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Exposition: Engaging Intergroup Relations in a Conflict-Ridden Society

Abstract This chapter endeavours to elucidate the complexity of encountering and managing intergroup relations in a conflict-ridden society. It presents studies investigating intergroup relations, contact, and interactions in the challenging context of social diversity and divisions, especially in societies afflicted by protracted intergroup conflicts. This chapter mainly draws on conflict literature in the social psychological and social science domains. The discussion underscores the importance of a real-life, in situ research perspective and methods that allow examination of the phenomena in a manner that is particularly relevant for the contemporary social, political, and economic context.

Keywords Divided society · Protracted conflict · Political tensions · Intergroup relations · In situ research

During a recent visit to the Old City of Jerusalem, while walking through the market I recalled a field experiment in bargaining that we conducted in the very same market as part of a second-year experimental psychology course at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. We tested the effect of the opening offer on negotiation outcomes. The experiment was conducted in pairs, each one approaching a different shopkeeper and negotiating

H. Desivilya Syna, *Diversity Management in Places and Times of Tensions*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-37723-6_2

the price of a small carpet. Half of us were assigned a tough first offer condition, and the other half a mild first offer condition. We examined how the respective opening stance affected the final price achieved in this bargaining experiment. Clearly, this retrospection does not intend to discuss either the flaws in methodological rigour of the field experiment or its ethical aspects, but rather to illustrate how intrigued I was by the negotiation process, particularly the inevitability of relating to the other, and coordinating in some ways with your negotiation counterpart to get what you want, and often what you genuinely need, but also to give something in return, that is to reciprocate. The concept of interdependence appeared of paramount importance, remained vivid, and persisted as my professional career progressed. This notion subsequently joined my fascination with social perception, especially the deep contrast between self and others' perception of positive and negative events, and our obliviousness regarding these differences.

How do we engage with real and perceived disparities and incompatibilities in our encounters with the other? Do we always stubbornly stick to our disparate demands? These queries have become the central focus of my research throughout the different stages of my career, initially investigated by means of experimental studies of interpersonal negotiation. Gradually, I have expanded this area of research to broader conceptual and methodological approaches: integrating a micro-level social psychological perspective with a macro-level social-constructivism perspective. I have used a mixed-methods approach—quantitative and qualitative methodologies and research tools, and program evaluation research—attempting to deeply and comprehensively study the research–practice interface associated with intergroup relations in contemporary societies, characterised by mounting social divisions.

In line with the pursuits mentioned above, this chapter presents the main insights from studies investigating intergroup relations, contact, and interactions in the challenging context of social divisions, especially in societies afflicted by protracted intergroup conflicts. It mainly draws on conflict literature in the social psychological and social science domains (Bar-Tal, 2011; Coleman, 2004; Desivilya Syna, 2015; Deutsch, 1973, 2000; Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2006; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2017; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Maoz, 2011; Follett, 1918; Pruitt, Kim, & Rubin, 1994; Syna Desivilya, 1998).

The discussion underscores the importance of the real-life, in situ research perspective and methods that allow examination of the phenomena in a manner that is relevant for the contemporary social, political, and economic context. Nevertheless, it initially sketches the evolution and development of research on interpersonal relations studied through controlled methods, such as experimental designs or prearranged work groups and intergroup encounters.

Interspersed throughout the chapter are relevant research projects as milestones in my journey in the field, focusing on the phenomenon of relationships, in particular elucidating how people deal with conflict and engage differences at the interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup level, looking at how these endeavours are subjectively perceived and actually implemented.

Let me commence with the definition of 'negotiation', a concept that captured my attention in the early stages of my professional journey. Negotiation entails one of the most prevalent methods of coping with social conflict. The social psychological definitions construe it as a process aimed at settling disagreements through give-and-take (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). Other definitions conceptualise negotiation as a process of searching for consensus, aimed especially at synchronising reciprocal attitudes (Dunlop, 1984; Glenn & Susskind, 2010).

