identify strongly with the national identity and those who identify less strongly—but rather with a gradual developmental process that happens to the participants and is expressed in two typical and contradictory ways in parallel. When the Palestinians were present, the Jews—to preserve their power—talked about their strong attachment to their national identity. But outside the binational group, when they met alone in the uninational forum, or together with their friends or their family, the Jewish participants felt and expressed guilt and anger about the injustices perpetrated. Their strong attachment to their national identity did not prevent them from also feeling, at the same time, collective guilt. On the contrary; perhaps it was actually because they felt such an attachment and obligation to their national identity that they could feel guilty about the injustices done to the Palestinians (for similar results, see also Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2004). It is possible that this attachment magnified the pain and shock of their discovery of the injustices their group perpetrated against the Palestinians. In structured encounters between Jews and Palestinians, many of the Jewish participants undergo such a process.

The changes that the Jewish group underwent on the level of awareness mainly arose out of the efforts invested by the Palestinian group in the process and out of the work the Jewish group did with the help of the facilitators to work through this difficult challenge. The moral imperative is not something within our power to grant ourselves; it comes to us uninvited, unexpected, and unplanned, via the challenge posed by the other (Butler, 2004, p. 88). In response to this challenge, the Jewish group engaged in some very painful and difficult work. This is a dialectical process that is not possible without dialogue with the Palestinian side, or as Freire (1970) says, "This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both" (p. 28).

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