

# The Challenges of Social and Political Psychology in Pursuit of Peace: Personal Account

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This article describes the autobiographical story of my professional and intellectual development. It describes sources of my values and begins the story of my doctoral study at the University of Pittsburgh that influenced my approach to making science. Next, the article describes the beginning of my academic career at School of Education of Tel Aviv University. Also the beginning was significantly influenced by the work of Arie Kruglanski who was developing his Lay epistemic theory. The shift of interest in the early 1980s to political psychology opened new avenues for developing theories and empirical research. The climax of this line of work was the development of the general theory of shared societal beliefs and more specific theory of the sociopsychological foundations and dynamics of intractable conflicts. Since the end of the second millennium my efforts have been focused on training graduate students according to developed principles of the “learning community.”

## **Public Significance Statement**

The article illuminates major themes of the conflict research as well describes ways of their development. In addition it provides insights about study of conflicts and about the academic practices.

*Keywords:* career, conflict, professional development, social psychology, theory

When I was asked to write an autobiographical account of the development of my academic career, I felt flattered and also uncomfortable. It is clear why I was flattered—the inconvenience

came with the challenge of how to organize the 48 years of my experiences in social and political psychology, avoiding a self-praising tone. I hope I have successfully met the challenge.

## **Background**

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## **Search for the Mother**

Any type of a biographical story has to begin with the description of the sources that imprinted my beliefs and values in the early years of my life. In my case it is relatively easy to identify my mother (we call her Zosia) as being responsible for my intellectual upbringing, with complex and critical thinking and open-mindedness. It was she who encouraged me to read numerous works of classical literature during my childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. It was she who discussed with me the books that I read or plays and films that I saw. It was she who implanted in me the liberal values of unconditional acceptance of the other, freedom of expression, and justice. These values have served as a beacon for my personal life and my academic career.

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## **The Personal Memory of the Holocaust**

She was one of nine siblings in an ultraorthodox family living in Warsaw, but their parents were liberal enough to allow their daughters to attend secular high schools and earn matriculation (the sons were not interested in pursuing their formal education). Except for her sister and this sister's daughter, who survived the

POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY DRAWS MUCH of its knowledge from social psychology, and many political psychologists received their education in socio-psychological departments. My career in political psychology followed this route and therefore in my reflections I refer to this connection.

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Holocaust hell in Warsaw, the entire family perished in Treblinka. Only she, as a miracle, succeeded in escaping to the USSR in the early days of the German invasion of Poland and survived the war. The story of the Holocaust and the atrocities of the war were then my second experiential imprinting because of spending my first 11 years in posttraumatic Poland after the war, reading much about the war and then in Israel (where the family emigrated) residing in the same apartment with my aunt, who often told of her experiences during the war in great detail. Thus, from the early years I acquired the command of “never again” that characterizes Israeli society. But here the similarity ends to some extent. Whereas the state of Israel has mostly adopted the particularistic lesson saying that Jews have to be powerful militarily and exercise their right to defend themselves even without considering the views of the international community, my understanding of “never again” mainly touches upon the conditions that raised the Nazi regime to power and then enabled the regime to perform the Holocaust. Thus, in my view, it is vital to struggle unconditionally against racism, xenophobia, chauvinism, fascism, and militarism. This struggle is essential if civilization, including the Jews, wants to prevent additional genocide, ethnic cleansing, or wide-ranging violations of human rights.

With these values and my interest in social behavior, it was quite natural for me to study and specialize in one of the disciplines of the social sciences. I selected social psychology, studying for my first degree psychology and sociology at Tel Aviv University.

### Phase 1: Doctoral Study and the Initial Influences

My academic career began at the University of Pittsburgh, where I started my doctoral studies in 1970. With the socioemotional support of Martin Greenberg, I was introduced to the knowledge of social psychology and the art of planning and carrying out experiments, as the major research method of this discipline. My area of specialization was prosocial behavior, a realm of study which was developing in those years. In the same department, Irene Frieze presented me with the attribution theory that was then the hot theme in social psychology.

The arrival of the legendary Paul Lazarsfeld<sup>1</sup> to the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh affected my professional life, providing me with new perspectives on sciences. He set up a multidisciplinary program to which doctoral students from social science disciplines were invited to write their dissertations about education. As one of the lucky students of the department of psychology, I was invited to take part in this program and learned three important principles of science that have accompanied me throughout my academic work. The first is adoption of the multidisciplinary approach to the study of research issues. It was there that I understood that a study of any social issue cannot be comprehensive if it is carried out from one single perspective. Issues like poverty or conflicts require a multidisciplinary approach for wide and deep understanding.

The second principle that I learned in the group was that the study of a research question requires knowledge of multiresearch methods. Research of an issue cannot be carried out mainly with one method. The choice of the method depends on the selected research questions and not vice versa. Some research questions require use of experimentation, but others may require use of

content analysis, observation, questionnaires and surveys, or an interview. It may today seem very obvious to many students, but at the beginning of the 1970s, social psychology was almost completely dominated by the use of experimentation and was very reluctant to accept other research methods. This tradition prevails until the present, although the use of other methods is accepted in some circles.

The third perspective that I acquired in the LRDC doctoral program was to look at issues with what I call “a big head.” This means that to select a research question, it is necessary to comprehend the studied issue in all of its components and aspects. In other words, researchers need to understand the “large picture” to select a research question. We cannot approach an issue with a very narrow perspective of seeing only a small part of it.

Finally, during my doctoral study in LRDC I realized that social psychology has something to say about many different social issues that preoccupy human beings and it is its responsibility and duty to contribute its knowledge to understanding humanity. Social psychology cannot disregard its relevance to societal issues that preoccupy human beings in different areas, zones, and spaces.

### Phase 2: Beginning of My Academic Career

#### Social Psychology of Education, Prosocial Behavior, and Attribution Theory

In 1975 I returned to Israel with the knowledge acquired at the University of Pittsburgh to assume a position at the School of Education of Tel Aviv University.

In line with the knowledge I received at Pittsburgh, I began my independent career in two areas. The first was building the foundations of the social psychology of education which at that time was taking its first steps and therefore its boundaries and research questions had to be set (see Bar-Tal & Saxe, 1978). I myself focused on the study of achievement motivation as conceptualized by Bernard Weiner (Bar-Tal, 1978, 1979). At the same time I continued to work in the area of prosocial behavior, publishing the first book in it that tried to organize the field (Bar-Tal, 1976). Later I focused mostly on the study of the development of helping behavior, as well as its nature (e.g., Bar-Tal, 1982, 1986; Staub, Bar-Tal, Karylowski, & Reykowski, 1984).

#### Lay-Epistemology

In the late 1970s I met Arie Kruglanski, who was advancing his career in the Department of Psychology of Tel Aviv University, one floor below my office. This was probably the most influential meeting in my career, beyond my doctoral study years. At this time, Arie was developing his lay-psychology theory (Kruglanski, 1989) and I joined his group of students engaging in this undertaking. The years of work with Arie were very exciting for me because we all thought that we were changing the paradigm of social psychology in particular and of psychology in general

<sup>1</sup> Paul Lazarsfeld (1901–1976) was a leading Austro-American sociologist and founder of modern empirical sociology. He left Vienna because of the untenable political climate and in the United States exerted an immense influence on social research, using quantitative methods.

(Bar-Tal & Kruglanski, 1988). His theory changed my views as well as the paradigm of approaching the study of issues in social psychology. The metatheory of knowledge formation in terms of process and content, with its epistemic motivations, appears in many of my writings. At least four publications were written directly on the basis of Arie's theory, trying to reconceptualize different areas of sociopsychological research (Bar-Tal, Bar-Tal, Geva, & Yarkin-Levin, 1991; Bar-Tal & Bar-Tal, 1988; Bar-Tal & Bar-Tal, 1991; Bar-Tal, Kruglanski, & Klar, 1989). In addition, Arie's concept of epistemic authority denoting a source on whom an individual may rely in her/his attempts to acquire knowledge on various topics stimulated a line of research to reveal its scope and trajectory of development (see review in Kruglanski et al., 2005).

