

**Interpretations of the past and expectations
for the future in two conflicted societies:
The case of Israeli and Palestinian youth**

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Abstract

This study has been developed by a group of Israeli and Palestinian researchers, for the purpose of exploring the perception of historical events among young people in the conflicted region of the Middle East. The paper examines the relations between measures of interpretations of the past (perceptions of legitimacy and emotional reactions towards the historical “narratives” of the two national groups – Israeli Jews and Palestinians - with regard to several historical events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) and measures of expectations of the collective future, as reflected in beliefs about the prospects for resolution of the severe regional conflict. Data were collected during December 1999 – February 2000 among representative samples of high-school students (grades 10 and 12): 1183 Palestinian students in the Palestinian National Territories and 1188 Israeli Jewish students. The adolescents’ historical perceptions of the two different narratives and their relations to the expectations of the future are compared and discussed from developmental, social and cultural perspectives.

Interpretations of the past and expectations for the future in two conflicted societies: The case of Israeli and Palestinian youth

The purpose of this study was to explore the social knowledge of two conflicted national groups as it is expressed by interpretations of the past and expectations for the future of young people. We examined it through the psychological correlates of readiness to legitimate the historical narrative of the “other’s” group, more particularly its relations with perceptions regarding the collective future as it is reflected in conflict resolution beliefs. This question is examined in the context of a severe and continuous national intergroup conflict: the Palestinian – Israeli case.

Members of a particular society tend to shape their view of the world on the basis of their society’s culture. The culture of any society, which encompasses the expressive terms of human behaviors, objects, and ideas in a particular society (Griswold, 1994), also includes the particular social knowledge which society members form as a result of their unique history, conditions, and experiences (Dougherty , 1985). The social knowledge of a culture encompasses a wide scope of concepts and beliefs, which pertain also to past events such as war, conflict, and peace. Events such as war and peace have a particularly important role in the formation of the society’s social knowledge, as these events are almost always powerful experiences that have a critical effect on the culture. Different cultures, however, have different concepts of the historical events of war, conflict, and peace and form different beliefs about them as a result of their different experiences (Raviv, Bar-Tal, Koren & Raviv, 1999). This difference may become a dominant factor in the social knowledge of a culture when the society is engaged in an ethno-national

conflict. Awareness of the impact of culture is clearly important, because it allows consideration of the manner by which individuals' approach to conflict and conflict-resolution may be bounded by culture-based beliefs and norms. Indeed, it has been argued that societies may, in fact, establish a "culture of conflict", consisting of a network of scripts or schemata, which provide models for dealing with conflict situations (Bjorkqvist & Fry, 1997).

The purpose of our study was to explore relations between two dimensions of social knowledge: interpretations of the past and expectations for the future. Society's collective history—its common memory of the past—is molded by the incorporate axiology of today. This means that social memory is organized according to sets of values that guide the evaluation of events of the past, exposing some of them and omitting others. The so-called objective expression of facts, to which we refer so often, is nothing but a conclusion suggested by those who have organized these facts into an entity (von Borries, 1997).

Beliefs regarding conflict resolution are also considered part of what is called social knowledge (Bar-Tal, 1990, Kruglanski, 1989). In the context of a continuous national conflict, such beliefs may reflect expectations for the collective future. Our study examined these two dimensions of social knowledge in the context of a continuous national inter-group conflict: the Palestinian-Israeli case.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the Israeli –Palestinian conflict is its grounding in a dispute over the right of people from both groups for self-determination and national identity. As in other national conflicts, in which the opposing sides are members of different ethnic or racial groups, the psychological dimension of the Jewish-Palestinian conflict manifests itself in strong negative inter-group perceptions and emotions (Smootha, 1998). These negative inter-group

relations provide different narratives and meanings to historical events that are perceived to be a meaningful part of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The mainstream Jewish and Palestinian in-group national narratives structure central belief systems – or societal schemas (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998) – that provide the foundation for each group’s perceptions and emotions about their existence in the region, and thus for their national self-perceptions by members of each in-group (cf. Baumeister, 1995).

The development of the collective identities of the Israeli and Palestinian societies has been a dialectic process in which the negation of the “other” has a special role. The mainstream Jewish-Zionist and Palestinian narratives completely undermine the very right of the “other” to the land. The destruction or delegitimization of the “other’s” narrative or memory is a central element in the establishment and maintenance of the violent (Gur – Zeev, 1999). Rouhana and Bar-Tal (1998) argue that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, perhaps more than other ethno-national conflicts, is so resistant to resolution because of the unique characteristics of the opposing narratives, the central one being a perception of exclusive legitimacy.

