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***Ethos as an Expression of Identity:
Its Changes in Transition from
Conflict to Peace in the Israeli Case***

The Leonard Davis Institute
Davis Occasional Papers
No. 83

Davis Occasional Papers, No. 83, November 2000
The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Israel

The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Leonard Davis Institute.

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INTRODUCTION

A determinative element in the “being” of any group or society,¹ including a nation, is its *social identity*, defined psychologically as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). It is the shared feeling of social identity among collectives of individuals that makes them a society, since it forms the basis of society’s existence. That is, only when a collective of individuals share an idea that they are members of society and that the society is a reality for them, does a society exist. Only then do individuals think, feel, and behave as members of society. Of special importance in this context is their perception that other individuals are similar and share the same notion of being members of society, whereas other individuals are different and therefore belong to other groups.

The perception of similarity is based, among other elements, on shared beliefs² (Bar-Tal, 1990, 1998a; Giddens, 1984; Griswold, 1994; Hoebel, 1960). Of interest for the present paper are shared societal beliefs that provide a dominant orientation to the society and contribute the epistemic basis of the social identity of its members. The totality of these beliefs

- 1 The term society, which denotes a large, stable social system with boundaries that differentiate it from other societies, will be used throughout this paper. Societies consist of collectives that have a clear sense of social identity and that evolve tradition, culture, collective memory, belief systems, social structures, and institutions (Giddens, 1984; Griswold, 1994).
- 2 Beliefs are defined as propositions that express thoughts (Kruglanski, 1989). They can be differentiated on the basis of the confidence and centrality accorded them. Some beliefs are accorded minimal confidence and therefore are regarded as hypotheses or uncertainties; other beliefs are accorded full confidence and hence are regarded as facts and verities. The degree of a belief’s centrality involves the frequency with which it is accessible in the cognitive system, as expressed in the society, and its relevance for a wide range of decisions and judgments in the society.

constitutes ethos, defined as *the configuration of central societal beliefs that provide particular orientation to a society* (Bar-Tal, 2000). Ethos, then, combines dominant societal beliefs in a particular structure, and gives meaning to the societal life of a particular society. It constitutes one of the bases of social identity, by providing a common societal viewpoint that underlies the sense of belonging and identification. In contrast, however, to the category of social identity, which may remain the same for centuries (e.g., Poles, Frenchmen), ethos is not a stable component of social identity. It changes over decades and centuries, together with changes in the political, societal, economic, and technological conditions in which the society lives and in the collective experiences of its members. In this process, as the ethos changes, the orientations of the society also change and thus, as well, the meaning of social identity. The changing ethos provides new meaning to being a member of society and to the “being” of the society itself.

The present paper focuses on the Israeli Jewish ethos as an illustration of the process of change. It analyzes the changes in this ethos, focusing only on those parts of it that evolved in relation to the intractable conflict with the Arabs and started to alter as the peace process began. The first section of the paper discusses societal ethos and its changeable nature as a component of social identity. The second section delineates the Israeli Jewish ethos that prevailed during the intractable stage of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The next section describes the changes that took place in the societal beliefs of the Israeli conflictive ethos during the peace process that began in 1975, and the implications of these changes for Israeli society. The final section offers general conclusions.

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND ETHOS

Social identity has become one of the central concepts in the social sciences, inseparable from any analysis of societies' social functioning (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Calhoun, 1994; Cohen, 1986; Dunn, 1998, Jenkins, 1996;

Lactau, 1994; Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1999; Worchel et al., 1998). It indicates that individuals cognitively organize their social world in terms of groups, including categorization of themselves as members of society, and that this categorization has cognitive, affective, and behavioral implications for the individuals and the society that they compose.

From the individual perspective, social identity is based on a categorization process that underlies the psychological formation of groups (Tajfel, 1978, 1981). Individuals categorize themselves as group members, and this self-categorization is the fundamental step and prerequisite for group formation and/or its further existence. This psychological process reflects individuals' awareness of being group members and brings individuals to the recognition of their social identity. The recognition of being an Israeli, a Muslim, or a Kosovar indicates that the individual also categorizes other individuals as such, perceiving them as similar to him/herself. In fact, individuals, in their expression of social identity, draw an imaginary boundary between themselves and other people who do not belong to their group (Cohen, 1985).

Nevertheless, self-categorization as a group member is only one part of social identity. The recognition of belonging is necessary to social identity, but the social implications of this recognition involve sharing with other group members certain beliefs, attitudes, values, emotions, and behavior patterns. Turner and colleagues propounded a similar idea with the self-categorization theory (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Turner, 1991, 1999; Turner et al., 1987), which suggests that when individuals perceive themselves as group members, their self-perception becomes depersonalized. This perception leads to consensual behavior in terms of common beliefs or norms and shared expectations of agreement between group members. The agreement validates the beliefs and norms, providing evidence that they reflect "objective" reality. Thus, according to this theory, shared social identity is the precondition for the formation of shared beliefs, which plays an important role in validating the perceived reality of group members.

From a societal perspective, of special importance are the enduring shared beliefs, called *societal beliefs*, that characterize a society (for extensive analysis, see Bar-Tal, 2000). Their contents, which are organized around certain themes (e.g., security, equality), may include myths, collective memories, ideologies, self-images, concerns, images of the groups in question, goals, values, and so on. Societal beliefs allow communication and common understanding, but their primary function is to provide a sense of similarity and a basis for interdependence and coordination of societal activities, all of which are necessary conditions for the functioning of social systems (see Somers & Gibson, 1994). These beliefs are the lenses through which members of society look at their own society, clarifying for them the essence of the society and the bases for societal action (see also Giddens, 1984).

