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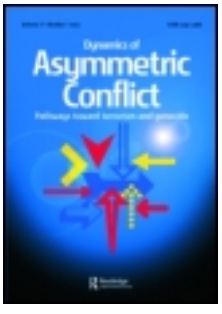

Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Pathways toward terrorism and genocide

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Peacemaking through dialogue? Effects of intergroup dialogue on perceptions regarding the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

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EMPIRICAL PAPER

Peacemaking through dialogue? Effects of intergroup dialogue on perceptions regarding the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict

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This study examines the effect of continued participation in conflict management dialogue workshops on perceptions regarding the management and the resolution of the protracted conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The analysis is based on a unique set of data, which includes in-depth interviews with Israeli Jews who have been involved in Israeli–Palestinian conflict management workshops for extended periods of time, as well as full transcripts of the discussions in such workshops. Our findings indicate that continuous involvement in conflict management workshops with Palestinians increases Israeli Jews' awareness of the different and often contrasting perspectives, issues and considerations that relate to the resolution of the conflict. Extended participation in these workshops provides Israeli Jews with a new awareness of the depth and complexity of the conflict, and of the needs and perspectives of the Palestinians. Moreover, the repeated encounter with Palestinians brings Israeli Jews to recognize the serious limitations of commonly discussed proposals for solving the conflict, and the need to continue searching for additional solutions. These findings significantly contribute to our understanding of both the potential and limitations of bottom-up grassroots conflict management interventions, alongside top-down political processes of conflict resolution and peace negotiations, in promoting peacemaking and reconciliation.

Keywords: intergroup contact; conflict resolution; conflict management; dialogue; Israeli–Palestinian conflict; peacemaking

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Intractable ethnopolitical conflicts, such as the long-running dispute between Israelis and Palestinians, are often protracted, deeply set conflicts involving hostility and repeated violence. In order for political solutions to be accepted in the societies involved, formal, top-down processes of conflict management and peace negotiations must be accompanied by processes of reconciliation and intergroup contact (Bar-On, 2008; Salomon & Cairns, 2009).

This study addresses one of the major questions posed by both scholars and practitioners of conflict resolution and peacemaking: namely, how to bring people and societies to support mutually agreed-upon compromise solutions (Halperin, 2011; Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2011; Maoz & Eidelson, 2007). More directly, this study focuses on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and examines the following issues: (1) Israeli Jews' perceptions of the extent to which their continued involvement in dialogue workshops had an impact on their perspectives on the conflict and its resolution; (2) Israeli Jews' resulting

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perceptions, following their participation in dialogue workshops with Palestinians, regarding the nature, the structure and the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Conceptual background

Research into conflict resolution and peace processes emphasizes the lengthy process of peace-building and reconciliation that has to accompany the political process of peacemaking (Bar-Tal, 2000; Bar-Tal, Rosen, & Nets-Zehngut 2009; Kelman, 1998, 1999, 2007). This becomes especially important in intractable conflicts, such as the ethnopolitical conflict in Northern Ireland (Gallagher, 2009), or the long-term conflict between Israelis and Palestinians (Kelman, 1998, 1999, 2007; Kriesberg, 2001, 2002, 2009), where a history of hostility and frequent eruptions of violence disrupt the normal functioning of society (Halperin, 2008, 2011; Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2011; Kriesberg, 2001, 2002, 2009).

Structured intergroup encounter workshops are commonly used as a device for grassroots-level peace-building. These workshops provide an opportunity to engage in discussions about the needs and motivations of each side in the conflict; about the relations between the sides; and about possible ways of coping with the conflict and possible solutions to it (Maoz, 2011; Maoz & Ellis, 2008; Ron, Maoz, & Bekerman, 2010). Although extensive research has examined the effectiveness of such structured intergroup contact in altering awareness and perceptions regarding the out-group in a conflict (Kupermintz, Rosen, Salomon, & Husisi, 2007; Ron & Maoz, 2013; Ron et al., 2010) and in improving intergroup relations (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), little research attention has been directed to the impact of these encounters on participants' perceptions regarding the nature of the conflict and possible ways of resolving it. The present study directly explores the effects of continuous involvement in conflict management and dialogue workshops on perceptions of Jewish Israelis regarding the nature of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and its peaceful resolution.