The Zionist narrative of the conflict, which has been taught in the national history curriculum in Israel during the past 52 years (Bar-Tal, 1998), and which is celebrated through myths, monuments, and national ceremonies (Ben-Amos & Beit-El, 1999), provides a strong moral justification for Jewish adolescents who, after high-school, are drafted into compulsory service in the army. Similarly, the Palestinian narrative is strongly represented in literature and songs (Parmenter, 1994), as well as history textbooks (Firer & Adwan, 1998) and provides the justification for Palestinian youth to join resistance groups and to take part in fighting against the Israeli occupation.

Our study examined central elements of the narrative, as represented in the historical consciousness of young people in both societies, with a focus on the cognitive and emotional elements of justness and legitimization (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998) of one's group narrative and the de-legitimization and de-humanization of the "other's" narrative. In actuality, we examined Palestinian and Israeli students' views concerning their own and the "other's" narrative regarding several historical events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We asked about beliefs (cognitions and emotions) that concern the Israeli and Palestinian mainstream narratives regarding seven central points in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the Holocaust, the 1948 War, the 1967 War, the *Intifada* (the Palestinian national uprising during 1987), the Oslo Accords, and the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin. The students were asked to express their attitudes towards the views of the two mainstream narratives on these events in Palestinian and Israeli society. We then examined the correlation between the attitudes towards the "other's" narrative with the attitudes of those adolescents regarding the future of the conflict and the possibilities for resolution.

Since this was an exploratory study, no strict hypotheses were paraphrased. The direction, however, was towards hypothesized relations between the level of readiness to consider the "other's" narrative as legitimate and the level of positive expectations towards the future, as measured by various options for ending the conflict. We expected that acceptance of the legitimacy of the "other's" perspective would entail confronting strong societal convictions concerning conflict. It is likely, for example, that accepting the legitimacy of the "other's" narrative would be related to expectation that the conflict will be resolved through agreement. In contrast,

perceiving the “other’s” perspective as illegitimate may be related to negation and to a perception that the conflict will not be resolved, or will only be resolved by force.

Our decision to examine these questions among adolescents was based on the assumption that political attitudes crystallize during this developmental stage and remain quite stable throughout adulthood (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989). Moreover, conflict researchers have found adolescence as an appropriate stage to create opportunities for an open dialogue among representatives of conflicted groups, as adolescents were found to be open to new attitudes and ideologies (Wallach, Wallach & Lukoski, 2000). As we were also interested in studying these issues in developmental terms, the question was examined among adolescents of two age groups: 15 and 18 years old. We hypothesized a difference between young (age 15) and older adolescents (age 18), as the latter group is likely to be characterized by more developed ability to crystallize stable ideological positions to a reasonable degree than the younger group (Adelson, 1971). Thus, from the developmental perspective, we hypothesized that we will find more coherence in the belief system among the older adolescents (age 18) than among the younger ones (age 15).

Development of the questionnaire

The questionnaire included structured questions that presented adolescents with the mainstream views of the Israeli Zionist and the Palestinian narratives concerning particular historical events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The mainstream views of the events were formulated by a team of Israeli Jewish and Palestinian researchers, for their respective groups¹.

¹ The team included the three authors, Dr. Muhammed Farhat from Hebron University and Mrs. Fatma Kassem from Ben-Gurion University

To exemplify the examination of the narratives we focus on two central and emotionally charged events in the two narratives: the “Holocaust” and “*Al Nakba*” (The disaster - the Palestinians’ epithet for the 1948 war in which many of them lost their homes).

The memory of the Holocaust is a central component in the construction of the Israeli national identity. It exists in the Israeli consciousness and in the collective memory as a traumatic historical event. In addition, it serves as a lesson at both the individual and the national level. The memory of the Holocaust expresses itself in the attempt to take one’s fate “in one’s hands”. The collective memory of helplessness of the Jewish victims has created the Israeli ethos of the need for security and military strength. The mentality of a nation under siege, a history of many generations of persecution, and the existential fear which resulted from the extinction of Jews in the Holocaust, provided a basis for the moral justification of Israeli acts of violence against the Arab population (Kimmerling, 1999). The memories of the Holocaust were used by the Zionist establishment to define basic national interests. They facilitated institutionalized ethnocentrism as exemplified by the popular slogan “*Haolam Kulo Negdenu*” (the entire world is against us) and were employed to counter the breakdown of the traditional Zionist myths and ideals that served the hegemonic Zionist ideology (Gur-Ze’ev, 1998).