During this period, I realized that, first and foremost, I immensely enjoy developing concepts, conceptual frameworks, and theories, and then, on their basis, engaging in empirical research to validate the ideas. And indeed, this has characterized my contribution to social sciences, in the spirit of Kurt Lewin's assertion that "there is nothing more practical than a good theory."

### Phase 3: Shift in My Interests to Political Psychology

#### Political Activism

My political activism began during my undergraduate studies, immediately after the 1967 war, when it became absolutely clear to me that the occupation of territories in this war would bring mainly losses and sufferings, without advancing to the solution of the bloody conflict. It is a universal principle that unwanted occupation leads to resistance by the occupied society and, in turn, the resistance is always met with oppression by the occupying forces. This cycle has happened through centuries of history in almost every occupation, and the fate of the Israeli occupation could not be different. Indeed Israel makes tremendous efforts with immense resources to repress every sign of resistance, but this resistance appears and reappears in different forms continuously.

My activism continued with my return to Israel in 1975. In 1978 the Peace Now movement was founded, and I found my place there almost from the beginning. During this period, I realized that, as an Israeli, it was my great interest as well as my duty to engage in research relevant to my life in Israel and to study the most central issue of the Israeli Jewish society: the Israeli–Arab/Palestinian conflict that overwhelms it.

#### Moving to Political Psychology

The opportunity for the major shift came on my sabbatical at Vanderbilt University in 1981–1982. It was there that I began to conceptualize the phenomena of delegitimization, siege mentality, and patriotism that have absorbed me, especially observing them in Israeli society. Bill Smith of the Department of Psychology was a critical listener to my developing conceptions. This was the beginning of my journey that has continued until today—studying societies involved in a long and violent conflict that I later characterized as intractable (Bar-Tal, 1998). The ideas came from observing Israeli Jewish society and I then tried to ascertain whether they appear in other societies engulfed in intractable conflict as well. Eventually each societal phenomenon that I observed was analyzed within two frame-

works: once on the general level and then as it appeared in Israeli Jewish society.

**Delegitimization.** The study of delegitimization has accompanied me through the years, being convinced that delegitimization represents an extreme form of moral exclusion that leads to moral disengagement and then to violence. It is based on classifying societies into categories that deny their humanity, providing psychological permission to carry out acts of cruel violence that only human beings can imagine and use.<sup>2</sup> It is probably one of the most destructive mindsets that human beings construct to carry out acts of evil. Delegitimization does not appear in every intergroup conflict, but it tends to emerge, especially in every violent conflict, when the contested goals are perceived as far-reaching, unjustified, and endangering the existential goals of the group. The use of delegitimization in intractable conflicts is not surprising because the rivals are also viewed as an enemy. A group defined as an "enemy" is seen as a group that threatens to carry out unjust harm and therefore arouses feelings of hostility. Moreover, enemies are expected to be eliminated and destroyed. The word "enemy" is enough to condemn a human being to death. Delegitimization was used by Hutu in Rwanda who decided to exterminate Tutsi, but also by the rivals in the Israeli–Arab conflict to facilitate mutual killings. This was my observation that led to extensive work on this concept (Bar-Tal, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1994; Bar-Tal & Hammack, 2012; Oren & Bar-Tal, 2007).

**Siege mentality.** Siege mentality is another observation characterizing Jewish society that has had an effect on managing the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000b; Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992). It has also been observed in Serb and Iranian society, as well as being hegemonic in Albanian and North Korean societies. It denotes the domination of a belief that the rest of the world has highly negative intentions toward one's own society. This belief appears dominantly in the Jewish psychological repertoire and is frequently expressed by leaders and the mass media. Throughout their long history, and as retained in their collective memory, Jews have experienced persecution, libel, social taxation, restriction, forced conversion, expulsion, and pogroms. But the climax of these experiences took place in the 20th century with "the final solution to the Jewish problem," the systematic genocide which we now call the Holocaust. The fact that six million Jews perished, while "the world" remained indifferent, has served crucially to strengthen the siege mentality of the remaining Jews and has left its mark on future generations and their experiences. In addition, the collective memory of the Israeli–Arab conflict, although very different from the Holocaust, has greatly contributed to preserving this siege mentality. Many Jews have seen Arab animosity and hatred as a continuation of European anti-Semitism. Moreover, Israeli Jews view the criticism of Israeli policies and behaviors regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, especially in the context of the occupation, as an indication of world anti-Semitism. The popular song in Israel "The Whole World is Against Us," composed in the late 1960s, is probably the most vivid and obvious expression of this view: "The whole world is against us, this is an ancient tale, taught by our forefathers. . . . We don't give a damn. . . . Let the whole world go to hell." Siege mentality has serious consequences: self-isolation, formation of

<sup>2</sup> It has been suggested that dehumanization, out-casting, negative trait characterization, political labeling, and group comparison are among the most commonly used contents in delegitimization (Bar-Tal, 1989).

suspicion, mistrust, and negative attitudes toward the nations of the world, sensitivity to any information and cues coming from other societies, especially critical ones, disregard of the international community norms, and pressure for conformity and obedience within society.

**Patriotism.** Patriotism is an essential condition for group existence (Bar-Tal, 1993; Bar-Tal & Staub, 1997). It reflects an attachment of society members toward their nation and the country in which they reside. It implies their love, care, and volunteering for actions that benefit society. Patriotism is of special importance during protracted and violent conflicts, because conflicts cannot be maintained without it. Violent conflicts require not only mobilization of the society members for support and participation, but also readiness to kill members of the rival group (the enemy) and also sacrifice one's own life. The latter is the ultimate patriotic act. It is thus not surprising that Israeli Jewish society, like other societies engaged in intractable conflict, makes special efforts to instill patriotism among society members from a very early age and tries to maintain it throughout their lives by using all agents of socialization, including leaders, mass media, the educational system, youth movements, and so on (Ben-Amos & Bar-Tal, 2004).

Conceptualization of patriotism led me to notice, both in Israel and in other states, what I have called "monopolization of patriotism" (Bar-Tal, 1997b). Monopolization of patriotism is a mechanism of exclusion for ingroup members. It takes place when a subgroup assumes that there are limiting conditions for including only a part of the ingroup in the group of patriots on the basis of acceptance a particular ideology, ideas, regime, or a leader. The extreme cases of monopolization of patriotism are found in totalitarian systems. But monopolization of patriotism may also occur in democratic systems, as in the United States during the McCarthy era. In addition, a group does not have to be in power to monopolize patriotism, as in Israel during the term of Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin, who negotiated with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The hawkish opposition presented the negotiations as an unpatriotic act of treason because it refused to relinquish the occupied territories (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip), even in return for peace, and advocated their settlement by Jews (Oren & Bar-Tal, 2004). Monopolization of patriotism leads to exclusion and delegitimization of the so-called nonpatriots, their scapegoating, and even violence toward them. It also indicates that a society which, practices it on a wide scale and for a long period of time, is moving toward totalitarianism.

**Security.** My next theme of study was security because I observed that maintaining security was one of the primary motivators for collective action and a major topic in international and societal discourse. It also occurred to me that the notion of security is misrepresented in this discourse: Security is presented as an objective, well defined and measurable concept that can be assessed with the number of soldiers, quantity and quality of weapons possessed, or territories held, as well as on the basis of the capability and intentions of the rival. In contrast, in my view, a sense of security or insecurity is a social psychological concept necessarily related to human needs and based on cognitive processes through which society members evaluate their situation (Bar-Tal, 1991).

Security or insecurity should thus be viewed in terms of beliefs and feelings and, as a result, marked by individual, societal, and cultural differences. Specifically, security, or rather insecurity, is defined as an appraisal of a perceived danger in the environment to which a person perceives threat (Jacobson, 1991). In essence, two beliefs constitute

the set of beliefs about insecurity. One refers to the appraisal of an event(s), condition(s), or situation(s) as an indicator of threat or danger (primary appraisal) and the other refers to an evaluation of available defenses and the ability to cope with the perceived threat or danger (secondary appraisal). Accordingly, people form beliefs about being secure when they do not perceive threats or dangers, or even when they perceive threats or dangers, which they believe they are able to overcome. In contrast, people form beliefs about being insecure when they detect dangers or threats and see difficulty in coping with them (Smith & Lazarus, 1993). In reality, beliefs about security or insecurity are not dichotomous, but vary on the range of which a high level of insecurity and a high level of security are the extreme poles.