The configuration of the central societal beliefs that provide a society's particular orientation is called *ethos* (for extensive analysis, see Bar-Tal, 2000). Ethos is what binds the members of society together, along with the goals and aspirations that impel them toward the future. Thus, in essence, it provides the meaning of social identity for members of society (see, e.g., McClosky & Zaller, 1984, who analyze the beliefs about democracy and capitalism in the American ethos). Here a question arises: what are the criteria for evaluating whether the societal beliefs of an ethos reflect the society's social identity? The following seven criteria are suggested: (a) the majority of members of the society share the societal beliefs of the ethos; (b) this sharing is enduring, at least for decades; (c) the members of society perceive these societal beliefs as characterizing their society; (d) these beliefs serve the political-societal and economic leadership in justifying and explaining policies and decisions; (e) these beliefs are used to justify societal actions in the past, present, and future by members of society; (f) these beliefs are propagated by societal institutions, transmitted through societal channels of communication, and appear in various cultural products; and (g) these beliefs are imparted to the young generation and to new members of society.

As these criteria suggest, the notion of ethos assumes that the beliefs that guide the behavior of any society are not just random but represent a coherent and systematic pattern of knowledge. The notion of ethos offers a balanced picture of rational choices based on this knowledge. Ethos implies that the decisions of society's leaders, the coordinated behavior of the members of society, and the structure and functioning of the society are all based on coherent and comprehensive beliefs that justify and motivate members of society to act in the society and accept the system. Ethos imparts legitimacy to the societal order and fosters integration among the members of society. It is thus a crucial mechanism for organizing a collective of individuals as a society.

The societal beliefs of the ethos evolve under the influence of the particular conditions in which the society lives and the particular collective experiences that shape the society. They provide the epistemic organizational framework that gives meaning to the perceived reality. The influencing conditions are of wide scope and include geographic, demographic, political, societal, economic, and cultural factors. In addition, each society has its own unique set of powerful and/or prolonged, meaningful collective experiences such as conquests, wars, conflicts, famine, waves of immigration, dictatorship, and so on, which often have a determinative influence on the contents of the societal beliefs of the ethos. The evolvement of the ethos includes processes of dissemination and negotiation through which the contents of the beliefs are acquired by members of society (Bar-Tal, 2000; Lincoln, 1989; Sperber, 1985).

The established societal beliefs of the ethos are communicated through societal communication channels and are presented in societal institutions (Jenkins, 1996). Specifically, they are expressed in such cultural products as school textbooks, literature, films, or the speeches of leaders (see, e.g., Medin, 1990, who analyzes the dissemination of Marxist-Leninist beliefs in Cuba in an attempt to form an ethos). They often appear on the societal agenda and in public debate, since they are related to many of the current issues that preoccupy the society. Ethos, thus, is the basis

for a common societal view of the world and hence one of the foundations of societal life. Members of society must have basic shared views in order to experience a sense of belonging and identification, as well as to lead an integrative and coordinated life as one entity. In this respect, ethos provides the connection between the individual and society. Individuals, who develop an identity as members of society, also acquire the beliefs of the ethos. It is thus not surprising that the society makes a special effort to impart the societal beliefs of the ethos to its members together with social identity. As a result, societal beliefs of the ethos are shared to a great extent by members of society and the extent of this sharing can be viewed as one indicator of societal integration and cohesion (Epstein, 1978).

The societal beliefs of the ethos are not stable, but change when they cease to illuminate the reality of the society, cease to be perceived as valid, and no longer fulfill the needs of members of society. These outcomes take place in the face of (a) changes in the conditions in which a society lives, for example, industrialization, waves of immigration; (b) major events that undermine the prevailing ethos such as war, famine, formal conflict termination, or unification; or (c) the appearance of new ideas in a society such as Marxism, Christianity, or democracy. The last factor, which can be potent in itself, is also necessary for the two former factors, since in cases of changing conditions of life or major events, there is a need for new ideas with which to interpret the society's experiences. But whereas in the cases of the first two factors the new ideas emerge as a result of the new experiences of members of society, in the third case the new ideas shed new light on the existing conditions and experiences. The new ideas may provide explanations for the present reality, offer new perspectives on the past, and may even set new goals and aspirations for the future. When they fulfill the needs of members of society, they are perceived as valid, providing new interpretations of present experiences, and may become widely shared in the society. Eventually, some of these ideas may even be perceived as central societal beliefs, contributing to social identity.

The changes of societal beliefs occur over a prolonged process of years. From the moment an idea is born until it is shared by the members of society and perceived as characterizing them, much time must pass. Even in the course of major events such as revolutions, wars, or peace-making, societal beliefs do not change overnight, since the members of society do not change their beliefs rapidly. Change of deeply rooted, shared, and central societal beliefs is a complex process. The slow change of a society's ethos involves a change of social identity, since it confers new meaning on the social identity. This is a psychological, social, and cultural process, which requires changes not only of individuals' cognitive repertoire but also of cultural expressions through societal institutions and channels of communication.

Inglehart (1990), who defines culture as those attitudes, values, and knowledge that are widely shared within a society, extensively analyzes cultural change that results from economic, technological, and political change. Since societal beliefs are part of cultural knowledge, his analysis is of relevance here and offers a conceptual and empirical illustration for the present framework. Inglehart proposes that social change is always circular in nature: economic, technological, and sociopolitical changes influence the culture, and these changes in culture affect, in turn, the economic, technological, and sociopolitical domains. Among current economic, technological, and sociopolitical factors of change, he notes the evolution of high-tech industry, the limitation of welfare services, a shift toward individual autonomy, greater interest and participation in political processes, major waves of immigration from Third World countries, and growing economic prosperity. On the cultural level, Inglehart notes the emphasis on quality of life and self-realization, individual permissiveness, and a strengthening of democratic attitudes.

On the basis of data on cultural change collected from two dozen societies around the world, Inglehart found that societies differ in beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors even when their conditions are similar. This, he suggests, is because societies attribute different meanings to similar

situations, reflecting different historical experiences. Studying data collected over a period of fifteen years (1973-1988) and then tracing them back into the 1950s, he found durability in societal beliefs. He also, however, noticed gradual change over the years: "change in a central component of people's worldview seems to take place, in large part, as one generation replaces another" (p. 423). The young generations increasingly adopt postmaterialistic values, which include a broader orientation in terms of such issues as the environment and nuclear power; the role of women, homosexuality, or divorce; political outlook; or motivation to work. Economic, political, and technological changes have created different experiences for the young generation, and these experiences affect their belief systems.