The Palestinians generally accepted the official Israeli understanding of the Holocaust as the justification for Zionism and for the right of the Jewish state to exist. However, they turned it into: “Your Holocaust has become our *Karita* (Holocaust)”, as stated by Emil Habibi (1986, pr. 27), an important Israeli Arab writer and political activist. The Palestinians also see themselves as victims of the Holocaust. This feeling is the result of the U.N. decision to compensate the Jewish victims of the

Nazis by giving them part of the land of Palestine. In addition, the sense of being indirect victims of the Holocaust is facilitated by the perception that the Israelis use “Nazi tactics” and “racist aggression” (Kimmerling, 1999). In our research the two narratives concerning the Holocaust were introduced in the following questions:

- Many Jewish-Israelis view the Holocaust as the greatest tragedy that ever happened to any nation and this fact provides justification for establishing a Jewish State for the Jews. How do you feel about their attitude?
- Many Palestinians view the Holocaust as a tragedy of the Jewish people that does not justify inflicting suffering on the Palestinian people. How do you feel about their attitude?

The second example concerns the historical event of the 1948 War. This war is constructed dramatically differently in the national narrative of each side. In the Israeli narrative this is the War of Independence, which signifies the beginning of a hopeful period in which the State of Israel was established, thus fulfilling the Zionist national dream. For the Palestinians, this event is known as *Al Nakba*, the beginning of a long period in which Palestinian hopes for national self-determination and a national home were severely thwarted, as many Palestinians lost their land, homes, and property and became refugees in many countries.

Among the Palestinians, the events and results of *Al Nakba* have played a dominant and formative role in the ways they construct their collective memory. Palestinian popular culture has been created around issues related to *Al Nakba* and is connected to the past, present, and future. These images include the memory of the lost Garden of Eden, from which the Palestinians were evicted, the mourning of the present, and the desire to take revenge, while painting descriptions of the future return

to Palestine. They have developed a refugees' culture. In our study the two narratives were introduced in the following questions:

- Many Jewish-Israelis view the 1948 war as an important event marking their survival and independence. How do you feel about their attitude?
- Many Palestinians view the 1948 war as a disaster/catastrophe. How do you feel about their attitude?

Similar questions were developed with regard to the 6 other events in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The students were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with a statement indicating that they perceive the view presented as legitimate. Responses were on a scale of 1 (very untrue) to 5 (very true). Other statements concerning the narrative for each event on which participants were asked to respond included: feelings of empathy, anger, pride, shame, and irrelevance of the view. In this report we present and discuss only three measures: Legitimacy, Empathy and Anger.

Our second variable was Attitudes towards the Conflict: one question that participants were asked to indicate asked about the chances and possibilities for resolution of the conflict in the future. The answers ranged from peaceful resolution (e.g. by mutual agreement, trust building, education, mutual interests) to the view of impossibility of resolution (e.g. more wars, each side adhering to its own goals). The students were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with each item on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Procedures and Sample

The questionnaire was developed in English, then translated into Arabic and Hebrew. To validate the accuracy of the translation, the questionnaire was then re-translated back into English.

The study went through a pilot stage, in which we distributed the questionnaire to a sample of 600 10th grade Palestinians and Jewish Israeli students.

Two thousand three hundred and ninety four high school students comprised the random sample for the study (1188 Israeli Jews and 1183 Palestinians). Careful considerations were taken by each research team to provide representation of all types of schools and types of location.

The questionnaires were administered to the students in their classrooms during a normal class period in the first semester of the 1999/2000 academic year. The questionnaire was answered anonymously. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the two groups.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Results

Figures 1-3 display score means of three measures relating to the “other’s” group narrative in seven of the events presented to the two groups. Figure 1 displays the means of readiness to consider the other narrative as legitimate in the two groups (Israeli Jews and Palestinians).

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Two points of comparison are noteworthy:

(A) Overall, the findings suggest that the perception of the Legitimacy of the “other’s” perspective was relatively higher among the Israeli students than their Palestinian counterparts. The level of perceived legitimacy of the “other’s” view

among the Palestinian adolescents was low, while among the Jewish students it was mostly near medium.

(B) Among the Palestinian adolescents the level of the perceived Legitimacy on the various events was quite uniform, whereas among the Jewish adolescents it was less so. The lowest mean of perceived Legitimacy of the Palestinians' perspective among the Israeli respondents was concerning the *Intifada* – the Palestinian national uprising in 1987. The highest mean among the Israeli adolescents of perceived Legitimacy of the Palestinians' perspective concerned the assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin. This event, unlike the other events in the survey, was apparently perceived as negative by both groups, albeit for different reasons. The murder of Rabin was also the event for which the Israeli narrative received the highest level of legitimacy from the Palestinian adolescents.

Figures 2 and 3 present the means of feeling of Empathy and Anger towards the “other’s” narrative, respectively.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Both groups showed relatively low levels of Empathy towards the “other’s” narrative. One exceptional example is, once again, Rabin’s assassination. Concerning this event, both groups felt more willingness to feel empathy towards the “other’s” view.