Social scientists, notably organisational behaviour scholars, coined the term 'negotiating reality', referring to the parties' jointly evolving mutual understandings of their relationships and terms of interaction in a specific context (Eden & Huxham, 2001; Friedman & Antal, 2004; Kolb & McGinn, 2009; Putnam, 2010).

Advocates of the critical conflict resolution approach conceive negotiation as a social activism process seeking to redefine power relations through struggle against institutional oppression and pursuit of social justice (Hansen, 2008). Collier's (2009) definition of negotiation reflects a similar conception. It focuses on the process of identity construction, shaping the parties' stances, and, in general, developing mutual terms of engagement, as put by the scholar: 'Negotiation refers to communicative processes in which parties are engaged in developing, challenging, and reinforcing their group and individual positions in relationship to each other and the context' (p. 289).

I draw on the aforementioned definition, conceptualising negotiation as an informal communication process designed to coordinate individual or group comprehensions of the rules governing their relationships.

My doctoral dissertation on 'real' married and cohabiting couples, using structured observation of role-playing scenarios and structured questionnaires, yielded relevant findings on negotiation as a relationship development process in intimate bonds. The results pointed to the association of blame attributions and the capacity to either increase escalation or foster reconciliation between partners. Individuals who tended to exclusively blame their partners for conflicts in their relationship spurred contentious negotiations and precipitated deadlocks. Conversely, individuals who were inclined to share some blame for the couples' discords (especially women) were more likely to manage conflicts using integrative-cooperative strategies and tactics, thereby not only mitigating escalation, but promoting reconciliation between the partners in the conflict aftermath (Pruitt & Syna, 1985; Syna, 1984).

Nearly three decades later, we conducted a study in a similar context of intimate relationships, focusing on couples' conjoint negotiation with a third party (Aloni & Desivilya, 2013). The study sought to test the effects of gender stereotypes with regard to negotiation, of asymmetric contextual ambiguity, and of the couples' orientation with regard to gender equality on the choice of the negotiator with a third party (a man versus a woman).

We used an experimental design, manipulating the type of gender stereotype priming (either implicit or explicit). In the implicit condition, gender stereotypes were elicited subtly, indicating by means of the instructions that individual characteristics such as rationality and assertiveness promote successful negotiation, in contrast to emotionality and care for others that are likely to hinder the process. In the explicit condition, gender stereotypes were induced bluntly. In addition to the prior statement in the instructions, there was a message maintaining that according to research evidence, women tend to be less competent than men at negotiation. Prior research showed that the implicit priming condition tended to evoke a self-fulfilling prophecy, namely behaviour confirming gender stereotypes: women indeed achieved inferior negotiation outcomes in comparison with men. By contrast, the

explicit priming condition produced resistance, reflected in counter-stereotypical behaviour among women, that is women performing better than men, who 'rested on their laurels' (Bowles, Babcock, & McGinn, 2005; Kray, Reb, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2004).

We also manipulated the negotiation context. In one condition, the negotiation context was more ambiguous for women (attempting to hire, hence negotiating with a contractor), whereas in the other condition it was more ambiguous for men (attempting to hire, hence negotiating with a childminder). Previous studies showed that both women and men tended to attain better negotiation results in settings that were less ambiguous to them (Miles & LaSalle, 2007).

The couples' orientation to gender equality was measured by means of a structured questionnaire. Accordingly, they were categorised as either traditional couples who tend to embrace stereotypical gender-role expectations, or egalitarian couples, who espouse liberal gender-related attitudes, advocating equality between women and men. 'Real' married or cohabiting couples participated in this field experiment. We hypothesised that the traditional couples would choose the man to negotiate with a third party, regardless of the context (ambiguous for men or for women) and the type of priming, in line with their stereotypical belief that men do better than women in any negotiation. By contrast, the egalitarian couples were expected to be more sensitive than their traditional counterparts to the contextual circumstances and to react differently to implicit in comparison with explicit priming. Consequently, they would choose the woman in situations favourable to women and ambiguous to men, and under the explicit priming condition, and would choose the man in the unambiguous circumstances to men and under implicit priming.