The present paper focuses on the conflictive ethos of Israeli Jewish society that evolved during the intractable stage of the conflict with the Arabs. The next two sections describe this ethos and its implications for social identity, and the changes that have been taking place in this ethos during the peace process.

THE ISRAELI CONFLICTIVE ETHOS DURING INTRACTABLE CONFLICT

Israeli Jewish society evolved a conflictive ethos as a result of experiencing intractable conflict, which is characterized as being protracted, violent, apparently irreconcilable, of a zero-sum nature, total, central, and with the involved parties having an interest in its continuation (Azar, Jureidini, & McLaurin, 1978; Bar-Tal, 1998b; Goertz & Diehl, 1993; Kriesberg, 1993). This conflict developed over contested territory that two national movements claimed as their homeland. For more than eighty years Zionism, the Jewish national movement, and Palestinian nationalism clashed recurrently over the rights to self-determination, statehood, and justice. The conflict, however, was not only territorial and political but, being total, also concerned deep clashes of religious, cultural, and social interests.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share common roots that relate to the contested territory, some of the same places being sacred to all three religions. Both the Muslim majority and the Christian minority among the Arabs have struggled with the Jews over control of the holy places. Moreover, the influx of Jews from the Diaspora changed the demographic balance of the area, which had been mainly populated by Muslim Arabs. The newcomers were not only of a different religion but sought to spread Western culture in an area that was characterized by Arab culture.

The Arab-Israeli conflict began violently as a communal conflict between Jews and Palestinians living in British-ruled Palestine, and evolved into a full-blown interstate conflict between Israel and Arab countries during the 1948-1949 war. Since 1967, with the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the Six Day War, the conflict has involved both the interstate and communal levels (Sandler, 1988). According to Sandler (1988), it is this spatial expansion that accounts for the increase in the intractability of the conflict. Each new phase involved intensive violence and was followed by the entry of new parties into the conflict and the development of new patterns of hostile interaction. In the course of the conflict many thousands of lives were lost including civilians, many thousands more were injured, and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians became refugees.

In view of the intractable nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Israeli Jews evolved an ethos of conflict during the late 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s that was functional for the demanding, stressful, costly, and prolonged situation. This ethos enabled adaptation and successful coping with the conflict's painful consequences.³ It has been suggested that this ethos consisted of eight themes of societal belief (Bar-Tal, 1998b), which we shall now review.

3 The evolution of an ethos of conflict in Israeli society was not a unique process (see Bar-Tal, 1998b, in press).

Societal Beliefs about the Justness of the Israeli Goals

This theme concerns the rationales for the goals that led to the conflict, and particularly the justification of these goals in terms of their crucial importance.

The Jews' return to territory known over the past centuries as Palestine, with the aim of establishing their own state after two thousand years of exile, was inspired by the nationalist ideology of Zionism. This ideology provided the Jews both with their goals and with the justifications for them (Avineri, 1981; Vital, 1982). The goals centered first of all on the establishment of a Jewish state in the ancient homeland of Eretz Israel. Historical, theological, national, existential, political, societal, and cultural justifications for these goals were used. Some common motifs are that the Jewish nation was founded in the ancient Land of Israel; that during many years of ancient Jewish history the Land of Israel was the Jews' homeland; that during their exile Jews maintained close spiritual and physical ties with the Land of Israel, continuously aspiring to return to it; and that the persistent experience of anti-Semitism in the Diaspora highlighted the Jewish people's need for a secure existence in their old homeland. The conquest of the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights in the 1967 war greatly augmented the territorial dimension of the Israeli goals. In the aftermath of the war, many Israeli Jews believed that Israel had the right to retain these territories. Their shared beliefs pertained to the Jewish people's exclusive rights to the West Bank and Gaza and to the security importance of the Golan Heights and the Sinai.

In the context of justifying the Israeli goals, attempts were made over the years to refute the Palestinian claims. The contested territory was often described as being sparsely populated by Arabs, who, moreover, had immigrated there in recent centuries. These Arabs' national definition as Palestinians was also denied, and it was claimed that they were part of the Arab nation. Finally, their attachment to the land was questioned by characterizing the country, until the Jews' return, as desolate, neglected, swampy, desertlike, and primitive.

These societal beliefs motivated the members of Israeli Jewish society to struggle for their goals and to endure the stresses, sacrifices, and costs of the intractable conflict.

Societal Beliefs about Security

The societal beliefs about security stress the importance both of national survival and of personal safety. They highlight the potential dangers and posit the conditions that foster the security of the society.

During the intractable conflict, the Israeli Jews believed that the security of the country and of its Jewish citizens was under serious threat (Arian, 1995; Stein & Brecher, 1976; Stone, 1982). Therefore the achievement of security, which originally underlay the Zionist aspirations to return to Israel and establish a Jewish state, became the most central need and value, acquiring the status of a cultural master-symbol in the Israeli Jewish ethos (Horowitz, 1984; Liebman & Don Yehiya, 1983). Israeli society became a "nation in arms" or "nation in uniform," living in a situation that has been termed a "dormant war" (Horowitz, 1993).

Security considerations played a crucial role in many major governmental decisions, constantly being preferred over other considerations. Security became a sort of rubber stamp for many kinds of laws, policies, and actions, going beyond the military and political spheres into the economic, legal, social, educational, and even cultural domains (Bar-Tal, Jacobson, & Klieman, 1998; Kimmerling, 1993; Perlmutter, 1969). Moreover, during the intractable conflict the society uncritically accepted all decisions that were justified by security concerns; acquiesced in the stringent censorship of information on security grounds; avoided public debate on issues that were perceived as jeopardizing security; and avoided seeking or even presenting information that was perceived as possibly posing a threat to security (Barzilai, 1996; Lahav, 1993).