Means of answers regarding the feelings of Anger towards the “other’s” perspective are presented in Figure 3. It seems that this question aroused high levels of emotion among the adolescents in both groups. The Palestinian students, however, showed higher levels of anger toward the Zionist view with regard to most of the events the questionnaire. Only the *Intifada* aroused the same level of anger in both

groups, and the highest level among the Israelis. Rabin's assassination aroused the lowest level of anger in the two groups.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Three combined measures, including all seven events, were calculated: Legitimization, Empathy and Anger. Three two-way ANOVAs were performed using group (Israelis vs. Palestinians) and age 15 vs. 18 years (10th vs. 12th grade) as independent variables, and each of the measures regarding the "other's" narrative perception as a dependent variable.

In all three analyses, the main effect of the group (Israelis vs. Palestinians) was found to be significant (Legitimization: $F=1043.75$, $p=.001$; Empathy: $F=69.51$, $p=.001$; Anger: $F=257.57$, $p=.001$). Israelis scored significantly higher than did Palestinians on Legitimization and Empathy, whereas the Palestinians scored more than the Israelis on Anger. The main effect of age was found to be not significant in all three analyses. However, interaction effects (age x group) were found to be significant in the three ANOVAs (Legitimization: $F=7.98$, $p=.01$; Empathy: $F=8.31$, $p=.01$; Anger: $F=7.98$, $p=.01$), indicating different patterns of age effect in the two groups. Among the Israeli group, the older adolescents (12th grade) expressed more readiness to legitimate, more empathy and less anger towards the "other's" group narratives. Among the Palestinian students, however, the older youth expressed less readiness to legitimate and to empathize and more anger towards the narrative of the "other".

Our second dependent variable concerned the expectations for the future among the youth in both groups (Attitudes towards the conflict).

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Table 2 displays score means and standard deviations of the items concerning this question. Data are presented separately for the Israeli and the Palestinian groups, and for 10th and 12th grade in each group.

Table 3 displays the results of two-way ANOVAs, using group (Israeli Jews vs. Palestinians) and age 15 vs. 18 years (10th vs. 12th grade) as independent variables, and the items of Attitudes towards the Conflict as dependent variables.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The group effect was found to be significant in most of the attitude items, indicating higher scores of the Israelis vs. the Palestinian students in items expressing positive attitudes towards the possibility of reconciliation by mutual agreement, joint interests, education and socialization, etc. The age effect was inconsistent along the various items and was found to be significant in only 4 of the 11 items. Among the older students there was, for example, a decrease of agreement in religious claims as a possible resolution (item A1) or in the belief that eventually one side concedes (item A10). Significant interaction effects (group x age), however, were found in 8 of the items, indicating a tendency toward a different pattern of age effect in the two groups. While in the Israeli group the older adolescents (12th grade) expressed more positive attitudes towards the possibilities of reconciliation of the conflict by mutual agreement and understanding [e.g. confidence building (item A3), education (item A6), or mutual interests (item A7)], among the Palestinian group the older youth expressed less positive attitudes and more pessimistic opinions towards any resolution at all (e.g. item A11).

The third type of analyses performed investigated the relations between the perceptions and emotions concerning the “other’s” group narrative and expectations for the future. Table 4 shows the correlations among the Attitudes items and the three

combined measures regarding the perception of the “other” (Legitimization, Empathy and Anger) for each group separately (Palestinian and Israeli Jews).

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

The results, however, generally support the prediction that higher levels of perceived Legitimacy and Empathy would be related to expectations that the conflict will be resolved through positive processes (e.g., mutual interests, confidence building, education and socialization). Anger, in contrast, was related to expectations that the conflict will not be resolved and that there will be more wars. The findings also suggest generally higher correlations among the Israeli respondents than among the Palestinian respondents. Similar results were found in both age groups.

Discussion

This study attempted to examine the relationship between two dimensions of social knowledge – the interpretations of the past and expectations for the future – among young people living in two societies in conflict. Living in a conflicted area has nourished different interpretations by each side of recent, as well as historical events, which tend to favor different political convictions and belief systems. Our first issue concerned the interpretations of the past as reflected by three measures: readiness of legitimization, feelings of empathy and feelings of anger towards the narrative of the “other’s” group.

Overall, the results suggest that the readiness of legitimization of the “other’s” perspective, as well as the feelings of empathy towards the “other’s” narrative, was higher among the Israeli students than among their Palestinian counterparts, whereas the feelings of anger towards the “other’s” narrative were higher among the

Palestinians. However, the general low levels in both groups of feelings of empathy together with the high levels of anger towards the “other’s” perspective reflect a picture of unreadiness of either side to accept the “other’s” narrative on the emotional level. These results can be accounted for by the background of the prolonged, continuous Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which has led both societies to construct their national identity on the basis of negation of the enemy’s perception.