The context: the intractable conflict between Israelis and Palestinians

The dispute between Israelis and Palestinians is a salient example of an intractable conflict (Halperin, 2008; Rotberg, 2006; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998) that is violent, deeply entrenched and perceived by many of those involved in it as irresolvable and of a zero sum nature (Bar-Tal, 2007; Maoz & McCauley, 2005). In addition, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is characterized by asymmetrical power relations between the parties, specifically, Israeli political and military domination of the Palestinians (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006; Bar-Siman-Tov, 2010; Kriesberg, 2009). Although there are semi-autonomous regions within the Occupied Territories, as designated by the 1993 Oslo accords, Israel still effectively controls the Occupied Territories and regularly conducts military operations within them (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006; Hammak, 2010). This imbalance of power, alongside the failure to build a culture of peace, mutual trust and acceptance of compromise solutions, is considered by many to be one of the main reasons for the breakdown of the Oslo peace process (Kriesberg, 2009; Sela, 2009; Shlaim, 2005). Thus, one of the lessons to be learned from the failed peace process is that top-down, formal, compromise agreements between policy-makers are not enough (Kriesberg, 2001, 2002). These have to be accompanied by bottom-up processes of peacemaking (Mitchell, 2009), reconciliation and intergroup contact at the grassroots level.

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Intergroup dialogue and perceptions regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and its peaceful resolution

Although the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is rooted in competition over material resources and political or territorial control, a number of scholars have pointed to the significant role played by the collective perceptions of both sides in sustaining and escalating the conflict. Hammack (2008, 2009) claims that collective narratives and the role they play within the discursive field of the conflict reinforce the polar national identities of both parties, as well as the array of beliefs and emotions that have been feeding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict for years. Bar-Tal and Salomon (2006) similarly describe the role played by the collective memory and the narratives of Israelis and Palestinians in structuring national identities that negate one other, and in constituting the reality of the conflict as a "zero sum game".

It is these attitudes and beliefs regarding the causes and course of the conflict, as well as perceptions regarding the enemy and the desired solution to the conflict, that dialogue workshops between Israeli Jews and Palestinians aim to address (Bar-Tal et al., 2009).

Extensive research has examined processes and models of structured intergroup encounters (Bekerman, 2002; Maoz, 2011; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) as well as the effectiveness of structured encounters in improving intergroup relations and altering perceptions and attitudes regarding the out-group in a conflict (Abu Nimer, 1999, 2004; Ron & Maoz, 2013; Ron et al., 2010; Salomon, 2004a, 2004b). However, little research effort has been directed to in-depth systematic examinations of the processes and mechanisms through which participation in intergroup encounter workshops might affect political and ideological perceptions of the nature of the conflict and the various ways to resolve it.

The current study uses empirical data on Israeli–Palestinian conflict management dialogue workshops to examine the effects and consequences of participation in structured intergroup encounters via the reported experiences of Jewish Israelis who were continuously involved in such workshops**.** It examines the effects of continuous involvement of Israeli Jews in dialogue with Palestinians on Israeli Jews' perceptions of the nature of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and its possible solutions to it. Thus, this study seeks to contribute to our understanding of the perceptual, ideological and emotional mechanisms and processes through which grassroots-level dialogue can reinforce compromise agreements and promote peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.

Methods

The analysis presented here is based on a unique and extensive set of data, which includes in-depth interviews with Israeli Jews who have been continuously involved in Israeli–Palestinian conflict management dialogue workshops over a considerable period of time, as well as full transcripts of Jewish–Palestinian workshop discussions. In line with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the analysis proceeds by identifying meaningful themes and frames that emerged in the interviews and the observed workshop sessions, rather than imposing preconceived categories and classifications. Accordingly, the research tools used are qualitative (Straus & Corbin, 1998) and include the following.

In-depth interviews

Our data set includes 25 in-depth interviews with Israeli Jews – 11 women and 14 men – all of whom had been involved in Israeli–Palestinian dialogue workshops for at least two

years. Interviewees' ages range from 26 to 44. All of the interviewees live in Israeli towns or communities that are predominantly Jewish, and thus have limited interactions with Palestinians outside the dialogue interactions. All but two of the interviewees served in the Israeli military, although reported minimal contact with the Palestinian population during their service. All of the interviewees hold academic degrees in the humanities or social sciences, and four of them speak Arabic.