Assigning the highest priority to the value of security, the society did all it could to induce its members to serve in the armed forces, and to motivate

the best qualified to volunteer for the most important institutions and units (e.g., the air force, the commando units, the Mossad, the General Security Services). Service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) was viewed as an entrance ticket to Israeli society, and any type of refusal or evasion of it was severely sanctioned. Individuals who did not serve or were released from service before completing it, even if this was because they were psychologically unfit, encountered disapproval and difficulties in finding work in civilian life.

All of the channels of communication and agents of socialization paid tribute to the security forces (Lissak, 1984). Those who volunteered to serve in special institutions or units were accorded high prestige. The top-ranking officers were ascribed a special status that allowed them not only to act as epistemic authorities on a wide range of issues but also to be accepted into any field upon retirement, including politics, industry, business, the civil service, and even cultural institutions and education (Peri, 1983).

At the same time, a heritage of wars and battles was developed and heroism was glorified. Military heroes received special honors, and the society stressed the commemoration of those who had fallen in military service, support for their families, and aid for those who had been injured in the line of duty.

The fundamental societal beliefs of the ethos also concerned the conditions that were believed to ensure security. First, it was stressed that Israel had the right and duty to cope with threats by means of its own armed might, without relying on help from foreign military forces and often disregarding international public opinion or the views of foreign leaders and international organizations (e.g., the UN). Second, land was regarded as the country's most important national strategic asset in maintaining security.

In sum, the societal beliefs about security were functional for the violent confrontations in the conflict, since they assigned high priority to security, provided a rationale for societal decisions and actions, and motivated the

members of society to participate in the conflict and cope with stressful conditions.

Societal Beliefs about Delegitimizing the Opponents

Beliefs of this sort include the denial of the humanity of the adversary group (Bar-Tal, 1989). Indeed, mutual delegitimization has been one of the bitter manifestations of the long years of conflict between the Israeli Jews and the Arabs (Bar-Tal, 1988). From early on, the encounter between Jews, mostly coming from Europe, and the Arabs who were living in Palestine fostered negative stereotyping (Lustick, 1982). Arabs were attributed such labels as primitive, uncivilized, savage, and backward. With time, as the conflict deepened and became violent, Arabs were perceived as killers, a bloodthirsty mob, treacherous, cowardly, cruel, and wicked. After the establishment of the state, these delegitimizing beliefs about Arabs still prevailed and were transmitted through institutional channels (e.g., Cohen, 1985; Domb, 1982; Segev, 1984). In addition, Arabs were blamed for the continuation of the conflict, for the eruption of all of the wars and military clashes, and for intransigently rejecting a peaceful resolution (Ben-Gurion, 1975; Harkabi, 1977; Landau, 1971). They were also characterized as striving to annihilate the state of Israel and to drive the Jewish population into the sea.

These beliefs, while purporting to explain the causes for the conflict and for the Arabs' violence, also provided justification for one's own hostile and sometimes extremely violent actions.

Societal Beliefs about Positive Self-Image

The societal beliefs of positive self-image involve the attribution of positive traits, values, intentions, and behaviors to one's own society. These beliefs stood in absolute contrast to the delegitimizing beliefs about the Arabs. The Israeli Jews viewed themselves as "new people," reborn in the Land of Israel (Hofman, 1970). The positive stereotypes portrayed them as tenacious, hard-working, courageous, modern, and intelligent on the one hand, and

as moral and humane on the other. With respect to the former set of traits, various stories and myths were amassed about the Jews' behavior in peace and wartime, while the latter traits referred to Israeli Jews' behavior toward Arabs.

Positive self-presentation also invoked the Jewish heritage. The Jewish culture, religion, and tradition were regarded as roots of the West's civilization and superior morality. Jews thought of themselves as the Chosen People and as a "light unto the nations."

These beliefs provided moral strength and feelings of self-worth during the conflict.

Societal Beliefs about One's Own Victimization

These beliefs involve self-presentation as a victim of conflict. They are associated with the beliefs about positive self-image and delegitimization of Arabs, since in view of these beliefs, Israeli Jews perceived themselves as victims of unjust aggression by the Arabs. Beginning with the early encounter with the Arabs, the attempts to harm Jews physically, halt their immigration, or prevent them from settling were perceived by the Israeli Jews as evidence of their victimization (Hareven, 1983). These beliefs were greatly reinforced when, following the establishment of Israel, the Palestinians and the Arab states tried to annihilate the new state, and then continued to attack it during the first decades of its existence. The wars that were fought, the Arab embargo on trade with Israel, the terrorist attacks on Israeli and non-Israeli Jews—all confirmed to the Israeli Jews their victimhood.

These beliefs accorded with the Jewish tradition of viewing Jews as victims of a hostile world (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Liebman, 1978). This perception is based on ongoing persecutions, libels, special taxations, restrictions, forced conversions, expulsions, and pogroms that Jews experienced throughout their history, culminating in the systematic genocide attempt known as the Holocaust that occurred in the 20th century.

During the conflict the belief about victimhood provided moral incentive

to fight against the Arabs, to seek justice, and to turn to the international community for moral, political, and material support.

Societal Beliefs about Patriotism

Societal beliefs of patriotism refer to attachment to the country and society as expressed by loyalty, love, and sacrifice (Bar-Tal, 1993). It is not surprising that during the intractable conflict, Israeli Jews made special efforts to impart beliefs that would instill patriotism (Ben-Amos & Bar-Tal, in preparation). In the context of the conflict, extreme sacrifices were asked of Israeli Jews, including economic hardships along with prolonged military service and reserve duty. Patriotic beliefs called for various forms of dedication, including settlement of outlying or desolate areas, volunteering for the security forces, and working for society's welfare. These beliefs even called for the ultimate sacrifice of life as part of the violent confrontation with the Arabs. Those who acted as models of patriotism were glorified, while those who left the country (called "deserters") or did not fulfill their duties to the state (e.g., by not serving in the army) were stigmatized.