In the Israeli group, however, there was a gap between the cognitive and the emotional components of their attitudes towards the “other’s” narrative. While these Jewish Israeli students were ready, to some extent, to cognitively accept the legitimacy of the “other’s” narrative, they still negated it emotionally. This gap between emotions, or affect, and cognitive resources is known in political psychology (Granberg & Brown, 1989, Dolan & Hollbrook, 2000) as an important component of the process of perceiving one’s political world. In several studies concerning political context, affect was found to exert a much stronger effect on behavior than cognition (e.g. Granberg & Brown, 1989). Having an ambivalent set of cognitions was found to be associated with less stable affect and behavior (Rosenberg, 1968; Norman, 1975; Granberg & Brown, 1989). In our study such ambivalence may be expressed as a higher cognitive readiness to legitimize the “other’s” narrative than the feelings towards it. Thus, we can cautiously view the development of cognitive legitimization as a starting point on the long route of a gradual changing of feelings and behavior towards the “other”. Moreover, in our complicated conflict situation, it seems easier to change the cognitive component of attitudes towards the “other” than the emotional one.

The higher levels of legitimacy of the “other’s” perspective among the Israeli adolescents may indeed suggest some kind of transition in Israeli society, at least

during the period in which the research took place (December 1999 / February 2000, while negotiations between the two parties were intensive). This transition can be explained on two levels: historical-national and cultural.

On the historical-national level of the development of national ethos, this finding may indicate a gradual movement out of the strong emphasis on “building our nation” in the 50s and 60s, to a new stage which can include other elements in the collective Israeli identity (Sagy, Orr & Bar-On, 1999)

The second explanation concerns the cultural level. Israeli society appears to have undergone a gradual shift toward a more Western oriented culture. Contemporary Israeli youth were recently described as more individualistic and Western oriented than they were in the 60s and 70s (e.g. Florian, Mikulincer & Weller, 1993, Sagy, Orr, Bar-On & Awwad, in press). Exposure to modern mass media and international communication of the 1990s and to post modern ideas, as well as the years of the peace process (1994-2000), have also increased the shift from a closed local collectivism to a possible international individualism (Huntington, 1997). This substantive change in Israeli society toward an individual-oriented culture may be reflected in a growing readiness to legitimate other narratives. The gradual readiness for perception of the “other’s” legitimacy is well reflected in the public debate in Israeli society around the validity of some of the historical “facts” as presented by the Zionist narrative. This discourse arose especially after the introduction of a new high school history textbook that diverged from the traditional Zionist story (Nave, 1998). The “crack” in the traditional Israeli narrative is a matter discussed extensively during the period of data collection, both in academia (Shapira, 1997) and in the popular media (Taub, 1997). Perhaps that the results of our study reflect this open discussion, which has been re-aroused lately by the new Israeli Minister of Education (Livnat,

2001) who used it as a reason for blocking a change in the high-school history curriculum and for removing a new history textbook from students' reading list. Further research is needed to investigate the impact of these new trends on students.

As for the Palestinian society, on the historical-national level, it is still in the initial stage of nation building. At this stage, to accept the legitimacy of their enemy's narrative may be threatening. For many decades Palestinians' rights to develop their own identity were denied (Kimmerling & Migdal, 1994). During the period of our study, the Palestinians were in the process of composing their own text for the first time in history (Firer & Adwan, 1999). The efforts to formulate the Palestinian identity and develop Palestinian ethos and nationalism challenged the Palestinian ethnocentric narrative.

On the cultural level, Palestinian society seems to be more homogeneous than Israeli society. With the majority of the Palestinians being Muslim, Palestinian culture is focused on the duties of worshiping God and defending the holy places, the land, and the people. The whole of Palestine is considered to be an Islamic regime. Since the signing of the Oslo Accords, however, other voices have been heard, which make the Palestinian narrative less singular and cohesive. Secular ideology, for example, as differentiated from religious ideology, proposed more willingness to accept Israel as a sovereign state.

Some differences, however, in the pattern of results with regard to two specific events in the narratives, can contribute to deeper understanding of the findings. One event is the *Intifada*. This event aroused the highest level of anger among the Israelis. The Palestinian's perspective of the *Intifada* was presented as a legitimate resistance to the Israeli occupation, while the Israeli perspective was presented as viewing it as illegal riots. More than any other event in the survey, the *Intifada* may represent

Palestinian strength in their demand for national identity. This seems to be a threat to the Israeli mainstream Zionist perspective.