Interviews were conducted at a location chosen by the interviewee, usually their home or workplace. The interviews were semi-structured and included two main parts: the first part dealt with the interviewee's individual story, while the second part posed questions about the topics addressed in the study (Berg, 2004; Kvale, 1996). Each interview lasted from one and a half to two and a half hours. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Workshop transcripts

Our data set is also based on full transcripts of seven sessions of a Jewish–Palestinian conflict management dialogue workshop. The observations of this workshop were conducted by the first author. The workshop included 10 Jewish and 10 Palestinian participants all working as facilitators of Jewish–Palestinian dialogue groups in an established encounter program in Israel. Its goal was to provide a framework in which participants discuss the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

The workshop was conducted in Hebrew and co-facilitated by two professional group leaders: one Israeli and one Palestinian. It was video recorded and fully transcribed.

Data analysis

In line with the grounded theory approach, several stages of analysis were undertaken (Berg, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The first phase included a thematic analysis of each event (interview or observation), which revealed thematic categories. Through a process of reading and re-reading the events, the number of categories was reduced by combining similar categories and focusing on those that emerged as most relevant. These categories were scrutinized again for centrality (repeated appearances across interviews and observations), for the connections between them, and for their relevance to theory, to the subject of the study, and to the questions it addresses (Berg, 2004; Roth, 2005).

Findings

Three major thematic categories emerged from the interviews and the transcripts of the workshop discussions: (1) participants' perceptions of the extent to which their continued involvement in dialogue had an impact on their perspectives on the conflict and its resolution; (2) participants' perceptions, following their involvement in the conflict management dialogue workshops, regarding the nature and structure of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict; and (3) participants' perceptions, following their participation in the workshops, regarding the peaceful resolution of the conflict**.**

1. Participants' perceptions of the extent to which their continued involvement in dialogue had an impact on their perspectives on the conflict and its resolution

Ongoing involvement in structured dialogue encounters with Palestinians was described by the Jewish participants as an experience that influenced their current perceptions of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and its resolution. Many participants pointed out that their

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awareness and understanding of the complexity of the conflict, the positions of the Palestinians, and the difficulties en route to solving the conflict increased following their involvement in dialogue between the two sides.

Shay,[1] who directed a program of conflict management dialogue encounters between Jews and Palestinians in Israel for several years, described how his ongoing dialogue with Palestinian counterparts had increased his understanding of and sensitivity to their viewpoint, and had given him a better appreciation of the difficulties experienced by Palestinians in accepting the terms and the peace proposals presented by the Jewish Israeli side:

> I used to say, "Fine. First of all accept the existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish state, and then we'll start talking." Nowadays I say: "OK, why place any pre-conditions?" You know, why should I define for him how he should see things? And any time someone raises (a claim by the Palestinian citizens, to define the State of Israel as) the state of all its citizens, I truly listen, and ask myself – "why not, why yes, and where does this come from?" And when people speak of national service and civic service, then I understand why, for the Arabs, it is nearly impossible. Like, I have a much greater sensitivity to it.

In another excerpt, taken from the transcript of an Israeli–Palestinian conflict management workshop, Shay describes to his Palestinian counterparts how his involvement in dialogue with them enabled him to more deeply understand the wrongdoings of Israelis towards the Palestinians throughout the many years of the conflict, and his own responsibility as a Jewish Israeli:

> I am telling you that through this dialogue I understand much more deeply the wrongs that have been done … today I understand this issue much more deeply and I understand where things come from, and I also think that it is much easier for me to take responsibility for it. I mean, I think that in the past I would have said, well, it was different people who did the bad things. Today I say – no, it is my responsibility.

In addition to their increased understanding of the positions of the other side and their acknowledgment of the wrongdoings caused to the Palestinians throughout the conflict, several Jewish participants described significant changes in their perspectives regarding the structure of the conflict and its resolution as a result of their extended involvement in dialogue with Palestinians. Shaul, for instance, discussed how his involvement in the intergroup dialogue had changed his perspective on the conflict and made him reconsider the possible paths for resolving it:

> Look, it [my involvement in dialogue encounters] did many things to me. Let's start from the political – I think that it made me focus much more on the Palestinians who are Israeli citizens. I think that until then I didn't pay too much attention to them … and I realized that ultimately they embody in their identity the core of the conflict. And their case is the most complicated case, and the solutions proposed up to this point do not provide them with answers. This really influenced me … and it's clear to me now, for instance, that the classic paradigm of Oslo, of two classic nation states for the two peoples, is pure nonsense … I think it contains many issues, that at the time we didn't even imagine. The issue of the Palestinian citizens of Israel is only one of these. Once I realized this, I realized that, wait a moment, there is a whole new series of issues that we didn't think of … and then I began re-engineering my entire paradigm.

