Chapter 2
Can There be a General Theory of Intractable Conflict?

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Dialectic Tensions in Daniel Bar-Tal's Work on Intractable Conflicts

Although the bulk of Daniel Bar-Tal's empirical studies focus on the complex socio-psychological dynamics of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the impact of his work goes way beyond this particular context. Generations of scholars from very different conflict-torn world regions have found a source of inspiration in Bar-Tal's writings. This transfer of explanatory models from one context to another is not accidental, and is in accordance with Bar-Tal's willingness to identify similarities across sites that others would see as incommensurable. His scientific ambition to develop a transferable theory of intractable conflicts becomes apparent in his theoretical writing as well as in his active involvement in many international research collaborations and dialogues.

Interestingly though, Bar-Tal's methodological thoughts and research practices lend a pre-eminent role to thick contextualisation of the studied conflict dynamics. They highlight that the general(izable) meant something else to him than psychological processes studied in isolation from their social environment. As a consequence, Bar-Tal's contribution to the social psychology of conflicts is so multifaceted that colleagues or students face the risk of overlooking part of the different scientific sensibilities that feed into his work.

In the present tribute, we will first highlight the complexity of his approach by showing some dialectic tensions that run throughout his monumental life work and discuss the heuristic import of his legacy to a science of conflict. We will then try to show how these dialectic tensions provide a creative impetus to refine our models

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regarding the interplay between universal human motives and the contingencies of particular social contexts, in the study of psychological reactions to violent conflict.

Sceptical Versus Engaged?

The first, and maybe foundational, creative tension that becomes obvious to Bar-Tal's readers concerns his normative outlook on social conflicts. There is certainly a pessimistic bottom line transpiring through many of his writings. The very notion of *Intractable Conflicts*, the title of his most recent book (Bar-Tal 2013) and a core concept of his work, draws our attention to the most dreadful and discouraging aspects of social conflicts. What makes that some destructive conflicts continue along similar lines across entire generations? How can it be that century-old persecutions still put their shadow over the collective behaviour of people in the twenty-first century, that past atrocities fuel current injustices? Such are the questions that have oriented Bar-Tal's analyses of protracted conflicts (Bar-Tal 2007; Reykowski, this volume), collective memories of past victimhood (Bar-Tal et al. 2009; Paez and Liu, this volume) and entrenched siege mentalities (Bar-Tal and Antebi 1992; Ray et al., this volume; Schori-Eyan and Klar volume 2). These analyses do not leave much room for naïve idealism or comforting illusions. They instruct us about how difficult it can be for societies that, at one point, have embraced an "ethos of conflict" to move beyond mutually reinforcing spirals of violence and authoritarianism.

However, such lucidity is no excuse for Bar-Tal to accept the intractability of conflicts as a fatality. Maybe surprisingly for someone whose studies highlight the weight of conflictual histories, Bar-Tal nourishes a pronounced interest for conflict resolution, for policies and concrete human actions that can make a difference (Bar-Tal 2009; Gayer et al. 2009; Tropp, this volume; Hameiri and Halperin, this volume). He has never used the academic ivory tower as a refuge, but rather as a place from where to state loudly and clearly his disagreement with the hawkish policies of successive governments of his country, as a place from where to draw attention to the terrible human and political consequences of the prolonged occupation of the Palestinian territories. For Daniel Bar-Tal, there is no contradiction between being a sceptical theorist and an engaged scholar.

Fundamental Versus Applied?

As an academic whose topics of investigation are directly tied to his overt concern, commitment, and criticism of the society he lives in, it seems straightforward to characterize Bar-Tal as an *applied* social psychologist: someone who uses theory not only to describe and understand the world, but to help make it a less desperate place to live in. While such a characterization is probably accurate, it is certainly not sufficient. Bar-Tal is active for peace in his own society, but he is also passionate about the circulation of ideas and transfer of theories. We had the chance to observe

directly how genuinely curious he is, through his contact with colleagues, to learn more about the circumstances of conflicts in societies distant from the one he has inhabited and studied most of his life, and then to try to draw parallels or find a general pattern, beyond particular local settings. In *Intractable conflicts*, Bar-Tal has condensed this myriad of exchanges, and the insights gained from them in an impressive attempt to propose a general theory of intractable conflicts. In the preface to the book, Bar-Tal (2013) spells out the universalist outlook underlying such theoretical integration:

> In the course of personal development, visiting places of bloody intergroup confrontations, and reading much about other conflicts, I became confident that the society of which I am part is not unlike other societies involved in intractable conflicts and that these other societies also develop similar processes and the same general socio-psychological repertoire. *(p. VIII)*

To rightly appreciate, then, the statement that Bar-Tal is an academic striving to make the world a less desperate place, it is important to keep in mind that Bar-Tal's world goes far beyond his immediate societal environment. In light of the universalistic ideal that motivates much of his scholarly commitment, transferring theoretical principles across contexts is certainly as central as applying them within one particular context. In a way, we could somehow inverse the well-known Lewinian statement for Bar-Tal's approach: "There is nothing as theoretical as a good observation".

Ideographic Versus Nomothetic?