The second event is the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin. This event aroused the highest level of legitimacy and willingness to feel empathy towards the “other’s” view in both groups. Apparently this event, unlike the other events in the survey, was perceived as negative by both groups, albeit for different reasons. The assassination on November 4, 1995 was on the background of a political struggle in Israeli society regarding the problem of national security. The contradictory ideologies of hawkish and dovish positions created a schism in Israeli society, which intensified radically in September 1993, when Prime Minister Rabin signed the document of principles with the PLO chairman Yasser Arafat. Many hawkish opponents of the Oslo accords felt Rabin was ignoring and abandoning a large segment of the population, and considered him a traitor. The atmosphere fermented dangerously and reached a climax in the assassination of Rabin by a religious Jewish right-wing radical. The assassination was an extraordinary, unprecedented event that caused shock, disbelief and deep grief to Israelis. Particularly prominent was the reaction of the youth, who engaged in various rituals of mourning behavior. The two narratives of the assassination were presented as follows:

- Many Israelis view the assassination of prime-minister Rabin as an indication that the peace process cannot continue unless there is a full national consensus about it. How do you feel about this attitude?
- Many Palestinians view the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin as a terrible blow to the peace process. How do you feel about this attitude?

More than any other part of the narrative, the Palestinians’ perspective about the assassination aroused a willingness by the Israeli Jewish respondents to accept its

legitimacy. The murder of Rabin was also the event for which the Israeli's narrative received the highest level of legitimacy and empathy from the Palestinian adolescents. It seems that they considered Rabin a man of peace, despite his iron fist policy during the 1987 *Intifada*. In Palestinian society Rabin was perceived as a partner for peace who was supportive of the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

Does this mean that the young students in both societies expressed, after all, wishful thinking towards peace between the two parties? The analysis of the answers to the question concerning the perspectives of the conflict resolution revealed a complex picture. The Israeli group expressed relatively high trust in the possibility of building peace in the future, whereas a much more pessimistic view was found among the Palestinians. This was expressed by the significantly higher expectations of the Jewish Israeli adolescents, as compared to their Palestinian counterparts, that the conflict would be resolved through mutual agreement, realizing shared interests and a process of socialization. In contrast, the Palestinian adolescents scored significantly higher than their Israeli counterparts on the item "the conflict will not be resolved at all". These results, it seems, reflect differentiated understanding of the meaning of peace during the years following the signing of the Oslo Accords (1993-2000). While most Israelis considered peace to be a situation with no violence and/or conflict, most Palestinians understood peace as a situation in which they would be able to establish their own independent state.

Similar pessimistic consciousness was also found among young Palestinians in previous research carried out during 1995 (Orr, Sagy & Bar-On, 2000). In that study, the young Palestinians expected that their future would bring only modest economic and social improvements, and would be less peaceful than in the past. In contrast, the Israeli adolescents expressed highly optimistic perspectives for the future of their

society. The opposing expectations towards the future may be related to the collective self-perception of Israelis as winners and Palestinians as losers (Rouhana & Fiske, 1995). This perception can be understood against the background of the gloomy Palestinian reality as an occupied society during a very long period (Kimmerling & Migdal, 1994).

Our third question concerned the relations between the interpretations of the past and expectations for the future in the two groups of young people. Actually, we investigated how acceptance of the legitimacy of the “other’s” narrative of the historical events was related to perceptions concerning the possible resolution of the conflict. We assumed that rejecting the legitimacy of the “other’s” narrative is likely to facilitate the perception that the conflict will only be resolved when the other side concedes. On the other hand, understanding that the “other” has also suffered may strengthen the belief in the ability to understand and perceive options for resolution through peaceful negotiations, mutual interests, education and socialization.

These types of relations between the two measures were found to be quite different in the two groups of Jewish Israeli and Palestinian students in our study. Whereas among the Palestinians almost no consistent pattern of relations was found, among the Israeli Jews such relations were low but significant. The highest correlation of expectations for peaceful solution was with the cognitive measure of Legitimization. The Anger measure, on the contrary, was highly related to the impossibility of resolution. These findings give some support to our prior interpretation regarding the meaningful role of the cognitive component of the perception of the “other” in the change towards reconciliation with the former enemy.

Here again, the different pattern of findings in the two groups can be understood against the background of the different real situations in which these

young people lived. Unfortunately, neither the Israeli nor the Palestinian high school students in our samples were lucky enough to experience peaceful social situations during their life. However, even while the peace negotiations between the parties proceeded, the context in which the Palestinians live is of an occupied society, going through daily life in the conflict. As a result of this, their reality seemed to reflect a more pessimistic, tough and untrusting view of the future. The Israelis, however, lived their life in this conflict situation without feeling it in their day-by-day reality. Moreover, the Israelis' story seemed to be constructed as a success story, both economically and politically, in spite of the context of conflict. This social state seems to contribute to their relatively high cognitive readiness to perceive the "other's" narrative as legitimate, and to their ability to construct a more coherent pattern, at least in the cognitive level of perceiving the conflict. The life of the Palestinians may explain the lack of coherence in their perceptions.