On an individual level, members of the same group, a nation, for example, differ with regard to their beliefs on security. Thus, different nation members in the same situation feel different levels of security or insecurity, while the same nation members may feel differently in a similar situation, at different points of time. The described individual differences in experiencing security or insecurity originate because individuals differ in their experiences, their ability to perceive, their perceptual selectivity, their information processing, and their motivation and knowledge—which influence the interrelation of the perceived information and in their coping ability.

This conception implies that feeling security or insecurity is subjective, based on a view of reality and received information about it, stored learned knowledge, and personal experiences. It is learned and generalized, based on collective memory and held ideology. Ways and conditions for achieving a state of security, a very important personal and collective need, are often based on misinformation provided by leaders who strive to impart and to propagate a particular ideology, and/or to maintain their role as a state's leader or try to be elected to this position.

The preoccupation with security problems in Israel has been longstanding and central from the establishment of the state in 1948 (Bar-Tal & Jacobson, 1998; Bar-Tal, Magal, & Halperin, 2009). Thus, it is not surprising that concerns about insecurity have been the major influence in many decisions regarding various spheres of collective life in the state. The challenge of achieving security has become the single most critical factor shaping personal and societal life in Israel and has had a determinative effect on the possible resolution of the Israeli–Arab conflict in the Middle East. In addition, insecurity concerns continuously touch and affect the personal life of citizens and serve as the most important consideration in their voting behavior and evaluation of the political echelon.

Through the years security has been used continuously as an important justification and explanation for many governmental decisions, even if they do not have direct implications for security; it became a rationale for initiating actions and responding with reactions in military, political, societal, and even educational and cultural domains, it became an excuse for undemocratic, immoral, or even illegal practices carried out by the Israelis, and it has been used to mobilize human and material resources.

**Group beliefs.** During the late eighties I also directed my intellectual efforts to investigate the more holistic concept of shared beliefs in groups that resulted in writing a book called *Group Beliefs* (Bar-Tal, 1990). Group beliefs were defined as "convictions that group members a. are aware that they share and b. consider as defining their 'groupness'" (p. 36). These beliefs



serve as a *raison d'être* for a collective of individuals to label themselves as group members and view the entity as a group. It was posited that only when individuals are aware that they are group members can the group's existence be determined for them. They then form key group beliefs that define their essence and uniqueness. The book later described the contents of this basic concept and the characteristics of group beliefs, and their formation and maintenance. Furthermore, I used the concept to analyze various group processes such as the emergence of groups, the merging of two groups or more, subgrouping, group schisms, and disintegration.

#### Phase 4: Conceptual Work About Conflicts and Shared Beliefs

After initial development of some critical concepts, it became obvious to me that I focus on particular elements of something that is bigger in terms of gestalt. It was in the middle of the night that I awoke and got the idea: My early work directed me to the concept of ethos of conflict as a holistic picture. I got up immediately and started to write until morning what became the initial draft of the ethos of conflict conception. It later allowed me to expand the theory in various directions to bring it to the present status.

#### Ethos of Conflict

Ethos of conflict was conceptualized as the configuration of shared central societal beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society at present and for the future in the contexts of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, 1998, 2000b, 2006, 2013). It is composed of eight major themes about issues related to the conflict, the in-group, and its adversary: (a) A theme about the justness of one's own goals, which outlines the contested goals, indicates their crucial importance, and provides their explanations and rationales; (b) A theme about security stresses the importance of personal safety and national survival, and outlines the conditions for their achievement; (c) A theme about positive collective self-image concerns the ethnocentric tendency to attribute positive traits, values, and behavior to one's own society; (d) A theme about victimization concerns the self-presentation of the in-group as the victim of the conflict; (e) A theme about delegitimizing the opponent concerns beliefs that deny the adversary's humanity; (f) A theme about patriotism generates attachment to the country and society, by propagating loyalty, love, care, and sacrifice; (g) A theme about unity refers to the importance of ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements during intractable conflicts to unite society's forces in the face of an external threat; Finally, (h) A theme about peace refers to it as the ultimate desire of the society. Together, all the themes provide a holistic conflict-supporting narrative that also appears in the collective memory of the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2003; Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006; Oren, in press). Only in 2012 was an instrument to measure ethos of conflict developed and then published (Bar-Tal, Sharvit, Halperin, & Zafran, 2012), enabling the performance of quantitative studies.

#### Theory of Intractable Conflict

This was the beginning of the wide scope theory of conflict that was developed from this foundation, extension after extension,

until it reached its final draft in a 2013 book (Bar-Tal, 2013). The final theory began with a description of the characteristics of the context of intractable conflict that necessarily lead to negative experiences of loss, stress, insecurity, hardship, uncertainty, misery, and suffering. These experiences pose challenges for a society involved in intractable conflict and its leaders: to cope with stress, to satisfy individual and collective needs, and to oppose the rival society. One of the necessary ways to meet these challenges is to construct a functional psychological repertoire of beliefs, attitudes, values and emotions. This repertoire is systematized and structured in the form of an ethos of conflict and collective memory with the eight themes presented above, as well as collective emotional orientations. In time, I began to refer to ethos of conflict and collective memory as conflict supporting narratives<sup>3</sup> with the eight above-noted themes (see Figure 1). In cooperative work we elaborated how they are constructed and how they are maintained by a regime interested in the continuation of the conflict (Bar-Tal, Oren, & Nets-Zehngut, 2014).

#### Culture of Conflict

The conflict-supporting narratives are transmitted to society members through various media, channels, cultural products, societal institutions, and agents of socialization—and eventually institutionalized. The result of these societal, political, cultural, and educational processes is the evolvment and crystallization of a culture of conflict and collective identity that become interwoven into the fabric of societal life on every level and in every domain (Bar-Tal, 2010, 2013; Oren & Bar-Tal, 2014). Culture of conflict consists of a shared system of beliefs, values, emotions, symbols, norms, cultural products, institutions, and patterns of behaviors developed during the conflict on societal and individual levels that reflect the conflict conditions and provide explanations, justifications, and objectives for maintenance of the conflict. The sociopsychological repertoire of the culture of conflict serves as individual and collective eyeglasses to absorb, to interpret, to process, and evaluate information that functions as a basis for decision and policymaking and carrying out lines of actions. But it must be noted that this repertoire is by nature selective, biased, distortive, simplistic, one-sided, and moralistic. Thus, the theory presents a kind of vicious cycle of violence because the formed sociopsychological repertoire leads to violent actions toward the rival and in turn, these violent reactions serve as validation and even reinforcement of the held psychological repertoire (see Figure 2).

The proposed theory offers a holistic and comprehensive narrative that has interconnected parts in a causal relationship and can explain and predict the development and the escalation of intractable conflicts in general in different places of the world. It focuses on the sociopsychological aspects of the conflict but takes a multidisciplinary approach drawing from political sciences, sociology, education, communication, and cultural studies. This was a journey of inductive thinking, of putting pieces of the puzzle in the right place step after step until it was assembled. Looking back, it was tremendously enjoyable and challenging work, although I

<sup>3</sup> This conceptualization was constructed on the basis of the narrative tradition developed by such psychologists as Bruner (1990) or László (2008).

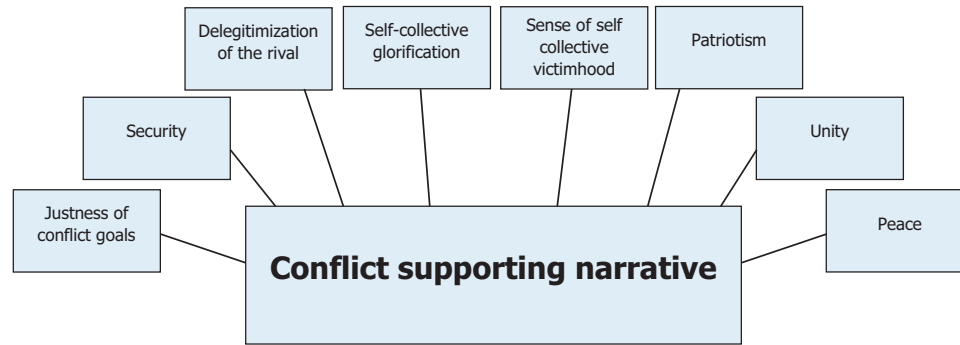


Figure 1. Themes of the conflict supporting narratives (collective memory and ethos of conflict). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

realize that other disciplines may contribute additional perspectives for the understanding of violent and protracted conflicts.