Such patriotic beliefs increased cohesiveness and played an important role in mobilizing the members of Israeli society for active participation in the conflict and for enduring hardship and even human losses (Elon, 1971).

Societal Beliefs about Unity

These beliefs concern the ignoring of internal disagreements and conflicts so as to unite the society in the face of external threats. Israeli Jewish society strove to foster unity and build a sense of belonging and solidarity. Heritage and religion were emphasized, and an attempt was made to minimize the ethnic differences within a society whose members came from various parts of the world. Unity was also reinforced by setting

lines of agreement in the form of a “consensus,” and sanctions were applied to those who expressed opinions or exhibited behavior beyond the acceptable consensus (Smootha, 1978). The consensus pertained especially to societal beliefs about the Arab-Israeli conflict, and about the justness of Israel’s goals and the means of ensuring security (Lahav, 1993; Negbi, 1985).

Such beliefs strengthen society from within, augment the sense of commonality and solidarity, and allow energy to be directed toward coping with the external enemy.

Societal Beliefs about Peace

These beliefs center on the society’s ultimate desideratum, namely, peace. During the intractable conflict with the Arabs, Israeli Jewish society cherished peace as a value. Peace was conceived of as a dream, a prayer, a hope in utopian and idyllic images. Hence Israeli Jews were stereotyped as peace-loving people forced by circumstances to engage in violent conflict. They presented themselves as ready to negotiate and achieve peace, whereas the Arabs, rejecting any peaceful resolution of the conflict and even refusing to have direct contact with Jews, were seen as the sole obstacle to progress.

Such beliefs inspire hope and optimism, strengthen positive self-image, and contribute to empathic self-presentation to the outside world.

These eight themes of the conflictive ethos gave Israeli Jewish society its dominant orientation in the context of the intractable conflict, both before the establishment of the state and during the first twenty-seven years of its existence. The themes were widely shared by the great majority of the society’s members, and were perceived as characterizing the society (e.g., Liebman & Don-Yehiya, 1983; Zerubavel, 1995). These beliefs were used to justify society’s policies, decisions, and actions (e.g., Bar-Tal, Jacobson, & Klieman, 1998; Yaniv, 1993). They were maintained by societal, political, and cultural institutions (e.g., Ben-Ezer, 1977; Cohen, 1985; Gertz, 1998; Govrin, 1989; Peri, 1998; Zemah, 1995) and transmitted to the new gener-

ations by the educational system (e.g., Bar-Tal, 1998b; Firer, 1985; Podeh, in press).

THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE CONFLICT AND THE CHANGING CONFLICTIVE ETHOS

The conflictive ethos of Israeli Jewish society was dominant and exclusive so long as the society experienced a violent and total conflict, which was perceived as irreconcilable and zero-sum. All of the wars and clashes from 1948 to 1973 were fought under the epistemic rationale of the conflictive ethos. The 1973 war was the last climactic confrontation during the period of the intractable conflict, bringing the Egyptians and the Israelis in 1974, as well as the Syrians and the Israelis in 1975, to sign the disengagement agreements that were the first indications of the approaching peace process.

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem on November 19, 1977, marked a turning point in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, providing unequivocal evidence to many Israelis that there was a possibility of peacefully terminating the violent conflict, that there was an Arab partner for negotiations, and that the achievement of peace would require compromise. Sadat's visit constituted the first clear sign that the intractable nature of the conflict could change.

The peace treaty with Egypt signed in 1979 was another major event, providing a new experience for Israeli society and serving as a catalyst for a new perception of the conflict and the formation of new societal beliefs, which contravened the societal beliefs of the conflictive ethos. Subsequent events provided further new experiences, fostered further new perceptions, and enabled the transformation of the conflict from intractable to tractable, including: the Lebanon War, the PLO's decisions in its meeting in Algeria in 1988, the Intifada, the collapse of the USSR, the Gulf War, the Madrid Conference, the Oslo accords with the PLO, the peace treaty with Jordan, peace negotiations with Syria, the establishment of relations with several

Arab states, and the Hebron, Wye, and Sharm-el-Sheikh agreements with the Palestinians as well as the negotiations with them at Camp David.⁴ The changed perceptions had a major effect on the societal beliefs of the conflictive ethos, which took three different forms:

- (a) Change in the extent of *confidence* ascribed to the *contents* of the societal beliefs. That is, members of society may lessen their confidence in these contents, by reducing their status from facts and verities to hypotheses and uncertainties.
- (b) Change in the extent of *centrality* accorded to the societal beliefs. This means that members of society transfer central beliefs, which are often referred to for various decisions and behaviors, to a more peripheral status.
- (c) Change in the *contents* of societal beliefs. When this ultimate change occurs, a given belief is no longer considered valid and is removed. Often members of society form new beliefs that may even contradict the former beliefs.

We turn now to a description of the changes in the societal beliefs of the conflictive ethos.⁵

Changes in Societal Beliefs about the Justness of the Israeli Goals

The right of Israeli Jews to establish a Jewish state in the homeland of Eretz Israel is still a central component of the Israeli ethos. Almost all Israeli Jews still accept the historical, theological, and national beliefs that have been invoked over the years to justify this right. Yet since the 1970s, some changes in these central societal beliefs have occurred.

- 4 It is well recognized that other events and changing conditions in Israel and the world also had an impact on Israeli society and the ethos of conflict. The events related to the conflict itself, however, played a major role in changing this ethos.
- 5 This section does not aim to provide an exhaustive analysis of the changes that have taken place, but to outline their major features.