Continuous involvement in dialogue encounters with Palestinians confronted Shaul with aspects of the conflict that he had not previously been aware of. Thus, Shaul was brought to more acutely recognize the status of the Palestinian citizens of Israel as a complicated and crucial issue at the heart of the conflict. This issue was also presented by additional Jewish participants as an important and difficult one which they had been forced to face during the dialogue encounters. Yair put it as follows:

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> The topic [of the dialogue encounters] in Giv'at Haviva is more about the Arabs living in Israel. And here, to this day, although it's been several years already, I can't tell you exactly what it did to my worldview. To a large degree it complicated it. Because the dispute I became aware of through the dialogue runs much deeper than I thought … in order to achieve what the Arabs in Israel want – those who participated in the encounters – that required sacrifices that, in my view, I am not ready for yet … this thing with national rights, the meaning of which may be that the state should be devoid of a national (Jewish) identity, is a kind of glass ceiling, that even within the dialogue it was impossible to breach. And to this day I ask myself what can be done with it. The dialogue ended at a point that I don't know how to advance from.

During the dialogue, Yair was exposed to the depth of the dispute between himself and the Palestinians living in Israel regarding the future character of the state and the manner in which the relations between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority should be managed. Yair feels he reached a dead end on this subject, claiming that "the dialogue ended at a point that I don't know how to advance from".

Overall, it seems then that the continuous involvement of Israeli Jews in dialogue encounters with Palestinians does not equip them with simple solutions to the conflict. It exposes the Jewish participants to the complexity of the issues at hand and the positions of the Palestinian side, and makes them re-examine old positions and solutions and leads them to search for new ways to peacefully resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

The perceived effects of continuous involvement in conflict management dialogue workshops with Palestinians on Jewish participants' perspectives regarding the nature of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and ways of resolving it are presented in more detail in the two following sections.

2. Participants' perceptions of the nature and structure of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict

Our findings indicate that repeated participation in encounters with Palestinians markedly increases Israeli Jews' awareness of the difficulties experienced by the Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories under Israeli occupation. Na'ama, a Jewish Israeli female interviewee, said:

> This other received a face … and suddenly [I started] seeing things through their eyes. And, like, the mere possibility of looking at what was happening differently, it was very dramatic. The description of their lives in the territories, the description of their daily life, the way they lived, what happens to them there … What happens at the checkpoints, what the daily routine of life there looks like, the prices, what happens to the soldiers serving in the territories … lots of things that before I wasn't even aware existed, or was aware of them in a very general manner.

The direct encounter with the Palestinian viewpoint causes many of the Jewish participants to describe the Israeli rule in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 as an immoral occupation that is unjust towards the Palestinians and that should end as soon as possible. Nissim, a Jewish Israeli male interviewee, related to this issue as follows:

> We are in a problematic place. The occupation corrupts. This is not a proverb, it corrupts. It turns us into bad people. I can't sit at home, watch TV, and say, oh no, we are doing such terrible things.

This approach, whereby Israeli rule over the territories beyond the 1967 borders is morally wrong and should end, characterized many of the Jewish workshop participants. This approach was also expressed by Yair, another Jewish Israeli male interviewee:

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> My worldview in all matters regarding the Palestinians in the territories is very resolved. We should not be there, we have no business ruling over them, and we need to end this as soon as possible, and give them an independent state, to do with it whatever they wish.

However, the views of Jewish Israeli participants regarding the relationship between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority within the State of Israel were more complex. Shaul, a Jewish Israeli male interviewee, described an increased awareness – following his involvement in dialogue workshops with Palestinian citizens of Israel – of the centrality of the issue of the relations between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority within Israel to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict:

> I think that it [the involvement in dialogue workshops] made me place a lot of focus on the Palestinian citizens of Israel … I think that until then I kind of didn't pay too much attention to them. And I think that in the mythology of the Israeli left, they are a kind of, you know, superfluous to the "real" Palestinians in Ramallah. And I eventually realized that they embody in their identity the heart of the conflict. And their case is the most complicated case, and the solutions proposed so far do not meet their needs. And if you want to understand what was going on, you need to go to them. And many of the ideas that are worth hearing, that might give you some way out, come from there.