### Shared Beliefs in a Society

During the same period, I wrote my book *Shared Beliefs in a Society* (Bar-Tal, 2000b) that attempted to open a wider picture of societal psychology by deepening understanding of the meaning of sharing beliefs by society members. These shared beliefs allow a common view of the society and its concerns, facilitate communication among society members, and guide many societal behaviors. Their contents, which appear in various cultural products, public debates, leaders' speeches, media information, and educational material, reflect concerns of society members with regard to life in a societal framework and represent the social reality of society members regarding their societal life. They are the lenses through which society members look at their own society. These beliefs contribute to the sense of uniqueness of society members as distinct from members of other societies, while they allow a psychological connection among society members to their own society. They make an important contribution to the formation of social identity of society members, by providing knowledge which society members share and relate to.

Societal beliefs, however, are not merely individual manifestations; they are also considered societal characteristics. This perspective has been relatively neglected in social psychology, but very widely addressed by sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists. The view that societies, through a complex interaction between human experience and thinking, form characterizing belief systems shared by the society members has been expressed by many social thinkers, including Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Karl Mannheim, Talcot Parsons, and Robert Merton, to name just a few of the most prominent social scientists. In modern social psychology, Muzaref Sherif, Kurt Lewin, Solomon Asch, and more recently Serge Moscovici, Henri Tajfel, and John Turner have talked about shared beliefs, norms, or attitudes in a more limited way.

The proposed conception analyzed societal beliefs from a social psychological perspective to provide a unique contribution, complementing the work of other social sciences who have studied belief systems in a society. Social psychology has devoted considerable efforts to examining the nature and structure of beliefs

and their processes of acquisition and change, but this has mainly been on an individual level. It is of importance to apply this knowledge to the analysis of beliefs shared by a group or society members. More specifically, research in social psychology concerning the beliefs and attitudes formed by individuals in a group framework can shed special light on societal systems of beliefs: their characteristics, functions, and especially guidance for collective action.

### A Struggle for Societal Psychology

This contribution appeared within the framework of my struggle to divert the mainstream of social psychology to further focus on societal issues and on varying research methods. I still have the feeling that social psychology in general does not fulfil its promise as was shaped by its founding fathers. They considered the study of macrosocietal context as part of the endeavor of social psychology during the 1930s through the early 1950s. But during the 1960s, the mainstream of social psychology, especially the American wing, gravitated toward psychological-individualistic orientation with major reliance on experimentation. With some shifts, this is still the dominant trend. Considering the influence of European social psychologists such as Henri Tajfel, Serge Moscovici, Hilde Himmelweit, Willem Doise, and Rob Farr with their students, I thought that social psychology greatly needed to focus on the societal context of which individuals are part. Without such focus, social psychology fails, as a study of human social behavior, to understand key facets of human behavior (Bar-Tal, 2003, 2006). Members of societies worry about unemployment, follow government policy, demonstrate against various government decisions, are happy to be the majority, support the grievances of minorities, or disseminate them, struggle against authoritarian regimes, but also follow populist leaders, and so on. For most individuals, the boundaries between life as an individual and life as a society member are blurred. Thus, for social psychology to be relevant and influential it must add and develop an additional direction called societal psychology that will be more interdisciplinary, and macro- and multimethods oriented (Bar-Tal, 2000b). This struggle was carried on within the European Association of Social Psychology during the 1990s and 2000s with the active participation of Janusz Reykowski, Stephen Reicher, Janos Laszlo, Dario Paez, Willem Doise, Wolfgang Wagner, Colin Fraser,

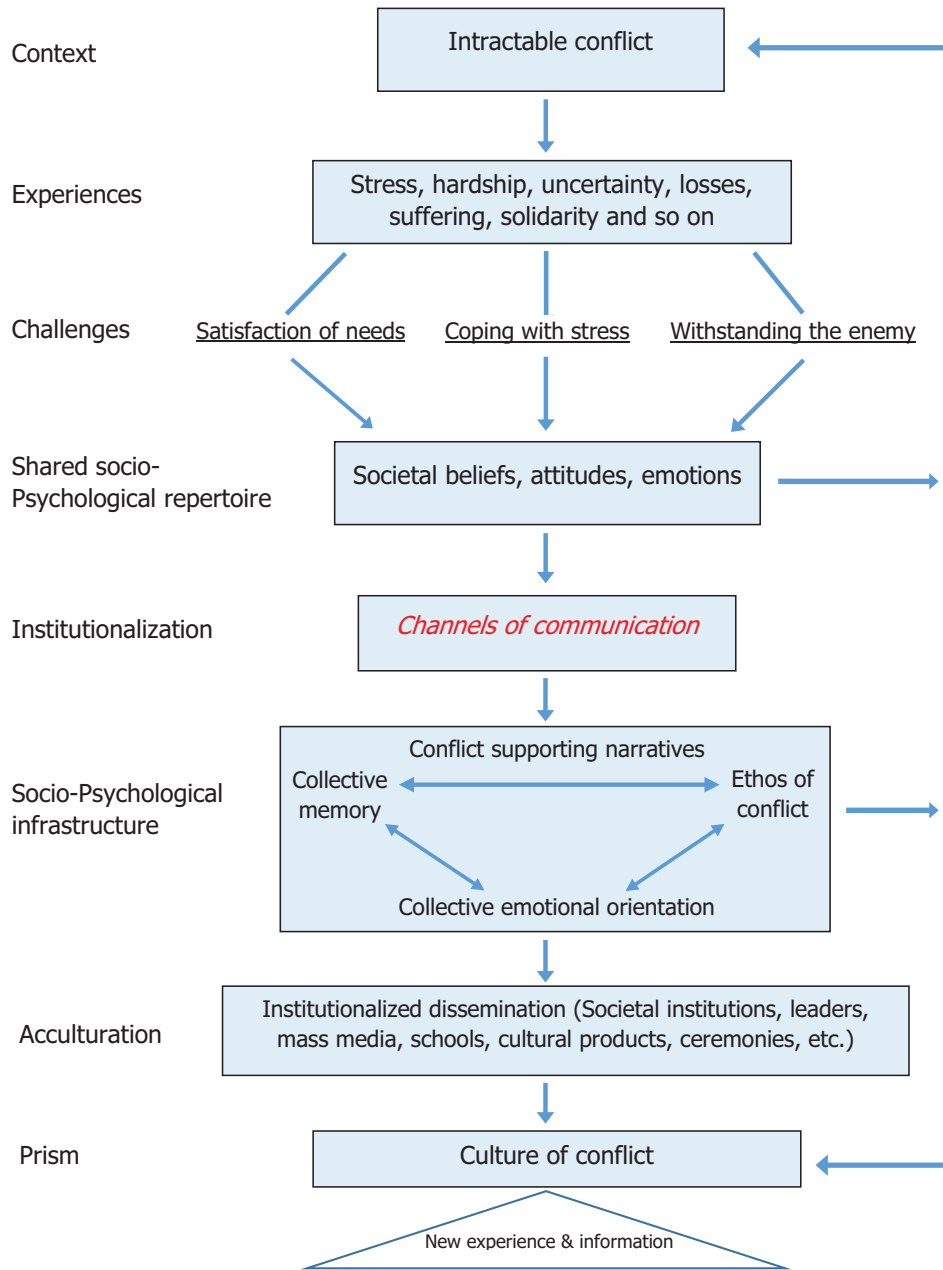


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of the Psychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

James Liu, Dario Spini, Stephen Worchel, and many others. I hope that this struggle has left its mark on the development of social and political psychology.