The results largely corroborated our predictions. The findings demonstrated the potency of gender-role expectations, biasing judgements and, in turn, potentially impeding achievements in negotiations. Importantly, the results also indicated that the biased perceptions were not uniform among all the couples (Aloni & Desivilya, 2013). They prevailed among the traditional couples, who are prone to view the social world through a one-dimensional lens, and were more moderate among the egalitarian couples, who are more sensitive to social justice and values of equality.

Additionally, the study indicated the paramount importance of the particular negotiation context, albeit akin to the biased views, the couples' gender-role orientation largely governed the level of attention to these situational facets. While the traditional couples were oblivious to changing circumstances, the egalitarian couples were highly attuned to the contextual features and acted accordingly.

Both studies on negotiation in intimate relationships evinced the negative effects of biased perceptions on negotiation behaviour within the couples and of the couples vis-à-vis external negotiators. A tendency for internal attribution of blame to the partner, and rigid preconceptions regarding the other (gender), impedes relationship building and eventually leads to adverse consequences for both partners. Conversely, the capacity for introspection into one's own deeds and vigilance to the changing situational characteristics appear to be the necessary ingredients for effectively negotiating the rules of engagement and coordinating a joint conception of the relationship. Our findings echo Mary Parker Follett's (1918) timeless insight, underscoring the challenge of relationship construction in conflict situations: 'We must indeed, as the extreme militarists tell us, "wipe out" our enemies, but we do not wipe out our enemies by crushing them. The old-fashioned hero went out to conquer his enemy; the modern hero goes out to disarm his enemy by creating a mutual understanding' (p. 345).

This quotation also provides a link and leap to the next meaningful step in my exploration of the negotiation process and relationship building: studying the phenomena in context, particularly the one in my vicinity—the tension-ridden region of Israel and its neighbours. How do negotiation processes and relationships evolve in complex environments—divided societies, engulfed by protracted intergroup political conflict? Unlike intimate relationships, the interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup interactions with the other/s in such intricate contexts are usually not voluntary or determined by choice; rather, the encounters are compelled, such as in mixed workplaces, educational institutions, and communities, where the parties display some degree of interdependence. Mary Parker Follett's vanguard tenet guides my exploration of complex contemporary reality: 'It is said that a mighty struggle is before us by-and-by when East meets West, and in that shock will be decided which

of these civilizations shall rule the world – that this is to be the great world-decision. No, the great world-decision is that each nation needs equally every other, therefore each will not only protect, but foster and increase the other that thereby it may increase its own stature' (Follett, 1918, p. 446).

What characterises the current conflict-ridden contexts: negative interdependence, contentious rivalry relations, or perhaps traces of transformation into positive interdependence, initial tendencies for cooperation? (Deutsch, 1973, 2000, 2011).

In an attempt to examine this query, we shall delineate the main features of the intricate environment, saturated with intergroup tensions, and labelled a divided society, followed by one of its most salient reflections—a protracted intergroup conflict.

'Divided society' refers to profound ruptures underlying the social framework where various groups display clashing, mutually exclusive, national, ethnic, and cultural identities, confirmed by suppression of the competing ones. Such construction of rival identities drastically curtails the potential for shared interests between the different social groups (Hargie, Dickson, & Nelson, 2003; Schaap, 2006). Protracted political conflicts present severe cases of a divided society, demonstrating numerous salient characteristics, such as continuation, stubbornness, and inescapability of the discords, endangered existential needs, and perceptions of intractability, namely a sense that the conflict cannot be resolved (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998). Such prolonged intergroup tensions often compound, erupting into violence, and eventually leading to deep-seated, harmful multifaceted and multilevel transitions, labelled 'conflict escalation'.

The next section describes the nature of the escalation process.

A conflict escalation process comprises a complex system of adverse transformations at individual, group, and social environment levels (Coleman, 2000; Gottman, 1993; Kriesberg, 1998; Pruitt et al., 1994; Pruitt & Olczak, 1995; Syna Desivilya, 2004; Toscano, 1998). The escalation entails simultaneously growing corrosion in five modalities of human experience: motivation, affect, cognition, behaviour, and social environment. According to Pruitt and Olczak (1995), these adverse multimodal changes constitute a system of intertwined components,

termed the MACBE model, representing the first letters of the 'diseased' modalities.