In a similar vein, following their involvement in conflict management workshops, many of our Jewish Israeli interviewees expressed grave criticism about the inequality between Jews and Palestinians in Israel, as well about the state's attitude towards its Palestinian citizens. Chanan, another Jewish Israeli male interviewee, said:

> [There is] a kind of racism towards the Arabs … a kind of erasure of the other, an erasure of the voice of the Arab residents, people who are Arabs here in Israel … look, as long as the state has to maintain its majority because it is the "Jewish State", and it has to maintain its Jewish majority, then everything there that is not Jewish, if we do not convert it to Judaism, it is not part of the state. This is a problem, in my opinion. It's a kind of erasure … we set some kind of ceiling – twenty percent.[2] In my view its racism, it's difficult for me to live in this situation. I find it hard to say I can identify with aspects of Judaism that speak of the demographic problem, that speak of "Judaizing" the Galilee, that speak of conquering the Negev from the Bedouins.

Chanan speaks of the erasure of the Palestinian voice in Israel, of a racist approach towards the Palestinian minority – an approach that is derived from Israel's definition as a Jewish state – and from its efforts to preserve the Jewish majority in it. Chanan claims that Israel treats its' Palestinian residents as a "demographic problem" and implements problematic and discriminatory policies intended to exclude, to "erase" or to "Judaize" all that is not Jewish.

However, interestingly, as well as this critique of the inequality between Jews and Palestinians in Israel, many Jewish participants also expressed a fear of a fundamental change to the status quo, and of the possibility that Israel's current identity as a Jewish state might be forfeited. In an excerpt taken from the transcript of a Jewish–Palestinian dialogue workshop, Ronen spoke of the things that are important for him, as a Jew, to preserve in any future arrangement:

> It's important to me that the Law of Return still exists. I mean, that Jews can still receive a citizenship here – that they would have, like, a state to which they can come and find a home in … it's important to me that Hebrew shall remain the official language in this state, it's important to me that there would be a real option to express many things that are related to my culture.

Ronen expresses a preference to preserve Israel's identity as a Jewish state. This preference seems to be common to many of the Jewish participants. Noga, for instance, also spoke of her desire that Israel will continue to exist as a Jewish state. She further

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specified the components of the existing reality that she would like to see preserved, including the state's Jewish symbols and its existing immigration laws, which are designed to preserve the country's Jewish majority:

> It's very hard for me, and I know that it wrongs others, but I still want this to be a Jewish state, and I know that it's, like, unfair, but that's what I want … but on the other hand I understand that it's very problematic, and I don't know how much longer this can go on … for instance the Law of Return, and not the right of return[3] which is something that's very important to me, as are the anthem and the flag … although I realize it is impossible, it's like saying to people they can be my citizens, but yet ignoring them. What else does it mean? This effort to maintain a Jewish demographic majority, which is unfair, which is discriminatory.

Following her involvement in a Jewish-Palestinian dialogue,[4] Noga clearly perceives her wish to preserve Jewish sovereignty and the Jewish character of the State of Israel as discriminatory and unjust towards the country's non-Jewish population. Noga appears to be speaking in two voices: alongside her desire to preserve the existing situation, she repeatedly expresses her acknowledgment of the injustice that it entails: "It's very hard for me, and I know that it wrongs others … and I know that it's, like, unfair … I understand that it's very problematic … although I realize it is impossible, it's like saying to people they can be my citizens, but yet ignoring them". Noga's oscillation between her desire to preserve the existing situation and the acknowledgement of the inequality suffered by the Palestinian minority in Israel reflects the ambivalent and complex perceptions of many of the participants regarding the relationship between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority in Israel.

This complexity is also expressed in the perceptions of Israeli Jews involved in repeated encounters with Palestinians concerning the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

3. Participants' perceptions regarding the peaceful resolution of the conflict

The statements regarding the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict that were made by Jewish participants during the observed conflict management dialogue workshops and in the interviews that followed them reflected an increased awareness of the complexity and depth of the conflict, as well as of the limitations of the solutions that are commonly proposed. The possible solutions to the conflict, as presented by the Jewish participants, ranged between a two-state solution – meaning the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel – and other solutions, such as a single state for all its (Jewish and Palestinian) citizens, which would require material changes to the laws, character and identity of the State of Israel.