The most notable change in the contents of these beliefs pertains to the Jews' exclusive rights to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The belief in a Greater Israel, which prevailed among the Israeli Jewish public for years, has been replaced by the growing recognition of the need to share the land with the Palestinian people. This is related to an emerging new belief concerning the recognition of the existence of the Palestinian nation, which was denied for many years. There has also been a lessening of confidence in the beliefs that refute the Palestinian claims to rights to Eretz Israel. The Camp David accords already referred to the "legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and their just requirements." Fourteen years later, the state of Israel and the PLO signed a clause on mutual recognition, which forms one of the bases for the establishment of the Palestinian state.

National surveys show that more and more Israeli Jews are prepared for withdrawal from the West Bank, which is considered part of Greater Israel and the region where the Jewish nation crystallized and lived for hundreds of years before the exile. In 1968, only about 9% of Israelis were ready to withdraw from at least part of the West Bank; by 1994 this figure had risen to 65% (Arian, 1995). Those upholding the value of Greater Israel as a first priority decreased from 19% in 1988 to 14% in 1996 (Arian, 1999). As for the establishment of the Palestinian state, support increased from 20% in 1987 to 44% in 1998. Recently, at the Camp David summit meeting between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders (July 2000), the Israeli prime minister discussed compromises over Jerusalem. The polls showed that about 27% of Israeli Jews were ready to offer the Palestinians part of East Jerusalem, an unthinkable measure just five years ago (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, July 27, 2000).

Changes in Societal Beliefs about Security

Societal beliefs about security still dominate the Israeli ethos (Bar-Tal, Jacobson, & Klieman, 1998; Yaniv, 1993). Many Israeli Jews continue to believe that the security of the state and of its Jewish citizens is under serious

threat (Arian, 1999). Therefore, the achievement of security has remained a top priority for Israeli Jews. The society still attributes great importance to army service and volunteering for special units, places great trust in the army, and bestows high status on its top officers. For example, about 75% of male recruits, more or less constantly, express willingness to serve in combat units (*Ha'aretz*, July 27, 2000), and the IDF continues to be the most trusted institution in the country (about 85%-92%), ranking higher than the Supreme Court, the law courts, the police, the prime minister, or any other governmental body (Yuchtman-Yaar & Peres, 1998).

At the same time, there have been conspicuous changes in the societal beliefs about security, particularly regarding the conditions that guarantee security. Today Israeli Jews recognize the limitations of using military force in general and especially as a tool for ensuring ultimate security (Arian, 1995). They also recognize the limitations of self-reliance, and hence the new security beliefs relate to Israel's strategic ties with the United States. The most notable changes of security beliefs, however, concern land and peace. Over the years, more and more Israeli Jews have realized that retaining the occupied territories is not the main determinant of security. Instead, they have adopted the belief that peaceful relations with Arab states are a more reliable determinant. The great majority of them, therefore, accept the principle of exchanging land for peace. The return of the Sinai to Egypt provided unequivocal evidence for this belief, and over the years the readiness to exchange land for peace has increased considerably. Whereas in 1973, 64% of Israeli Jews were not prepared to return any part of the territories, by 1989 this figure had declined to 38% (Arian, 1995), and today partial withdrawal from the West Bank is a reality confirmed even by the hawkish Likud Party and its prime minister during 1996–1999, Binyamin Netanyahu. Even with respect to the Golan Heights, which for many years was regarded as a security buffer, there has been a significant change of beliefs: about 48% of Israeli Jews are now prepared to relinquish at least part of this territory for peace with Syria (*Ha'aretz*, February 6, 2000).

As for other security beliefs, over the past three decades dramatic changes are notable in the attitudes and practices regarding the relationship between security institutions and society (see Bar-Tal, Jacobson, & Klieman, 1998; Ben Eliezer & Al-Haj, in preparation). There are emphatic demands for greater civilian control of the security forces, greater accountability of security institutions, freer debate about various security issues, a lesser role for security considerations in decisionmaking about various societal issues, and reduced censorship of information pertaining to security. These demands are expressed publicly and arouse much controversy.

The following are some manifestations of changes in societal beliefs about security: the demand for outside investigation of fatal accidents occurring during military training; appeals to the civil courts on military decisions and actions; the publicizing of various problems and complaints of soldiers; the Supreme Court's ruling against the use of torture; and public demands to reduce the security budget. Also, there is diminished confidence in beliefs involving the glorification of security institutions and personnel. More and more, their misdeeds, deceptions, and failures are publicized and even criticized. At the same time, confidence in beliefs that stigmatized those who do not serve in the army or evade reserve duty has declined; Israeli society is now more tolerant and understanding toward such individuals (see, e.g., Shavit, May 26, 2000).

Changes in Societal Beliefs about Delegitimizing Arabs

Although there has been a considerable decrease in the use of delegitimizing labels for Arabs, they are still predominantly stereotyped negatively. However, three important changes in this theme of societal beliefs have been occurring over the past decades (see Bar-Tal & Teichman, in preparation). First, the long-used general category of "Arabs" has been differentiated, and Israeli Jews have begun to refer to Egyptians, Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians, or Lebanese, and even to differentiate among different groups of Palestinians such as Hamas or Fatah. This is accompanied by differential stereotyping and evaluation of the groups. Not all of the Arabs

are perceived as enemies who seek to destroy Israel; instead there is a clear distinction among different groups, which form different kinds of relations with Israeli Jews ranging from hostility and conflict to peace and cooperation.

Thus, to begin with, Israeli Jews stereotype the Egyptians and the Jordanians, with whom peace treaties have been signed, more positively than the Syrians and the Palestinians with whom the conflict still continues. Among the Palestinian groups, supporters of Islamic Jihad and Hamas are delegitimized whereas supporters of Fatah are more positively stereotyped. Second, over the years there has been a process of legitimization and personalization of Arabs in general as well as of particular subcategories (e.g., Egyptians, Palestinians). Legitimization makes it possible to view Arabs as belonging to a category of acceptable groups and behaving within the bounds of international norms; personalization enables seeing individual Arabs as human beings, with characteristics similar to those of Israeli Jews. Third, the experiences of the 1973 war, the Lebanon War, the Intifada, and especially of the peace process have changed the stereotypic contents. These experiences have cast Arabs in a new light as having such characteristics as courage, determination, or strength, adding to Israeli Jews' repertoire of stereotyping for Arabs (e.g., Bar-Tal & Teichman, in preparation). Finally, the growing contact with the different groups of Arabs has diminished negative stereotypes (e.g., Amir & Ben-Ari, 1985; Bargal & Bar, 1992).