This system framework illuminates multimodal flaws 'infecting' individuals on either side of the conflict. In the motivational modality, each party adopts an exceedingly competitive, obstinate position, stemming from a 'zero-sum game' perception of the conflict, and changing the motivations from beating to destroying the opponent. In the affective sphere, the parties' emotions towards one another progressively shift from anger to overall antagonism, frequently transforming into hatred, fuelled by a desire for retaliation.

Faulty processes also harm the cognitive modality; that is, they exacerbate biased processing of information about the self and the other. The parties rely excessively on stereotypes, selectively perceiving the adversary, disproportionately evaluating negative information, while overlooking the opponent's positive aspects.

Conversely, self-serving bias is apparent in information processing about one's own side. Each side either discounts negative information or attributes it to external factors, whereas favourable evidence is inflated and ascribed to internal causes. An exceedingly negative image of the other generates mounting distrust between the rival parties.

The behavioural modality manifests increasingly antagonistic actions. The parties exhibit aggressive behaviour, at first demonstrated by verbal aggression, such as disparaging statements, then largely changing to physical violence. The parties face growing communication barriers, notably reflected in difficulties in listening to one another, thus maintaining a 'dialogue of the deaf'.

Presumably, the destructive transitions at individual level are inevitable owing to universal human limitations in processing social reality, labelled by social psychologists 'bias blind spot' or 'meta-bias' (West, Meserve, & Stanovich, 2012), and by Mitroff and Silvers (2010) as 'errors of the third and fourth kind'. Principally, both conceptualisations focus on the individual's fundamental impediment to engaging in critical thinking. Bias blind spot refers to the inability to detect one's own fallacies, while easily pinpointing them in others' information processing and thus, in turn, refraining from assuming responsibility for engaging with the problems. Error of the third kind pertains to the tendency to solve old and new

problems based on obsolete approaches, and failure to defy one's desires. Error of fourth kind refers to the unintentional fallacy of solving the wrong problems precisely. This fallacy bears significant political implications. The fundamental motivation for solving the wrong problems precisely stems from being caught in false conjectures of which individuals are largely ignorant. While an error of the third kind entails deluding ourselves, but not imposing mistaken strategies on others, an error of the fourth kind involves actually deceiving others.

Intragroup transformations in the social environment accompany the changes that have evolved at individual level. These include mounting ethnocentrism and groupthink (Coleman, 2000; Pruitt et al., 1994; Pruitt & Olczak, 1995; Syna Desivilya, 1998, 2004). Each group displays a proclivity for justifying its own goals, while delegitimising the rival group's aims (Bar-Tal, 2011). Groupthink symptoms involve growing within-group conformity and attempt to crush any internal opposition (Coleman, 2000). At the societal level, there is mounting polarisation, reflected in individuals and groups joining one of the opposing camps.

The group-level patterns persist due to the cognitive and motivational processes, such as biased information processing and the tendency to maintain positive group identity (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998; Syna Desivilya, 1998; Turner & Pratkanis, 1997). Adverse changes at the group and social environment level foster the mutual animosity experienced by individuals on both sides of the conflict.

In addition to the multimodal and multilevel features of the MACBE model, it postulates a circular causality, that is the antagonistic motivation, negative emotions and perceptions, aggressive behaviour, and a hostile environment that nourish each other. The vicious circles created in the complex process of conflict escalation engender a growing sense of psychological escalation, namely growing pessimism regarding the potential for resolving discords (Syna Desivilya, 2004).