**Development of Shared Psychological Intergroup Repertoire**

During the 1990s I began two new lines of research that have continued throughout my career. The first was based on my understanding that the psychological repertoire of conflicts with its stereotyping of the rival and the narratives supporting the

conflict (ethos of conflict and collective memory) are learned at a very early age and then maintained by the educational system, leaders and the mass media (see e.g., Bar-Tal, 1996, 1997a regarding stereotyping the Arabs). Along these lines, numerous studies were conducted, all of which were later published in a book coauthored by Yona Teichman and me. The book extensively reviewed research about representations of Arabs in Israeli Jewish society: how they are viewed by children, adolescents and adults, and their presentation in school textbooks, mass media, and cultural products (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005).

On the basis of our research, Yona and I (Teichman & Bar-Tal, 2008) developed the integrative developmental-contextual theory (IDCT). It introduced the concept of a shared psychological intergroup repertoire (SPIR) that pertains to beliefs, attitudes, and patterns of behaviors toward another group that the ingroup members share. IDCT proposes that SPIRs are mediated by the simultaneous influence of multiple factors in a given social context. IDCT acknowledges the role of cognitive development and self-enhancement motivation as playing an important role in the development of SPIRs. However, instead of focusing on one specific factor, IDCT includes both and traces their influence within a developmental perspective. Because self-enhancement motivation has not been embedded within a developmental framework, we proposed to view it within the theory relating to identity development.

Accordingly, we proposed that all the factors involved in the development of SPIRs are active all along the developmental span. In different stages, a different factor has the potential for acquiring salience and major influence, but contextual conditions or previous experiences will influence the salience of each factor. Thus, in infancy the main factor is affect, at school age, cognitive development, and in pre- and early adolescence identity development. The proposition that, at any given time, SPIRs are mediated by multiple factors expands the theoretical perspective to a wide developmental span. Finally, we posited that the development of a SPIR is greatly affected by the context in which a society lives. Intractable conflicts and wars are obvious examples of contexts that determine the content, valence, and intensity of the SPIR. It institutionalizes the norms guiding behavioral intentions and actual behaviors toward the enemy, the status of the involved groups, the type of boundaries between them, and as a result, the level and type of contact between them (see also Bar-Tal & Avrahamzon, 2017).

### Political Socialization in the Context of Intractable Conflict

Years later, together with collaboration of my ex-students, I expanded the research about SPIR to the study of the development of conflict supporting narratives. We suggested four premises: First, drawing on research conducted in the field, on the basis of accumulated studies, we posited that under conditions of intractable conflict, political socialization begins at a very young age because of intensive experiences and continuous exposure to information about the conflict. The second premise concerns the contents (i.e., societal beliefs and narratives) propagated by the societal agents of political socialization participating in the socialization of young children. We argued that, in instances of intractable conflict, these agents often propagate conflict-supporting narratives of the society's ethos of conflict and collective memory. Third, we suggested that young children, on the basis of their experiences and exposure to violence and learning, usually form systematic and coherent systems of beliefs, attitudes and emotions supporting the conflict. In our final premise, we proposed that the contents absorbed by children have lasting effects on the solidification of children's later sociopsychological repertoire. The four premises constitute a holistic framework that points to the serious consequences of the political socialization process at an early age in societies which have a dominant culture of conflict (Bar-Tal, Diamond, & Nasie, 2017).

### Peace Making and Reconciliation

The second line of my work supplemented the core of my research about the outbreak and escalation of intractable conflicts, as it focused on peace building. In my view it was necessary to go beyond development of conflicts to conceptualize the process of peace making and especially the process of reconciliation (Bar-Tal, 2000a, 2009). Building stable and lasting peaceful relations between two parties that have been involved in prolonged violent conflict is probably one of the most demanding challenges of the human race because of how difficult it is to achieve. *Peace building* is defined as continuous exerted efforts by society members, society's institutions, agents, channels of communications, and the international community to realize lasting peaceful relations with the past rival within the framework of a culture of peace. It consists of major societal change that often also refers to a restructuring of society, but first of all, concerns major sociopsychological and cultural change. Stable and lasting peace is based on fully nonviolent, normalized and cooperative political, economic and cultural relations where both societies have invested interest and goals in developing new peaceful relations and secure coexistence. This can only be successful when constructed within the framework of a culture of peace that both societies construct. Reconciliation constitutes the societal psychological process that is a necessary condition for building stable and lasting peace. It involves changes of motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions by the majority of society members (Bar-Tal, 2009, 2010, 2013; Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004).

### Peace Education

Another direction of study that I advanced with peacebuilding was peace education, so badly needed in societies engaged in intractable conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2002). Peace education aims to construct students' worldview (i.e., their values, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, motivations, skills and patterns of behavior) in a way that facilitates the peace building process and prepares them to live in an era of reconciliation and peace. In a conceptual paper (Bar-Tal, Rosen, & Nets, 2010), we proposed to differentiate between indirect and direct peace education as ways to change the views of the young generation based on the conditions of the conflict.

### Phase 5: Founding Learning Community

At the end of the second millennium I realized that my academic career was missing an important element: namely, training doctoral students. This realization led me to immediate action.

### Forming a Learning Community

At the end of the 1990s, together with my close friend and colleague Amiram Raviv, I decided to found a group of doctoral students who were interested in focusing on interethnic conflicts for their doctoral study. The whole process developed very fast, and within a short time we had a group of four students; a few years later, our numbers had grown to about 10–15 students. These numbers remained stable until the project ended with my retirement. The students came from different universities and departments in Israel and even from abroad. There were also a few master's degree students, postdoctoral students, and guests for a



year or more. All of them were united by their interest in studying bloody and lasting conflicts and peace building.

This part of my career demanded a conceptualization of how to train the students: we called the group a “learning community” and defined its goal to socialize doctoral students in the direction of either planning academic careers or being practitioners. We had a three-hour group meeting every two weeks and then we all went to dinner together. The meetings consisted of presentations by the doctoral students of their research in different phases of completion, invited lectures by experts on conflicts from different disciplines, and general discussions on different conceptual issues related to interethnic conflicts. In addition, students were assigned various research tasks on intractable conflicts in the world and then presented their materials to the group.

Students were also highly encouraged to cooperate on different research and empirical studies, as well as participating in groups developing different ideas and conducting empirical studies that were led by Amiram and me. Finally, as part of the socialization process we often discussed the norms and requirements of the academic role. As examples, we encouraged students to submit papers for presentation and organize symposia for different professional conferences (mostly EASP and ISPP). We prepared and rehearsed the presentations and then traveled with the students to the conferences.

On the social side, we had an open door policy and formed social relationships with them, organizing social events with the students and their families from time to time. The group turned out to be not only an instrumental group, but also socioemotional in nature and formed close supportive relationships. I defined my role as a mentor and a kind of spiritual father and still maintain close relationships with many of the group members who also became my friends. Twenty students completed their doctoral research and wrote their dissertations during their participation in the group that lasted on average about 4–5 years (and some continued to participate after completing their doctoral studies) with an additional 10 master’s theses.<sup>4</sup>

This was another most satisfying part of my academic career: the enjoyment of socializing, mentoring, training, and supervising students’ research work. But of special enjoyment was the fact that I had an opportunity to further develop various ideas and conduct empirical research about them. This was one of the most fruitful periods of my career. I absolutely realize that I would not have been able to achieve as much as I did without the involvement, capabilities, motivation, and the enthusiasm and dedication of the members of the learning community.

In groups of two to seven students, we worked with them on the development of a concept or a theory and then planned and carried out empirical studies. I will describe examples of several ideas that we developed.<sup>5</sup>

### Barriers to Resolving Conflicts Peacefully and Ways to Overcome Them

This theme has intrigued me through years of my research, realizing that it is extremely important topic, but at the same time thinking that the existing conceptions were fragmented and did not fully grasp the phenomenon. It was thus natural that after finishing constructing the theory of conflict, I began to entertain various ideas about the barriers. The final conceptualization was published

with Eran Halperin, who was my doctoral student (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011). Later, we received a grant from the Israel Science Foundation that allowed us to pursue empirical research about this theme with doctoral students.