Much like Yair, who was quoted in the previous section, many of the participants presented the solution of establishing a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel as the most realistic peaceful solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Thus, Liat says:

> On the principled, ideological level, I believe that a state of all its citizens is much more right … I'm, like, somewhat sobered, I don't really believe that it would work … it's either us [ruling] over them or them over us. It's like; it's always going to be there … I think it's an ideal. I think it's something that's not realistic … if you try too hard to implement it then the result could be devastating … you can't get out of it. But, I believe, you know, that dividing the cake, with each side, like, making do with the part they receive [a two-state solution] … And the Palestinians who are Israeli citizens will have to make a decision regarding what they want [whether to remain citizens of a Jewish Israel or to belong to the Palestinian state, once established]. I hope they could be included here, like, in a somewhat fairer way than how it is now.

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Against the background of the claims made by her Palestinian counterparts for a material and structural change to the State of Israel itself, Liat recognizes that the two-state solution is not a full solution: she acknowledges that on "the principled, ideological level" there may exist more just solutions. As she sees things, though, the solution of separating Israelis from Palestinians in two neighboring states is the most realistic one. Other solutions, such a "state of all its citizens", common to both Israelis and Palestinians, are perceived by Liat as utopian, and any attempt to realize them might, in her view, have devastating results.

Much like Liat, many of the other participants saw the two-state solution as not ideal but necessary, and perhaps only temporary. Shay described this as follows during a Jewish–Palestinian dialogue workshop:

> I think that first of all there needs to be some kind of framework of two states that will exist and develop true and amicable neighborly relations between them. And very slowly, I believe that the borders will become diffused, because it's impossible to maintain two states here, over such a small area. And it's possible that eventually … it's possible that the Jews will be sufficiently confident of their existence so as to say – wow, we can create some kind of confederacy here, we'll have some state, or some sphere, in which we could run our lives in a more Jewish manner, with symbols and all that stuff … and there would also be one state, a federal one, in which there will be a different anthem, which is the anthem of the state. Maybe. I think that giving up on this ability to run the lives of Jews, as Jews, is something I find hard to do right now.

Shay distinguishes between the near future, when, according to him, the Israeli and Palestinian peoples need to be separated as part of a two-state solution, and the more distant future, when there might be a possibility of forming a common framework for the Jews and the Palestinians living on the same piece of land. In trying to characterize that potential framework common to Jews and Palestinians, Shay uses terms like "federal state" and "confederacy", which express his aspiration to retain the separate collective identity of the two peoples even in the context of a future hypothetical situation of a possible joint political framework.

By stressing the need for Jews to have "sufficient confidence in their existence" in order to be able to examine the possibility of creating a joint political framework with the Palestinians in the future, Shay expresses a fear – which is quite prevalent among Jewish dialogue workshop participants – of structural changes to the status quo, a fear of relinquishing Israel's character and identity as a Jewish state. This fear is also apparent in Liat's words when she points to the potentially "devastating" results of trying to create a shared political framework for Jews and Palestinians. It seems that extended involvement in dialogue with their Palestinian counterparts leads Jewish participants to more fully recognize the problems and distortions in the current relations between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority in Israel, but does not dissipate their fears regarding any actual structural change in the relations between the two groups.

Udi, another Jewish participant, expressed a different position regarding these concerns and fears:

> They frighten us with, like, what would happen if there isn't a state that is defined as Jewish? What might happen here and all sorts of horror scripts, while for me the existing situation is a kind of horror show, which I live in. I mean, I am much more scared by the tangible present, by what I see in front of my eyes, than by being told that changing the definition … for me, like, this situation [the current one] is very, very bad. And there is something there [in relinquishing the definition of Israel as a Jewish state] that is much more right, much more integrated into the surroundings, and much more possible for us to look into the mirror, released of all these complexes. And the possibility that the state will not be defined as the

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> state of the Jews, but that there will be some real recognition of the fact that there was another national minority here, and that this will be reflected in the name of the state, and also in its practices. It doesn't scare me, like, to change the definition. I have remnants of fear, but I also have many other fears that, like, don't control me.

Udi refers to a fear that is shared by many of the Jewish participants regarding a structural change to the character and identity of the State of Israel. Specifically, the fear, described here above, of a possible shift from Israel being a Jewish nation-state and becoming instead a "state of all its citizens" that is founded on a civic basis that does not distinguish between its Jewish and Palestinian residents. While Udi admits that he has "remnants of fear" regarding such a step, he says that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the inequality between Jews and Palestinians within Israel is so problematic that he would be willing to accept any change that might bring about a more open and egalitarian sociopolitical structure. It seems that more than supporting the idea of a "state of all its citizens" as a solution to the conflict, Udi objects to the inequality that he sees as characterizing the relationship between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority in Israel.