One last note with regard to the developmental question. The age factor was found to have only a small effect on the respondents' reactions in both groups. This effect, however, was expressed in a completely different pattern in each group. Whereas among the Israelis the age increased the cognitive readiness to legitimate the "other's" narrative, among the Palestinians this readiness decreased with age. A similar tendency was found with regard to the conflict resolution attitudes. The attitudes towards possibilities of peaceful conflict resolution were more pessimistic among the older Palestinians (12th grade) than among their younger counterparts (10th grade). The older Palestinians also expected, more than the younger students, that the conflict will be resolved by more wars or will not be resolved at all. In the Israeli sample the change by age was in the opposite direction. The older adolescents expressed stronger beliefs in peaceful solutions and were more ready than their

younger counterparts to legitimate the “other’s” narrative. These developmental trends seem to reflect, once again, the different situations in which the students were living. The Palestinian context seems to lead to more negative and more pessimistic attitudes along the developmental line. The Palestinian 12th grade respondents were about 8 years old when the 1987 *Intifada* started. They were probably actively engaged in its activities and more politically aware of their situation, while the 10th graders grew up mostly in what is called the peace years (1993-2000). The older a Palestinian, the more he/she was exposed to Israeli oppression. This could explain why the group of older Palestinians was angrier, less optimistic, and less willing to legitimate the “other’s” narratives. Also, they were at the verge of leaving high school for college/university or work and felt, more than their younger counterparts the limited opportunities available to them.

In summary, our results seem to reveal that developmental processes are influenced not only by universal “laws” but also, and possibly more so, by specific social and cultural contexts. The idea of contextualism (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is well reflected in our findings. The young adolescents, growing up in a conflicted area, expressed in their historical interpretations, as well as in their future expectations, the cultural, political and social realities of their society. The Israeli youth reflected a Western-oriented society, which lived during that time in a relatively quiet, confident and prosperous condition. As a result, this society seemed to have been able to gradually develop (although not without bitter debate) a greater openness and readiness to accept the legitimacy of the “other’s” narrative (at least cognitively). Palestinian society was in that time in its initial stage of nation building, dealing with its situation as an occupied nation and with the need to struggle for its own identity

and rights. This situation led to a more negative perception of the “other” and less openness for peaceful resolutions.

Hazem Sarghiesh and Saleh Bashir recently wrote that “...the establishment of the Jewish State, and the conflict aroused by it, created a deep historical connection between Jews and Palestinians. Coexistence between peoples is unlikely as long as each side is living its own history alongside the other or in isolation from the other. To enable a real dialogue and coexistence, each side will have to assimilate the history of the other, even to make it its own...” (Haaretz, February 21, 2000).

Our group of researchers believes in coexistence between the two nations, coexistence that is based on mutual recognition of the historical narrative of each side. Our findings lead us to suggest a deeper recognition of the “other’s” narrative in the educational systems and curriculums of both nations, despite the different levels of development and the asymmetrical power relationship. We still believe that mutual recognition of the legitimacy of the other side’s perspective, and the ability to understand and acknowledge each other’s pain, is necessary in order to achieve a dialogue between the two peoples.

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Table 1:
**Demographic Characteristics of the two Study Groups:
 Israeli Jews and Palestinians**

<i>Sociodemographic characteristics</i>	Palestinians N=1183	Israeli Jews N=1188
<u>Gender</u>		
Girls	39.1	60.4
Boys	60.9	39.6
<u>Grades</u>		
10 th grade	55.8	55.0
12 th grade	44.2	45.0
<u>School</u>		
Public secular school	79.7	77.6
Public religious school	----	22.4
Private school	20.3	
<u>Religion</u>		
Muslims	85.9	
Christians	14.1	
Jews	-----	96.4
Others		3.6
<u>Dwelling</u>		
Cities	59.5	35.9
Small towns	25.6	32.6
Moshav, Kibbutz & settlement	-----	31.5
Refugees Camps	14.6	-----
<u>Residence Distribution</u>		
Northern area	23.9	16.4
Central area	17.3	27.0
Jerusalem area	26.9	11.5
Southern area	18.3	32.5
Gaza area	-----	-----
Other	13.6	7.6
<u>Father's Schooling</u>		
No schooling	3.3	1.5
Primary	23.8	5.1
Secondary	30.6	33.2
Professional	13.9	26.7
Academic	28.3	33.5
<u>Mother's Schooling</u>		
No schooling	6.4	1.6
Primary	23.4	2.6
Secondary	42.3	29.9
Professional	14.5	28.9
Academic	13.2	37.1