Pruitt and Olczak's (1995) original MACBE framework primarily concentrated on escalating interpersonal conflict, yet they maintained that it would be relevant for intergroup discords as well. Other scholars followed the assumption that the system-like model is applicable to intergroup

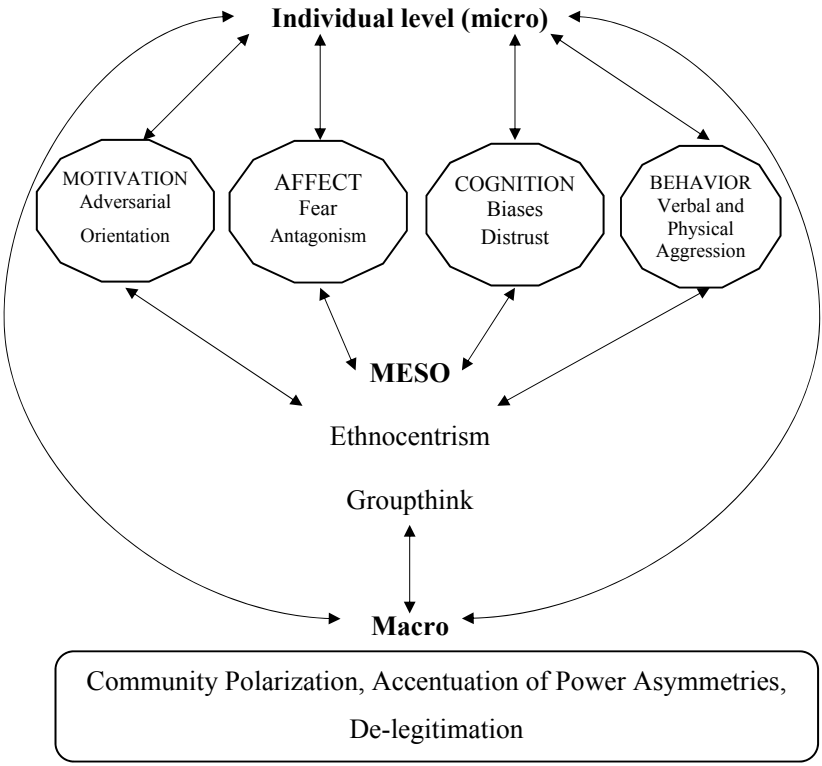

Fig. 2.1 Conflict escalation dynamics: MACBE model (*Source* Adapted from Syna Desivilya, 2004)

conflicts (Coleman, 2000; Desivilya & Gal, 2003; Desivilya & Hadar, 2001; Kriesberg, 1998; Syna Desivilya, 2004; Toscano, 1998). Our work incorporates the intergroup version of the MACBE model, schematically portrayed in Fig. 2.1, which was adapted from the one presented in Syna Desivilya (2004).

In the next section, we present research findings endorsing some components of the MACBE model with reference to intergroup conflicts.

Our first research was a case study of a conflict escalation process at a kibbutz in the north of Israel that was undergoing fundamental organisational changes (notably privatisation), which were sweeping communal settlements throughout Israel at the time. In the investigated case,

the disputing parties were two groups of kibbutz members, one supporting privatisation and the other opposing such a dramatic transformation.

The study aimed to shed light on the conflict escalation processes. Hence, we examined the emergent patterns of associations in the five domains: motivation, affect towards the other party, perceptions of the other, the actual behaviours adopted by each party, and the social environment. It also investigated the relationships between satisfaction level, investment, viability of alternatives, and the patterns of behaviour enacted by the individuals.

A stratified sample of 113 kibbutz residents (representing different age groups) participated in the study. A structured self-report questionnaire assessing all the major study variables served as the main research instrument. In addition, three individuals holding senior official positions responded to an open-ended questionnaire, addressing their perceptions regarding the conflict.

The results lent support to the systemic view of the conflict escalation process, namely a destructive sequence inflicting harmful changes in the motivational, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural spheres. The overt behaviour (notably verbal aggression) of each party seemed to suggest escalatory changes in the three other modalities. In the motivation domain, each group revealed mounting proclivity for forcing a solution on the other; at the cognitive level, members expressed growing distrust of the opponent; and in terms of affect, they displayed animosity verging on hatred towards the adversary group. Competitive motivation was the best predictor of ingroup cohesion in each of the camps. Moreover, individuals felt compelled to join one of the two camps, a phenomenon pointing to a change in the social environment domain (Desivilya & Hadar, 2001).