In general, the positions, attitudes and feelings expressed by participants in the workshops and interviews regarding the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict were characterized by confusion, concern, and a great deal of ambivalence; by a fluctuation between short-term solutions and possible solutions for the distant future; and between solutions that are perceived as just and proper and solutions that are perceived as more realistic and implementable. It seems, thus, that continuous involvement in dialogue workshops with Palestinians does not equip the Jewish participants with easy solutions. It mainly increases their awareness of the depth and complexity of the conflict and heightens their sensitivity to the perspective of the Palestinians. Moreover, participation in dialogues with Palestinians seems to have brought our Israeli Jewish respondents to recognize more acutely the limitations of the solutions commonly proposed for resolving the conflict, and of the need to continue the search for additional ways to change the relations between Israelis and Palestinians.

Discussion

Our findings indicate that continuous involvement in conflict management dialogue workshops with Palestinians is seen by Jewish participants as significantly affecting their current perceptions of the nature and the structure of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and its possible resolution. Many participants pointed out that their awareness and understanding of the complexity of the conflict, the perspectives of Palestinians, and the difficulties en route to peacefully solving the conflict, all increased following their involvement in intergroup dialogue. These findings are consistent with the research literature that has emphasized the importance of peace-building (Bar-Tal, 2000; Opotow, Gerson & Woodside, 2005; Salomon & Cairns, 2009) and intergroup contact (Gergen, 1999; Maoz, 2011; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) in accompanying top-down political processes of peacemaking and conflict resolution (Mitchell, 2009).

Our findings complement the picture that has emerged from a number of previous studies regarding the capacity of intergroup dialogue to alter perspectives and deeply set notions (Bekerman, 2002; Ron & Maoz, 2013; Steinberg & Bar-On, 2002) and to increase participants' awareness of power relations between groups in conflict, as well as of the needs and aspirations of the out-group in the conflict (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Maoz, 2000, 2004, 2011; Maoz & Ellis, 2008; Ron et al., 2010). The present study makes

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an innovative contribution by uncovering the ideological, emotional and perceptual processes through which continuous participation in conflict management dialogue workshops affect the perspectives of their Jewish Israeli participants regarding the nature of the conflict and ways for reaching its peaceful resolution.

More specifically, our study can be seen as continuing and expanding on a previous study conducted by Kellen, Bekerman and Maoz (2013) which was based on the analysis of transcriptions of a conflict management (track-two diplomacy) workshop. Interestingly, Kellen et al. (2013) found consistent patterns of cooperative, non-confrontational interaction between Israeli Jews and Palestinian participants, who, during the workshop discussions, reached high levels of agreement regarding the resolution of the conflict between the sides. The present study draws on in-depth interviews with workshop participants, as well as on the analysis of full transcripts of workshop discussions thereby enabling us to illuminate the emergence of complex attitudes among Israeli Jews following such conflict management workshops, and to shed more light on the enduring dilemma faced by Israeli Jews between their empathy with Palestinian positions and their commitment to the Jewish Israeli in-group.

Previous research has used public opinion polls to examine Israeli Jewish attitudes to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and its resolution, as well as to examine the psychological and demographic factors that explain these attitudes (Maoz & Eidelson, 2007; Maoz & Ellis, 2008; Maoz & McCauley, 2005, 2008, 2009). Maoz and Ellis (2008) found that participation in conflict management discussions increases support among Israeli Jews for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, with increased trust in Palestinians mediating this effect. The present study uses qualitative methods to provide a more in-depth, nuanced and complex picture regarding the ideological and psychological processes through which participation in Israeli–Palestinian conflict management workshops affects the attitudes of Israeli Jews to peace through the relationship-building interaction with their Palestinian counterparts.