The conception of the barriers, based on the theory of intractable conflict, suggested that the sociopsychological repertoire evolves during the conflict (ethos of conflict, collective memory and emotional collective orientation) and that its elements serve as powerful barriers to resolving intractable conflicts peacefully. These barriers are grounded in the culture of conflict, preventing information processing on an individual level that opens new perspectives. They are defined as “an integrated operation of cognitive, emotional and motivational processes, combined with pre-existing repertoire of rigid conflict supporting beliefs, world views and emotions that result in selective, biased and distorting information processing” (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011, p. 220).

In addition, on a collective level, societies involved in intractable conflict very often actively make efforts to maintain the conflict supporting narrative and prevent penetration of the alternative beliefs that may undermine this dominance. They use various societal mechanisms to block the appearance and dissemination of information that provides an alternative view about the conflict, about the rival, about one’s own group and/or about conflict goals: The alternative information that humanizes the rival and sheds new light on the conflict; that suggests that goals can be compromised, that there is a partner on the other side with whom it is possible to achieve peaceful settlement of the conflict, that peace is rewarding, while the conflict is costly, that continuation of the conflict is detrimental to the society, and may even provide evidence that the ingroup is also responsible for the continuation of the conflict and that has been carrying out immoral acts (Bar-Tal et al., 2014). Within this line of research, we also proposed a conception of how to overcome the barriers and conducted empirical studies to validate several hypotheses (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2009).

### Occupation

The continuous occupation by Israel of the West Bank and Gaza Strip has been my concern for a long time. Unwanted occupations are by nature brutal, discriminatory, and exploitive, necessarily leading to resistance by the occupied society. Moreover, I deeply believe that the occupying society cannot operate separately from the occupied society. It cannot seal itself off from the occupation and its effects. This connection becomes especially pronounced when the occupier not only penetrates the spaces of the occupied territories, but also settles in these spaces, which are perceived as a continuation of the homeland territory, as in the Israeli case. These processes have an imprinting and lasting effect on the occupying society, even if that society is not aware of them, ignores them, and/or tries to deny and hide them. In addition, the

<sup>4</sup> I am counting only master’s theses done in the framework of the learning community. As a faculty member at the School of Education, during my career I additionally supervised well over 150 master’s theses and five doctoral dissertations.

<sup>5</sup> We also developed the ideas of transforming collective memory, nature of the collective self-victimhood, nature of collective identity, development of views of war and peace, Holocaust memory, transitional context, major events, major information, and the psychological earthquake of 2000 in the Israeli Jewish society.

occupying society pays tremendous costs for the continuous occupation that, of course, do not match to the ones paid by the occupied society but are still meaningful in affecting every aspect of life.

In the research group that we formed, we published several analyses of the sociopsychological implications of occupation on the occupying society (Halperin, Bar-Tal, Sharvit, Rosler, & Raviv, 2010). These delineated the concept of occupation from a sociopsychological perspective, which supplements the legal-formal aspect; proposed a conceptual framework that analyzes the psychology of the occupying society; described the psychological challenges that the occupation may pose to the members of the occupying society; introduced psychological mechanisms that members of an occupying society may use to avoid facing these challenges; and offered a number of ideas regarding the relationship between these mechanisms and the process of ending the occupation. In addition, we examined moral implications of the occupation for the perceptions and the belief system of the occupying society, as well as its moral stature in a period of global social change affecting individual and societal moral conceptions and behaviors (Rosler, Bar-Tal, Sharvit, Halperin, & Raviv, 2009). Eventually years later, I returned to the issue of occupation and together with Izhak Schnell edited a volume that analyzed the impact of the occupation on the Israeli society in various areas (Bar-Tal & Schnell, 2013).

### Shared Emotions

In the analysis of the sociopsychological collective repertoire, emotions play a major role. The prolonged conditions of intractable conflict evoke strong shared emotions, among them fear, hatred and anger, that are often even automatic. The shared emotions are the stimulator, interpreter, motivator, energizer, director, and controller of various sociopsychological processes related to the dynamics of the intractable conflict. It is thus not surprising that many students of intractable conflicts have observed that not infrequently, the negative emotions with their intense motivating energy become the locomotive which carries them into their dark spaces. They not only feed the continuation of conflict, but serve as potent barriers that prevent peacemaking. They also have mutual interactions with the ethos of conflict and the collective memory.

The first emotion that I analyzed was fear, because of its major influence (together with insecurity) on the reactions of Israeli Jews (Bar-Tal, 2001). Fear as a primary aversive emotion arises in situations of threat and danger to the organism (the person) and/or his or her environment (the society), and enables an adaptive response. It is often activated automatically and spontaneously and once evoked, it limits the activation of other mechanisms of regulation and stalls consideration of various alternatives because of its egocentric and maladaptive patterns of reactions to situations that require creative and novel coping solutions. In stressful situations of intractable conflict that last for a long period of time, society members tend to process information selectively, focusing on the evil and mal-intentional acts of the adversary, which are threatening and full of dangers. Because of the different nature of fear and hope, the former tends to overcome the latter and exerts a major influence on society members involved in intractable conflict (Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006).

Subsequently, thinking that emotions can also become societal characterizations and aspects of culture, I proposed a concept termed *collective emotional orientation* that is reflected on individual and collective levels in the psychological repertoire, as well as in tangible and intangible societal symbols such as cultural products or ceremonies. Collective emotional orientation evolves as a result of living under particular durable conditions (see also Bar-Tal, 2013; Bar-Tal, Halperin, & de Rivera, 2007). These conditions lead to prolonged experiences that often bring about the dominance of an emotion or even a few emotions, becoming part of the psychological and cultural-societal repertoire.

### Self-Censorship

The context of intractable conflict reinforces obedience, conformity, and self-censorship. While the first two social phenomena have received very wide attention, the latter has been neglected and therefore, observing it in Israeli society, I decided to study it. Self-censorship of information, defined as an act of intentionally and voluntarily withholding information from others in the absence of formal obstacles, serves as a barrier to the proper functioning of a democratic society, because it prevents free access to information, freedom of expression, and the flow of information. It is of key importance in societies, as it blocks information that may shed new light on various societal issues (Bar-Tal, 2017).

Accordingly, self-censorship in times of conflict can be viewed as a sociopsychological barrier to peacemaking. By blocking alternative information and allowing the maintenance of conflict supporting narratives, it contributes directly to the continuation of intractable conflicts. Society members in these cases, on the one hand, voluntarily, intentionally, and consciously prevent the diffusion of new information that may provide an alternative view of the conflict, the adversary, and the goals of the ingroup or the conflict, even if they believe that this information is valid. On the other hand, they support this practice and sanction those who violate this norm and in this way, they help to maintain self-censorship.

A series of studies has shown its scope and the conditions for its use, as well as its motivational basis, as for example, Hameiri, Sharvit, Bar-Tal, Shahar, and Halperin (2017) and Sharvit et al. (in press). An edited book has illustrated its use in different institutions of society. This book was edited and almost all the chapters (except one) were written by members of the learning community (Bar-Tal, Nets-Zehngut, & Sharvit, 2017).

### Routinization

An additional idea that was developed concerns routinization of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, Abutbul, & Raviv, 2014). One of the clearest reflections of living with a protracted, intractable conflict is the routinization of its symbols in daily life. Society members constantly encounter these symbols, which become part and parcel of their daily experience. These are mundane and low-key symbols, which, over time, are no longer recognized as unusual signs of conflict because they have become an integral part of life and cannot be separated from the normal routines of daily experience. Through these routinized beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations, and practices, the culture of conflict maintains an even tighter grip on individuals. This is because these everyday routines shape the mindset, emotional state, behavioral tendencies, preparedness, and even identity of society members.

There are at least four ways in which conflicts seep into and become routine in everyday life and thus shape the experiences and identities of society members: the flow of information about the conflict, society members' exposure to images and symbols of the conflict that appear in public and private spaces, everyday practices, and public use of military language and the language of conflict in everyday speech. The routinization of media information, images, everyday practices, and language normalizes the unusual and anomalous aspects of living with intractable conflicts. It also prepares society members to cope with life under conflict, which is characterized by threats and dangers. Through repeated rituals, routinization increases the psychological resilience that makes it possible to overcome stress. Routinization creates a particular mindset attuned to conflict-related cues and thus makes individuals constantly alert to dangers and threats. Finally, routinization reinforces solidarity, cohesiveness, and the sense of a shared fate.