However, as we predicted, based on Rusbult's (1993) program of research, the actual behaviours enacted in the course of conflict escalation would not necessarily be uniformly destructive. The behavioural responses would depend on factors external to the escalation process, that is satisfaction level with kibbutz life, amount of investment in the kibbutz community, and viability of alternatives to kibbutz life. Indeed, the findings showed that positive attitudes towards the kibbutz community

tended to mitigate destructive behavioural inclinations, while enhancing constructive proclivities. The more satisfied the members were with kibbutz life, the more likely they were to enact constructive behaviours, and less likely to behave in a destructive fashion despite difficulties in the relationships between the two camps. In a similar vein, the greater their investment in the kibbutz community, the more they tended to exhibit constructive behaviour and revealed lower proclivity for enacting destructive behaviours. However, viability of alternatives to kibbutz life was not associated with any of the behavioural reactions. Conceivably, the members who opted for the most extreme form of destructive action 'exited the battlefield' (left the kibbutz community); hence, they were not included in our sample.

The model emphasises the subjective interpretation ascribed by individuals to the conflict process. Thus, the escalatory sequence evolves through a perception of divergence of interests, reflected in internal transformation in the motivational, cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and environmental arenas. When the other side shares the perception of divergence, the resultant process forms vicious circles of destructive responses. Such a process usually plants residues at both individual and group levels, which are difficult to dissolve (Pruitt et al., 1994; Pruitt & Olczak, 1995; Syna Desivilya, 1998).

In a way, the findings portrayed a gloomy picture: the kibbutz members experienced rather severe conflict escalation, which created a split into two opposing groups living within the same community in a state of high tensions and enmity. This is in fact an almost a tragic situation, since a kibbutz is not merely a place of residence, but mainly belief in a way of life and a vision. When these beliefs are threatened and disrupted, in the individuals' perception, virtually all the foundations of their life tend to collapse.

Notwithstanding the adverse transformations at individual and group levels, the study implies that these negative consequences can be mitigated, even in the face of crisis. Presumably, when the parties' relationships rest on solid foundations, namely built on foundations of positive interdependence, as was the case in kibbutz society, there is a potential for moderating the disruptive influence of conflict escalation. Indeed, as the results suggested, a sense of investment in the kibbutz community

and overall satisfaction with kibbutz life increased the individual's resistance to destructive reactions, and their capacity to respond with acts signalling willingness for cooperation and joint attempts to deal with their differences. Such tendencies mitigate the escalation process and its adverse consequences.

Our results are congruent with the findings obtained in Rusbult's (1993) program of research, conducted in both interpersonal and organisational contexts, and at least partially support previous research in the area of conflict escalation (Pruitt et al., 1994; Rubin, 1993), indicating the significance of subjective individual experiences in this destructive sequence. Furthermore, they contribute to the generalisation of the extant results, since the research was conducted in a novel context of a cooperative community, which has not previously been investigated in the conflict escalation arena.

The transforming kibbutz represents a setting that reflects one of the fundamental schisms in contemporary Israeli society, rooted in opposed economic outlooks: the socialist outlook, instituted in the State of Israel at its inception, and the more recent prevailing trend of a neoliberal capitalist economy, shared by many contemporary societies in Europe and North America (Beck, 2000; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Müller, 2016). Our subsequent research focused on the most salient division in Israeli society—the protracted Israeli–Palestinian conflict—and its legacies on the beliefs and values of Israelis. It examined the ramifications of the prolonged political tensions on Israelis' moral judgements and perceptions concerning human rights violations, pondering whether the destructive transformations threaten democracy' (Desivilya Syna & Yassour-Borochowitz, 2010).