Our data, derived from in-depth interviews as well as from full transcripts of conflict management workshop discussions between Israelis Jews and Palestinians, show that, following their encounter with Palestinians, Jewish participants expressed increased awareness of the suffering of the Palestinian population living under the military and political rule of Israel, as well as of the necessity of bringing an end to Israeli rule over those territories. A more complex picture emerges regarding participants' perceptions of the relationship between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority within the State of Israel, civic equality, and the character of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. Jewish participants expressed a deep duality and ambivalence towards these issues during and following their encounters with Palestinians. Thus, many of the Israeli Jews were sharply critical of the inequality between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority in Israel and of the way in which the State of Israel treats its Palestinian citizens. However, when it comes to actually resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, these participants mostly expressed a wish to preserve Jewish sovereignty and the Jewish character of the state, and a fear of a structural change in the relations between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority in Israel.

Thus, the possible solutions for the conflict as presented by the Jewish participants ranged between a two-state solution, with Israel withdrawing from the territories occupied since 1967 and the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel, and other solutions in the spirit of "a state of all its (Jewish and Palestinian) citizens" that would require significant changes to the laws, character and identity of the State of Israel. The participants moved along this axis between short-term solutions and potential

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solutions for the distant future, and between solutions that are perceived as just and proper and solutions that are perceived as more realistic and implementable. This motion reflects an acknowledgement of the depth and complexity of the conflict, as well as of the limitations of the commonly proposed solutions.

Although both in terms of the intensity and length of their contact experience, and in terms of their explicit choice to go through this process, participants who are continuously involved in dialogue workshops with Palestinians are not fully representative of the Jewish Israeli population, they are important to study as these Israeli Jews – who have repeatedly participated in workshops with Palestinians – act as agents of social and political change. Ron and Maoz (2013) found that many of the participants describe their involvement in dialogue workshops as leading them to social and political activism aimed at transforming the power asymmetry, inequality and discrimination towards Palestinians that characterizes the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

In a broader sense, our study indicates that societies involved in protracted, intractable asymmetric conflict need to attain complex perceptions of the nature of the conflict and of ways to solve it in order to be able to arrive to a mutually agreed on, integrative and stable solution. Contact interventions that expose each side to the point of view, arguments and feelings of the opponents can therefore be effective not only in improving mutual attitudes, but also in enabling the sides to see new ways to peacefully resolve the conflict.

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Methodological issues and directions for future research

Despite the innovative contribution of our findings, this study also has certain limitations. First, it is important to note that the study is based on qualitative research methods that are not intended to provide an exact measure of changes in attitudes or opinions. Thus, one limitation of our study is that it cannot point to a one-dimensional causal relationship of involvement in intergroup dialogue workshops with a transformation of perceptions regarding the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Another limitation concerns the research population. The study focuses on the perspectives of Jewish participants in conflict management workshops involving Israeli Jews and Palestinians. In order to achieve a more complete picture of the impact of these encounters on attitudes and views regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and its resolution, future research should also examine the perspectives of Palestinian participants.

Conclusion

This study addresses one of the major questions posed by both scholars and practitioners of conflict resolution and peace processes: how to bring people and societies embedded in intractable conflicts to support mutually agreed-upon compromise solutions.

Our findings indicate that continuous involvement in conflict management dialogue workshops with Palestinians increases Israeli Jews' awareness of the different and often contrasting perspectives, issues and considerations that relate to the resolution of the conflict. Extended participation in conflict management workshops with Palestinians does not necessarily equip Israeli Jews with easy solutions. Rather, through a process of relationship-building, it provides them with a new awareness of the depth and complexity of the conflict, and of the needs and perspectives of the Palestinians. Moreover, the repeated encounter with Palestinians brings Israeli Jews to recognize the serious limitations of the commonly discussed proposals for solving the conflict, and the need to

continue to search for additional ways to peacefully resolve it. These findings significantly contribute to our understanding of both the potential and limitations of bottom-up grassroots conflict management interventions – alongside top-down political processes of conflict resolution and peace negotiations – in promoting peacemaking and reconciliation.

Notes

1. All names have been changed.
2. Chanan is referring to the fact that in Israel there is a willingness to maintain a Palestinian minority of about 20% of the population, but not to allow a situation in which the Palestinian minority is significantly larger than that.
3. Here, Noga is in favor of keeping the existing Law of Return, which allows Jews to freely immigrate to Israel, but prevents Palestinian refugees from returning to the country.
4. Later in the interview, Noga spoke about how she was influenced by her participation in dialogue workshops with Palestinians: "I had a meaningful and founding experience … it [the dialogue encounter] undermined me, and mostly brought me to an understanding that I was living in repression and denial, and in ignorance … I feel I live like the lord of the manor in this country. I live at other people's expense in a lot of ways."

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