Changes in Societal Beliefs about Positive Self-Image

The societal beliefs of positive self-image are still held with confidence by Israeli Jewish society and constitute part of its ethos. Nevertheless, some changes in contents can be detected. First of all, among the secular Jews, the theme of the Chosen People has almost disappeared and many prefer to think of Israeli Jews as normal people, similar to other nations. In addition, there is diminished confidence in beliefs that Israeli Jews are moral and humane, as well as brave and undefeated.

Information has shown that Israeli Jews have committed immoral acts in violent encounters, are partially responsible for the Palestinian refugee problem, and have harmed, exploited, and discriminated against the Palestinians during the years of occupation. In addition, experiences have demonstrated that Israeli Jews can lose battles, can panic, and cannot resolve the conflict with the Arabs militarily despite victories in wars.

Changes in Societal Beliefs about One's Own Victimization

The societal beliefs about one's own victimization are still widely shared by Israeli Jews. Yet information about the victimhood of the Palestinians during the 1948 war and about Palestinian suffering as a result of the Israeli occupation since 1967 has reduced the exclusivity of the Israeli Jewish self-perception as victims. There is increasing awareness that the Palestinians have also been victims of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The present prime minister, Ehud Barak, went so far as to say in the name of the government that: "We are sorry for the heavy suffering that the conflict caused not only to us, but to all the Arab nations that fought against us, including the Palestinian people" (*Ha'aretz*, November 5, 1999, p. 1).

Changes in Societal Beliefs about Patriotism

Although societal beliefs about patriotism have remained part of the Israeli ethos, their centrality has diminished considerably. Israeli Jews question the necessity of sacrificing their lives in violent encounters with Arabs, are less ready to volunteer for various national tasks, and are less prepared to bear hardships on behalf of the country. There is even decreased confidence in societal beliefs that reject the option of emigrating from Israel. Also, beliefs have appeared about the right not to serve in the army either because of conscientious objection or psychological unfitness. Finally, there is reduced confidence in societal beliefs that glorify patriotism, and in current myths that encourage patriotic behavior (for details of these changes, see Ben-Amos & Bar-Tal, in preparation.)

Changes in Societal Beliefs about Unity

This theme of societal beliefs has undergone major changes. New beliefs have appeared that legitimize the emphasis on ethnic differences within Israeli Jewish society and stress the right to express views that may contravene majority opinion. As a result, on many major issues there are considerable disagreements and even conflicts. The core controversy involves issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which were the object of consensus from the late 1940s until the mid-1970s. Ever since Sadat's dramatic visit to Jerusalem in 1977, Israeli society has become polarized about the preferable solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The polarization centers on the territories that Israel captured in the 1967 war. Whereas "doves" favor withdrawing from a large part of these territories in exchange for peace, "hawks" object to such withdrawal, regarding the land as a security guarantee and/or insisting on Jewish historical and theological rights to this land (see Arian, 1995). Other conflicts have emerged in Israeli society as well; the main one, between religious and secular Jews, greatly threatens the society's integrity and solidarity (Mautner, Sagi, & Shamir, 1998).

Changes in Societal Beliefs about Peace

Peace has remained an ultimate goal of Israeli society. However, some significant changes in the contents of this theme have occurred since the late 1970s. The utopic, general, and simplistic view of peace has been replaced by a realistic, concrete, and complex conception, which encompasses beliefs about the need to negotiate with the enemy and the need to compromise so as to reach peace agreements (i.e., the "price of peace"). The Israeli Jews have become more aware of the rewards and costs of peace and realize that peaceful relations are not dichotomous, in terms of conflict or peace, but rather multidimensional. That is, there are various patterns of peaceful relations, with differing qualities.

Overall, it appears that the centrality of beliefs about peace has increased over the years. Nevertheless, there is deep disagreement about the meaning

of peace, the means and possibilities of achieving it, and the price that can be paid for it (Arian, 1995).

Implications

The changes in societal beliefs of the conflictive ethos have considerably influenced Israeli Jewish society's orientation, altering the meaning of its social identity. The cognitive, affective, and behavioral implications of the Israeli Jewish identity today are different from those of twenty-seven years ago, at the climax of the intractable conflict.

Being an Israeli Jew today implies having beliefs and attitudes, as well as behavior patterns, that correspond to the transition from intractable, violent conflict to tractable conflict. The newly emerging orientation does not, however, characterize all of Israeli Jewish society. Some groups explicitly object to the new trends or aspects of them. The new orientation should be viewed more as a dominant current in the society that exists alongside other currents, some of them oppositional. We shall now outline the transformations in the evolving mainstream orientation.

From ideology to pragmatism. Whereas during the intractable conflict Israeli Jewish society was primarily ideological, it has become primarily pragmatic. The ideological orientation centered on societal beliefs about the justness of the Israeli goals, security, one's own victimization, and patriotism. These beliefs were linked to premises mostly taken from Zionist ideology, which served as the major epistemic basis for the society's decisions and actions and the main motivating force for both the elite and large portions of Israeli society during the intractable conflict.

The pragmatic orientation, which reflects changes in societal beliefs, has added new political, legal, economic, social, and cultural considerations that affect societal decisionmaking and action. The changes in societal beliefs also stress the limitations of the ideological premises and diminish their centrality.

From "securitism" to civility. During the intractable conflict, the societal beliefs of security, patriotism, and delegitimization of Arabs provided the

basis for the “securitism” orientation. Security values and considerations held top priority, and security-oriented institutions, their personnel and practices, were highly evaluated and uncritically accepted. At present, a considerable change is evident in Israeli Jewish society’s security orientation. The decrease in the intractability of the conflict has been accompanied by growing demands for controllability, accountability, and openness, along with skepticism and criticism.