The subset of findings presented here emerged from an international research project, directed by Prof. Kathleen Malley-Morrison from Boston University, in which more than forty countries participated. The study used the Personal and Institutional Rights to Aggression and Peace Survey (PAIRTAPS, Malley-Morrison, 2009), which was administered to samples of ordinary people in each of the participating countries. The research instrument consisted of six sections, capturing judgements concerning the extent to which governments have the right to perform acts of aggression; perceptions concerning the rights of individuals to grow

up and live in a world of peace, and the right to demonstrate against war; attitudes towards patriotism and the United States' involvement in the Iraq War; projected emotional responses that might be experienced following direct or indirect exposure to acts of governmental violence; the study participants' subjective definitions of concepts such as 'war', 'torture', 'terrorism', 'peace', and 'reconciliation'; and views on the likelihood of attaining peace and its connection with national, individual, and family security.

Four sections were quantitative, that is largely structured, and two were qualitative, requesting open-ended, verbal responses. The Israeli sample comprised 155 adult Israeli citizens, aged 19–81. Most (84%) were Jewish, 11% were Muslim, 4% were Christian, and the remaining 1% did not indicate their nationality or religion. The majority (62%) had a high school education, 11% had a bachelor's degree, 9% had a master's degree, and 2% had a doctoral degree. Eighty-three per cent were students at the time of data collection. Over 70% rated their socioeconomic status as middle class. Seventy-nine of the respondents served in the army (nearly all of them in the Israel Defence Forces).

We shall focus here on a small subset of the results, capturing the attitudes of Israeli citizens to government aggression and human rights violations, shedding light on the moral aspects of these perceptions. The findings are based on responses to 10 items from the survey: the right of the police to use violence against citizens; governments ignoring international treaties; the rights of citizens to stage protests against war and in favour of peace; the right of the government/security forces to physically or mentally torture and kill a human being in order to fight international terrorism; judgements on whether disagreement with the government and its decisions is a non-patriotic act; the importance of supporting the government in time of war; judgement on whether in all military actions around the world it is possible to identify who is right and who is wrong; perception of the respondent's country's involvement in armed conflict as being morally right.

We also content-analysed the open-ended explanations following each of these items and extracted major themes from the verbal responses to two hypothetical scenarios: another nation recklessly bombards a city in your country, and a similar action performed by your own country.

Drawing on the social psychological theories presented earlier, the main assumption underlying our study was that the system-wide transformations developed in the protracted escalation process give rise to a utilitarian ethnocentric orientation. That is, such prolonged intergroup discord fosters each party's inclination to focus on attaining benefits for its own side, while disregarding the utility and potentially harmful outcomes for the other side (Bar-Tal, 2007; Coleman, 2000, 2004; Pruitt & Olczak, 1995; Syna Desivilya, 2004).

Hence, the specific local context of protracted political conflict may hinder moral judgements as a result of precipitating the activation of the 'enemy' schema and the proclivity for internal, ingroup conformity. These combined fallacies evolving in the social environment saturated by asymmetric intergroup tensions (between Israelis and Palestinians) interfere with the development of critical consciousness (Foucault, 1994; Freire, 1997).

Indeed, the study showed that Israelis display an inclination for limiting democratic standards and values of justice and ethics to their own side and to the abstract notion of a human being. By contrast, they tend to rely on an invidious orientation towards the opponent group, particularly as confronted in the local circumstances.

The majority of the participants stated that supporting governments in time of crisis, such as war, is important. The main responses to a hypothetical scenario of another nation's aggression against one's country were hatred, rage, and a desire for revenge. Hence, the Israeli respondents displayed very little tolerance towards disloyalty and lack of support for the official authorities in times of war. Interestingly, in general, they do not view disagreement with the government as a non-patriotic act. Presumably, the Israeli participants have internalised the fundamental democratic principles, albeit applying them rather selectively in their judgements, as befitting the particular circumstances. Consequently, they tend to morally endorse the government's military actions. Apparently, Israelis evaluate the local context embracing a utilitarian ethnocentric orientation. Nevertheless, their judgements concerning the justice and ethicality of military actions worldwide reflect the capacity for rather complex information processing.