<u>Place of Birth</u>		
Israel		84.0
West Bank	76.7	----
Gaza	9.9	----
Eastern Europe	----	8.2
Other	13.4	7.8
<u>Economic Status</u>		
(respondent evaluation)		
Lower class	4.0	2.0
Middle class	83.1	77.3
Upper class	12.9	20.8
<u>Father Working</u>		
Yes	89.7	91.3
No	10.3	8.7
<u>Mother Working</u>		
Yes	17.3	77.8
No	82.7	22.2
<u>Average Number of Children</u>		
<u>in Family</u>	5.5	3.7
<u>Palestinians</u>		
Non-refugees	65.7	----
Refugees	31.7	----
Returnees*	2.6	----

* Returnees – returned to the Palestinian National Territories after the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Attitudes towards the Conflict

		Israeli-Jews				Palestinians			
		<u>10th grade</u>		<u>12th grade</u>		<u>10th grade</u>		<u>12th grade</u>	
		n =653		n =535		n =660		n =523	
		<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
<i>The conflict will finally be resolved by:</i>									
A1.	Mutual agreement	3.60	1.24	3.59	1.19	2.80	1.27	2.57	1.29
A2.	International pressure and intervention	3.28	1.17	3.28	1.14	2.72	1.22	2.61	1.24
A3.	Trust and confidence building	3.48	1.22	3.60	1.18	2.86	1.31	2.65	1.30
A4.	More wars and conflicts	2.32	1.27	2.22	1.19	2.61	1.34	2.80	1.39
A5.	Mutual economic interests	3.15	1.17	3.31	1.11	2.72	1.18	2.73	1.20
A6.	Education and socialization	3.20	1.24	3.48	1.19	3.06	1.26	2.83	1.27
A7.	Mutual environmental interest	3.25	1.15	3.37	1.13	2.95	1.24	2.75	1.25
A8.	Will not be resolved at all	2.53	1.28	2.49	1.23	2.63	1.33	2.76	1.40
A9.	Religious claims	2.30	1.18	2.19	1.08	3.02	1.30	2.87	1.34
A10.	One side finally concedes	2.37	1.33	2.15	1.15	2.75	1.39	2.73	1.45
A11.	Each side adheres to its own goals	3.15	1.32	2.92	1.32	2.98	1.37	3.18	1.35

Table 3: **Results of two-way ANOVA on Attitudes towards the Conflict**

	<u>group effect</u>	<u>age effect</u>	<u>group x age interaction</u>
<i>The conflict will finally be resolved by:</i>			
A1. Mutual agreement	286.68***	5.33*	4.15*
A2. International pressure and intervention	140.14***	1.21	1.17
A3. Trust and confidence building	209.28***	0.75	9.99**
A4. More wars and conflicts	61.03***	0.65	6.60**
A5. Mutual economic interests	100.18***	2.93	2.14
A6. Education and socialization	55.69***	0.16	22.88***
A7. Mutual environmental interest	79.85***	0.47	9.50**
A8. Will not be resolved at all	11.10***	0.70	2.37
A9. Religious claims	172.55***	5.98*	0.24
A10. One side finally concedes	68.74***	4.43*	2.98
A11. Each side adheres to its own goals	0.76	0.09	14.09***

*** $p \leq .001$, ** $p \leq .01$, * $p \leq .05$

Table 4:
**Correlation Coefficients of Attitudes towards the Conflict on three
Measures of Perception of the “Other”’s Narrative**

<u>Attitudes:</u>		<u>Legitimization</u>		<u>Empathy</u>		<u>Anger</u>	
		<i>Israelis</i> n=1178	<i>Palestinians</i> n=1165	<i>Israelis</i> n=1080	<i>Palestinians</i> n=1083	<i>Israelis</i> n=1121	<u><i>Palestinians</i></u> n=1181
<u><i>The conflict will finally be resolved by:</i></u>							
A1.	Mutual agreement	.25	-.02	.22	-.02	-.23	.01
A2.	International pressure and intervention	.20	.12	.16	.05	-.20	.07
A3.	Trust and confidence building	.22	.12	.19	.18	-.20	-.06
A4.	More wars and conflicts	-.08	.01	-.03	-.01	.14	.11
A5.	Mutual economic interest	.25	.11	.31	.15	-.29	-.07
A6.	Education and socialization	.21	.09	.25	.12	-.24	-.03
A7.	Mutual environmental interest	.24	.11	.27	.13	-.27	-.10
A8.	Will not be resolved at all	-.17	.02	-.17	.00	.28	.09
A9.	Religious claims	-.03	.01	.11	.03	.07	.03
A10.	One side finally concedes	-.16	.01	-.06	-.00	.21	.05
A11.	Each side adheres to its own goals	-.07	.00	-.06	-.06	.09	.09