From collectivism to individualism. Israeli Jewish society has also become less collectivist and more individualist. During the intractable conflict, the collectivism was based on societal beliefs about the justness of Israeli goals, security, patriotism, and unity. These beliefs posited societal goals, emphasized acts that benefit society, urged mobilization for society’s causes, encouraged unity, highlighted the individual’s connectedness to the society, focused on the society’s achievements, and stressed interdependence and commonality as a societal foundation. As the societal beliefs have changed, the society’s orientation has become more individualistic. Members of society place less emphasis on society’s goals and more on individuals’ goals and rights, take more pride in individuals’ achievements, and grant more recognition to needs for self-actualization.

From blind to critical patriotism. The intractable conflict required blind patriotism, that is, uncritical loyalty to the state and its ideology, policies, and actions. This demand was based on societal beliefs about the justness of one’s own goals, patriotism, security, and unity. The blind patriotism led to conformity and unquestioning trust in societal institutions (the security forces, Knesset, government, legal system, and even the media). Since the 1973 war, blind patriotism has slowly been replaced by critical patriotism, which allows questioning and skepticism. This patriotism is also based on concern and love for the society and country, but reflects a different attitude. It requires openness and critical evaluation of the state’s policies, decisions, and actions in the interest of advancing its well-being. This type of patriotism leads to autonomous norms and even lack of trust in societal institutions.

From unity to segmentation. During the intractable conflict, Israeli Jewish

society was in principle united in terms of the goals and aspirations related to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The societal beliefs about unity, justness of goals, and security underlay this orientation, providing the parameters of consensus. Today, however, the society is deeply divided between doves and hawks about how to resolve the conflict. Consensus has been replaced by polarized groups engaged in internal conflicts. The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 because of his peace policy was a climactic indication of the scope and severity of the disagreements. In addition, in recent years deep internal disagreements and conflicts have emerged on various societal issues as well (e.g., the status of the Jewish religion, poverty, the status of the law courts, etc.).

From closedness to openness. During the intractable conflict, Israeli Jewish society could be characterized as relatively closed. Underlying this closedness were the societal beliefs about the justness of goals, security, one's own victimization, positive self-image, and delegitimization of Arabs. The society was focused on its own goals and problems, with limited flow of information or freedom of public debate, great isolation from the world, and a prevailing siege mentality. Over the past decades, however, this orientation has changed. Israel now has relations with almost all the states in the world and plays a significant role in international diplomacy. Members of the society travel constantly throughout the world, and are in contact with other societies and groups. There is a growing desire to be "a normal society," integrated with the global community. There is a relatively free flow of information and ideas in the society, as well as free public debate about almost all of the societal issues.

Summary. The changes in the conflictive ethos of Israeli Jewish society indicate that the meaning of the Israeli Jewish identity has been undergoing a significant transition. The experience of the intractable conflict and the conflictive ethos that evolved gave Israeli Jewish society a particular orientation. But changing conditions and new, major events provided a solid basis for change in the societal beliefs of the conflictive ethos. This slow process is bringing about the evolvement of a new ethos. In the present

transitional period, the societal beliefs of the conflictive ethos are still held by a substantial minority, and extreme groups remain loyal to these beliefs. Also, the changes have not been well internalized by a substantial portion of the society, whose views fluctuate in response to events (e.g., terrorist attacks, statements by leaders, or disturbances by the Palestinians).

An alternative ethos is still in its formative stage and will take decades to crystallize and become dominant in Israeli Jewish society. This long process requires the replacement of the old, dysfunctional societal beliefs of the conflictive ethos with beliefs that are relevant to the new reality, and particularly their acceptance by the members of society and their institutionalization in the political, educational, and cultural contexts. However, the experiences of Israeli Jewish society, shaped by changing conditions and major events, remain of crucial importance. To accelerate the evolution of the new Israeli ethos, namely, the ethos of peace, the conditions and major events must reflect the climate of an advancing peace process, which can transform the relations between Israel and the Arab nations from intractable conflict to peace.

CONCLUSIONS

We have maintained that ethos, consisting of the configuration of central societal beliefs, gives meaning to social identity. Social identity in its fundamental form is based on self-social categorization, and to this foundation are added the societal beliefs of the ethos. The sharing of the beliefs of the ethos by the members of society not only enables a common view of the world but also a sense of belonging and cohesiveness. Ethos provides a society's particular orientation and organizes its societal life. It constitutes the epistemic basis for the society's coordination, integration, and functioning.

Ethos is the changeable part of social identity. Societies are not static, but continuously change under the impact of new experiences. Although Italians, Germans, Chinese, or Mexicans may consider their social identity,

as represented by self-categorization, to have been the same over the last forty or eighty years, the meaning of their social identity has changed; that is, the shared societal beliefs of Italians, Germans, Chinese, or Mexicans have been modified. Such changes are slow and occur over many years, but they eventually result in a new meaning for social identity.

The changing ethos of Israeli society is an example of such a process. Initially, powerful experiences of the intractable conflict fostered the evolvment of an ethos of conflict. Later, as experiences of the peace process began, interwoven with new violent confrontations (the Lebanon War, the Intifada, the Gulf War), Israeli Jewish society began to change the societal beliefs of its ethos. This process has been occurring for decades and will continue well into the future. In view of the new, powerful experiences reflecting the transition from intractable conflict to peace, it is an inevitable process that changes the meaning of social identity. Israeli society has changed, developing new codes, new master-symbols, and new collective memories as a basis for its social identity.

The conception we have presented extends the notion of social identity, offering a dynamic perspective for its analysis. This conception of social identity enables both the study of a particular society across time and comparisons among societies. In light of the rapid changes that characterize our times, which greatly influence individuals in societies, it is a useful conception. New experiences change the ethos of a society, which is a manifestation of societal identity.

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