Israelis' emotional responses to government violence reveal equivocal judgements concerning democracy and human rights. They view aggression geared at seemingly innocent civilians as violating human rights, yet do not condemn similar behaviours enacted towards the opponent—their adversary social group (Palestinians). On the contrary, such aggression elicits rationalisation and justification.

Notwithstanding such adverse and ambiguous tendencies by the Israeli respondents, the findings provide some indication of deontological reasoning, or even some evidence of ethics of care, notably when referring to general declarations extracted from the local setting. Thus, more than half of the study participants condemned the government's disregard for international treaties, claiming that such accords protect human rights and prevent abuse of power by official authorities.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents were opposed to granting the government the right to physically or mentally torture or kill a human being in the fight against terror, since such acts violate the fundamental human right to life. Most respondents endorsed the right of citizens to protest against war and in favour of peace, stating that such actions represent the basic democratic right to freedom of speech.

Hence, despite ethnocentric inclinations, in general, the Israeli respondents have not abandoned democratic principles, although they display a tendency to apply them selectively in their judgements, mostly in situations calling for evaluations of rather abstract and general statements removed from the local conflictual context.

Overall, our findings suggest that the local experiences of war and prolonged political conflict affect Israelis' moral reasoning. The recurring violence is deeply sustained in their memories, compromising the complexity of judgements and consequently relying on egocentric evaluations. Although Israelis do seem to preserve their general humanistic tendencies, a substantial proportion of their views exhibit information processing from the perspective of a threatened victim (Bar-Tal, 2007; Syna Desivilya, 2004).

Protagonists experiencing protracted national conflict are inclined to accept government violence in the course of a crisis, releasing the official political authorities from the necessity of upholding human rights. In line with Van Beest and Van Dijk's (2007) theorising, such unfortunate circumstances markedly modify moral judgements, constricting the

'casualties' scope of justice. Moreover, according to social utility theory and research on coalition formation, protracted political conflicts confine the yardsticks of justice to ingroups, consequently evaluating government aggression and abuse of human rights in a self-serving manner (Loewenstein, Issacharoff, Camerer, & Babcock, 1993; Loewenstein & Moore, 2004). Thus, people experiencing intense and prolonged intergroup conflict tend to view the government's aggression towards the opponent much more leniently, justifying it as self-defence. By contrast, judgements of the enemy's violence become increasingly harsh and viewed as immoral. Such distorted ethical evaluations tend to amplify in vague situations where clear-cut information is not available.

Importantly, such biased justice perceptions largely escape the actors' awareness, in turn resulting in the belief that their views of reality are accurate and objective (Van Beest & Van Dijk, 2007). Drawing on Batson et al. (2003), conceivably, harmed moral reasoning also stems from lesser ability to view the situation from the other's perspective by people embroiled in protracted intergroup conflict (Desivilya & Rottman, 2008; Syna Desivilya, 2004). The deep-seated psychological transformations resulting from adverse experiences in continuing political discord impair the individual's capacity for observing reality from the other's (the adversary!) vantage point, precipitating the utilitarian ethnocentric moral approach.

In conclusion, this chapter presented the complex processes characterising protracted conflicts, especially their escalation process, manifesting fundamental multilevel and multimodal psychosocial changes. These transitions have profound ramifications for individuals, groups, and communities, particularly for how they negotiate and construe meaning with regard to their social environment and their actual interactions. 'Veterans' of protracted conflicts tend to use universal standards and values with great reservation, mainly towards members of their ingroup.

The sparse and ethnocentric orientation hinders collaborative relations at best, often promoting actual aggressive behaviour and feeding the vicious circles of escalation. Thus, although people living in dangerous sociopolitical environments of protracted conflict have not fully abandoned their ability to value human rights, equality, and justice, safeguarding the humanistic and democratic principles poses an arduous task under such complex circumstances of continuous political conflict.

We have described how the divided context, notably protracted conflict, informs the subjective perceptions of the protagonists actually experiencing such a complex reality. The next chapter elucidates the reflections of such a reality in attempts to manage diversity in real-life settings, such as work, educational, and community contexts. It places special emphasis on the contribution of critical theories to understanding diversity management in places and times of political tensions.

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