On the basis of these ideas, I recently came to the conclusion that the society members involved in intractable conflict become so routinized and accustomed to life in intractable conflict with the functional conflict supporting narratives that they prefer to live in this context instead of moving to an uncertain and risky new situation of peacemaking. So continuing the conflict and its narratives becomes an autonomous need that society members adhere to because they have learned how to satisfy their primary needs (e.g., need for meaningfulness, predictability, security, positive self-image, just) aroused during the conflict and are not certain regarding an unknown context.

### Critical Thinking and Trust

Pivotal conditions for moving to peacemaking are critical thinking and trust. Attempting to encompass the variety of definitions, critical thinking was defined as rational and reflective examination, analysis, explication, reasoning, and evaluation of any given knowledge, idea, opinion, argument, situation, or experience—as a thinking process that underlies taking any stance or making any impression, judgment, inference, or decision. Indeed, critical thinking skills have become a core competency in modern democratic societies, as they also contribute to the enrichment of pluralistic public discourse and increase its scope. However, in societies involved in intractable conflicts the black-and-white approach to collective narratives is extremely salient. Furthermore, to cope with the conflict situation and its immense challenges, conflict-ridden societies' need for widespread social adherence to these narratives and a strong belief in their validity becomes of ultimate importance. Thus, when conflict-supportive collective narratives dominate society's belief structures and the social order, the formal education system often inhibits critical examination of the existing knowledge and political-social order, obstructs free flow of information, and implements conservative educational strategies to ensure that conflict-supportive narratives are rigidly adhered to throughout the educational process (Vered, Bar-Tal, & Fuxman, 2018). As long as the educational climate and curricula are characterized by insularity that prevents questioning the political and social order, and as long as the educational policies prefer strengthening national values and unity over nurturing independent thinking and open-mindedness,

peace and reconciliation processes between parties in conflict are likely to encounter enormous difficulties.

Similarly, trust/distrust, defined as lasting expectations about future behaviors of the other (a person or a group) that affects one's own welfare (of the individual or of his or her own group) and allows for a readiness to take risks in relation to the other is an extremely important factor in conflict continuation and peacemaking. Distrust is an integral part of any intractable conflict, at least in its initial escalating phase (Bar-Tal & Alon, 2016). In a violent military conflict, presumably because the stakes are so high, the distrust between the sides reaches an extreme level. It can develop without the eruption of violence on the basis of the deteriorating relations during the outbreak of the conflict. It develops because the parties do not see any possibility of reaching an agreement and they embark on the path of serious confrontation. But the use of violence greatly increases distrust. In fact, violence continuously validates distrust of the rival because of the intentional harm inflicted on the group. In addition, it is based on selective, biased and distorted information processing that confirms the held beliefs and rejects alternatives.

No serious negotiation can begin without minimal trust. Groups do not usually actively begin a peace process if they believe that the rival is untrustworthy. They then assume that a signed agreement does not have any value because it can be broken any moment. Peacemaking necessarily involves a minimal legitimization and trust of the rival that enables establishing the idea that there is a partner on the other side. It also requires constructing beliefs that the agreement can be implemented, developing goals about new peaceful relations with the rival and eventually recognition of the need to reconcile and construction of new climate which promotes new ideas about peace building.

### Paradoxical Thinking

The final example of an advanced idea is the notion of paradoxical thinking. This unique approach to attitude change was discovered accidentally but once it was revealed, joint efforts of Boaz Hameiri, Eran Halperin, and me conceptualized this approach and carried out a series of studies to validate it with a grant from the Israeli Science Foundation. The approach is based on the classic debating technique, *reductio ad absurdum*. It suggests that compared with conventional persuasive approaches that aim to induce inconsistency, messages that are consistent with the individual's view, but formulated in an amplified, exaggerated, or even absurd manner, arouse lower levels of disagreement, resistance, and/or psychological defenses. Furthermore, such paradoxical messages, we suggest, raise threats to the identity of the message recipient, instigating a reevaluation process of the held beliefs and attitudes that in turn may stimulate their unfreezing, especially among individuals who are extreme in their views. Eventually, unfreezing may lead to openness to alternative viewpoints that may be adopted. Specifically, the paradoxical thinking message is intended to lead individuals to perceive their currently held societal beliefs or the current situation as implausible and farfetched and then eventually move them toward more moderate positions (Bar-Tal, Hameiri, & Halperin, 2019; Hameiri, Bar-Tal, & Halperin, 2019).



## Phase 6: Retirement

### Save Israel – Stop the Occupation (SISO)

In 2015 I retired from my position in Tel Aviv University, as it is mandatory to step down at the age 68. I fully devoted the first two retirement years to political activism because June 2017 was going to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and I thought that it was unacceptable in the 21st century for a state to maintain an unwanted occupation over another people without granting full human and citizenship rights to the occupied population.<sup>6</sup> Along with other activists, I founded a movement called “Save Israel – Stop the Occupation” (SISO), which called upon liberal Jews from the Jewish Diaspora to join activities in 2017 in a struggle to end the Israeli occupation. After June 2017 the political activism continued at a lighter pace with different projects, and I also returned to academic writing.

### The Three Books

After years of work, three projects reached their conclusion with the cooperation of Amiram Raviv: The first is a book in Hebrew that reports a study implemented in 2002–2003 with in-depth interviews of 5–7 hr with 95 Israeli Jews about their views of the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict. It was conducted with the cooperation of Rinat Abramowich, another ex-doctoral student of the learning community (Bar-Tal & Raviv, *in press*; Bar-Tal, Raviv, & Abromovich, *in press*). This study is most comprehensive in its scope, successfully unveiling the sociopsychological repertoire of Israeli Jews regarding many aspects of the conflict (ethos of conflict, collective memory, upbringing, influence of the socializing agents, change of political views during one’s life time, and more).

Then, coauthoring with Amiram Raviv, we finished a book written in Hebrew for the Israeli audience (that hopefully will be translated into English), analyzing the societal-psychological processes in Israeli society that have led to its extremism. A much longer academic version of this book will be published in the future in Hebrew. Both of these books show how Israeli Jewish society has moved to the right, and even to the extreme right (i.e., hawkish, nationalistic and even racist views) since 2000 and how the extreme religious nationalistic right has succeeded in penetrating the fabric of Israeli society and has institutionalized its position in the state (Bar-Tal & Raviv, *in press*).

### Future Projects

At present three research projects occupy my mind: (a) a line of empirical research studies based on my conceptual work that shows possible change of attitudes in the challenging context of intractable conflict. This is a new approach to attitude change based on illustrating to individuals the sociopsychological process of their functional attitude formation and then normalizing and humanizing this process; (b) writing a book about the sociopolitical psychological bases of the rise of authoritarianism. Such a book is needed because the last decades have witnessed a rise of authoritarian, nationalistic, and populist regimes in different countries that has signaled a dramatic change in the present era. Specifically, this trend can be observed in Russia, Turkey, Hun-

gary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, India, Israel, and more recently in the Philippines, Brazil, Austria, and Poland. The election of Donald Trump in the United States clearly created a new zeitgeist that affects the rest of world. Moreover, together with the rise of these regimes, we are witnessing the growth of a new strong political wave of rightist and nationalistic parties that have significantly increased their power in numerous countries, for example, in Germany, Italy, Austria, and in France. These developments need an explanation, and there is no doubt that social-political psychology can offer its perspective in addition to other analyses of different conceptual framework and disciplines; (c) to write a book about lack of correspondence between human nature and democracy and what kind of mechanisms democracy requires to be able to survive, in view of the lack of this correspondence. These are long-term and very presumptuous plans. I believe that without plans and aspirations, life becomes meaningless and purposeless. But, in any case, these projects are badly needed in view of the world trend we are witnessing at present. We, political psychologists, owe this contribution to civilization that is deviating from its humanistic, liberal-democratic, and moral way.

### General Understandings

At present I conclude 49 years of career in academia that started in 1970 with the beginning of my doctoral study at the University of Pittsburgh. This is a long period of time that allowed me to make certain observations that I would like to share with the readers. The first part is devoted to my macro level views about violent and protracted conflicts that have been the main focus of almost 40 years of my research.

### Understandings About Intractable Conflicts and Peace Making

1. Intractable conflicts are real, as they center over disagreements regarding contradictory central goals and interests in different domains. These real issues must be addressed in conflict resolution processes. Though these disagreements could potentially be resolved by many different means, reality often demonstrates that powerful psychological-cultural-societal factors serve as barriers and prevent their resolution.
2. Some intractable conflicts serve as important routes to stop and correct deplorable practices such as oppression, occupation, discrimination, or exploitation that are part of the human world—the unbearable immorality of the world. In many of these cases, conflicts are needed to change these conditions because nations do not voluntarily yield territories, power, wealth, and resources, even if it is clear that the territory they occupy, the advantage they have, the dominance they hold, the commodities they possess have all been acquired in ways that contradict contemporary moral standards.
3. Nations and states of the world have differential statuses and some are considered superpowers as reflected in military

<sup>6</sup> Only Morocco in Western Sahara and Israel on the West Bank are presently maintaining unwanted long lasting occupations without granting human and citizenship rights to the occupied society.



might, political dominance, control of resources, and economic strength. This differential power also has a tremendous effect on the eruption of intergroup conflicts and their preservation. Nations with power can and tend to ignore moral values, international laws and even external pressures.

4. Societies involved in intractable conflict evolve a culture of conflict with its collective conflict supporting narratives and collective emotional orientations. The narratives are, by nature, one-sided and black-white and thus selective, biased, and distortive. These narratives are imparted to society members for many years via institutions, educational systems, leaders, organizations, channels of communication, and cultural products. Once learned and absorbed they serve as a prism for society members, including the leaders, to interpret and evaluate experiences and information that represent bases of action. Eventually they constitute powerful barriers to peaceful resolution of conflicts.
5. The well-constructed and maintained conflict supporting narratives satisfy major individual and collective needs. This satisfaction turns the conflict itself into a need, leading to its continuation. Society members prefer to continue to live in conflict rather than taking risks and adopting the uncertainty needed for making peace.
6. Societies involved in intractable conflicts that are interested in continuing them struggle over conflict supporting narratives with the rival and make every effort to maintain them in their own society.
7. Intractable conflicts, and especially unwanted occupations, necessarily lead to authoritative and totalitarian tendencies to limit the flow of information, freedom of expression, and free access to information, as well as monopolization of patriotism and delegitimization of the sources that provide alternative information about possibilities of resolving the conflict peacefully.
8. There is no intractable conflict that does not involve vicious, violent, bloody, and severe harm to civilian populations and wide scale violation of human rights.
9. Studies of delegitimization, de-individuation, moral disengagement, moral entitlement, deprivation of basic psychological needs, appeal of destructive ideologies, passivity of bystanders, mechanization, functioning of threats and fear, routinization, obedience, and conformity all provide a glimpse into the dynamics of violent behaviors. Human beings embrace all possible psychological acrobatic exercises to be able to kill others in violent conflict.
10. Legitimacy of use of violence as well as peaceful resolution of intractable conflict are often determined by the interests of the powerful states.
11. Interethnic conflicts do not end with military victory of one side (only genocides can end them). They end when the solutions satisfy the basic needs of the majority of the adversaries.

12. A peace process requires change of the conflict supporting narratives, especially regarding the conflict goals and delegitimization of the rival.
13. Leaders who desire peace can reach a peaceful agreement to end an intractable conflict with the support of the significant part of their society members, with external pressure and help of the superpowers and the international community.
14. To achieve lasting and stable peace, human beings, wherever they live and especially in societies ridden by intractable conflict, have to struggle to establish institutions and systems, socialization patterns and educational systems which encourage openness, tolerance, freedom of expression, critical and reflective thinking, personal and collective accountability, and responsibility.

In addition to these understandings, the years of my academic career have led to some insights about the functioning of the academic system and I would like to share them with the readers.

### **Insights About the Functioning of the Academic System**

1. There is a need for holistic ideas on macro comprehensive levels that can encompass explanations of societal-political issues. Thus, in addition to fragmented micro and sporadic experimental studies, we need research programs that tackle social issues from their wide perspectives, with an interdisciplinary approach and with multi-method research. Interdisciplinary training is very difficult and challenging because of the excessive specialization of each discipline that continues to divide each subsubfield into autonomous regions, not only because of specialized knowledge, but also to retain its own machinery, mechanisms, and bureaucracy for control and resources.
2. "Making" social science should not be completely free of considering its relevance to societal issues that plague the societies and the world. Studying societal issues should be an inherent part of making science. Achieving this goal is not easy in social psychology because of the way it has been developing in the last decades—frequently and significantly fragmental, sporadic, individually focused, and relying mostly on experimentation. The world is engulfed in problems and many are man-made and thus require a human mind to resolve them or at least to attempt to challenge them. Social sciences have the responsibility and duty to help through research to understand the causes and to find ways to alleviate the suffering and misery of human beings wherever they are
3. I believe that one of the major challenges for social scientists is training students: Instead of training of technicians who know how to design experiments and analyze the data, we need academic people who, in addition to these skills, know how to look at the issues from a position of assuming a "big head" to understand the issue of research with its complexity and various perspectives.

I think that a mentor should not yield only to the requirements of a system whose main criterion is the number of publications for job positions. The mainstream is conservative and guards its criteria and standards, as do all other systems in the world. The core of training should be imparting critical thinking and open-mindedness with the ability to see the complexity of holistic social and societal issues. Only such an understanding of the research issues can lead to the formulation of research questions and eventually to advancement of scientific knowledge. Doctoral students need socialization to be able to fulfill their roles in academia and the field. We, as agents of socialization, should serve as models for the students in their training, shaping their future roles, and building relationships with them. Therefore we must be fair, moral, and ethical, treating them without exploitation, misuse, and mistreatment, especially in the development of their autonomy, creativity, and originality, as well as in the publication process. They will continue their careers following their models and will even improve on them.

4. We need to have confidence in what we do as social scientists. Thousands of years of science unequivocally demonstrate that not always are the views of the majority of colleagues right. I believe that sciences have one of the best systems of review and methods to control quality of research and then its publications. But we also have to remember that those who review papers are human beings, with all of their unavoidable characteristics. They also have biases, selective views, close-mindedness, and more—all the characteristics that we know about and investigate in psychology. We are also burdened by group thinking, safeguarding tradition and also power. These dispositions have always been in the repertoire of scientists' groups. Thus, making science is always a struggle for progress and change of paradigms, systems, and practices. Rejections of ideas by reviewers or colleagues do not always necessarily indicate that a scientist is wrong. Rejections require thorough reexamination of the ideas and research, and sometimes eventually, adherence to the produced knowledge. We always need to remember that acceptance of ideas or acceptance of papers is a human process with all its limitations.
5. Social scientists also have to recognize that they may pay a price, especially in certain societies, for their research questions and lines of research that advance knowledge, contradicting the hegemonic narrative of the regime. This is also the case in Israel. More than once did I have the honor of appearing on the black lists of various organizations that monitor academia, and I have been reprimanded by politicians who did not like the results of my studies. They thought that I was harming the standing of Israel in the international community. Fear of paying a price robs the mind not only of human beings, but also of scientists. It can affect their research in different ways. Thus, scientists have to be brave and independent in their science making.

In sum, I think that it is a societal privilege to serve as a researcher in an academic institution, to develop new knowledge, and to train doctoral students for the role of social scientists and practitioners. It is not an easy task, but it is very necessary. Societal research represents a very distinctive status in a society because of its responsibility toward advancing knowledge for the benefit of humanity and training the future generation of autonomous, open-minded, and critical intellectual elite.

It is extremely difficult to evaluate one's effect on the course of social and political psychology development. I know that I have tremendously enjoyed my career, and I still have not closed the pages of the book. I hope that at least some of my ideas have inspired others as I have been inspired by the ideas of others. Fruitful mutual inspiration is one of the ways to advance science.

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