Such a universalistic ideal certainly fits well with Bar-Tal's academic identity as a social psychologist, a scientific discipline largely inspired by the simple but far-reaching assumption that a human being is a human being. Notwithstanding the tremendous impact of social contexts on human behaviour, most social psychologists seek for commonalities in the way people make sense of and act within their respective social worlds. A similar motive to develop our understanding of how human beings psychologically cope with conflictual and threatening environments *anywhere* is clearly discernable in Bar-Tal's work, as is his ambition to identify and substantiate regularities across societies. But his approach to studying such regularities contrasts with social-psychological research practices that translate a universalistic outlook into a very literal understanding that human beings are interchangeable, or that abstract the psychological processing of conflictual environments from the study of these environments themselves (see Vollhardt and Bilali 2008). His various studies draw upon a fine-grained description of the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and of particular sequences of events within this conflict, prior to the analyses of specific psychological reactions to this context. In other words, while an articulated nomothetic objective runs through Bar-Tal's work, his research practices display an idiographic component, which is unusually strong and developed for the standards of his discipline.

Three Levels of Universalism in General Theories

One publication exemplifies particularly well the idiographic touch in Bar-Tal's work. In 2004, he published a thick description of Israeli society during a turning point of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Drawing on a variety of sources, he describes the sequence of events that led from the failure of the summer 2000 Camp David peace talks to the outbreak of the Second Intifada, a few months later. The peace talks were intended to produce a peace settlement for the Middle East and their failure was consistently portrayed by "epistemic authorities" in Israeli society as due to a lack of genuine will among the Palestinian leadership to find an agreement. In this climate, the peace process was definitely disrupted two months later, after opposition leader Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount, along with a Likud party delegation. Their visit provoked violent riots, which were countered by violent repression and eventually resulted in the first fatalities of the Second Intifada (for more on Bar-Tal's analysis of this period see Reykowski, this volume).

The holistic, eclectic, and highly contextualised methodological approach pursued in this research appears to be a textbook example of a thorough case study, conducted from the perspective of a *participant observer* (Bar-Tal 2004, p. 683), who combines a variety of sources, such as media reports, survey outcomes and first-hand observations. At the same time, the article displays an ambitious attempt to develop a bold theory of conflict escalation, spelling out a series of "general principles of social behaviour". The combination of idiographic and nomothetic elements in this publication makes it an exemplar of the dialectic tensions highlighted in the previous section. We will therefore focus on it as a privileged entry into a more thorough discussion of different levels of generalizability, that is different forms of validity of a theory across sociohistorical contexts.

Interestingly, the study is introduced in Bar-Tal (2004) by four pages of sharp criticism of social-psychological mainstream research, its broken promises, its methodological monoculturalism and its narrow empirical scope, while "outside the experimental laboratories at the universities and colleges, life has been going on: nations have been fighting their wars, interethnic conflicts have erupted and some have even been resolved …" (p. 679).

In contrast to the prevailing deductive method of inquiry, where general theoretical hypotheses are being tested in the controlled environment of the research laboratory, Bar-Tal (2004) issues a plea for using the (uncontrolled) *natural laboratory* (p. 683) of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as an opportunity for an alternative, inductive approach to theory-developing, which starts with the description of the relevant phenomena and then abstracts more general principles from this description, which should stimulate further studies and be tested against observations made in other contexts.

In order to illustrate how these principles are tied to important concepts of Bar-Tal's theory of intractable conflict, the first column specifies to which societal belief contributing to an entrenched ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal 2013, p. 175–201) the principles are relevant. In the second column of Table 2.1, three selected general

Table 2.1 Three selected general principles of social behaviour proposed by Bar-Tal (2004), and three different types of inferred universals

Related "ethos of conflict" belief	Hypothesised general principle	Existential universal	Functional universal	Accessibility universal
	"Violence, threat perception (and fear) cause" …	People from different societies are capable to categorize others into foes and friends, and to display heightened receptivity towards information congruent with the perception that those categorized as …	When these capacities are being used in a context of violence and perceived threat, across different societies they serve a similar function of facilitating and justifying actions …	Violence and perceived threat are equally likely across different societies to result in the production of …
Delegitimization of the opponent/ Security	"… homogenized delegitimization of the rival group and its leaders" (p. 686)	… "foes" are malevolent and dangerous	… directed against other groups	… actual delegitimization of out-groups through systematic use of these capacities
Victimization/ Justness of one's cause	"… self perception as a victim" (p. 690)	… "friends" have unduly suffered in the past	… to compensate past wrongs	… self-perceptions and victims through systematic use of these capacities
Patriotism/Unity/ Positive collective self-image/ Peace	"group mobilization, patriotism and unity" (p. 691)	… "friends" share an emotional bound and a motive to stand up for common aspirations	… against internal dissent or impassiveness	… group mobilization, patriotism and unity through systematic use of these capacities

principles of social behaviour are quoted from Bar-Tal (2004), generated following the aforementioned inductive approach. For example, the statement that "violence, threat perception and fear cause self-perception as a victim" (p. 690) is directly related to the development and maintenance of societal beliefs about "victimization", and indirectly to the societal beliefs about the "justness of one's cause", given that the consciousness of past sacrifices and endured injustice is an important component of beliefs about the justness of the current cause (see also Vollhardt et al., this volume; Schori-Eyal and Klar, volume 2).

The theoretical function of the "general principles" is not restricted here to summarize how Israeli Jews reacted to violence and perceived threat during the run-up to the Second Intifada—it should also help to explain how they reacted to similar events previously, to anticipate how they will react to similar events subsequently, or to extrapolate how other groups react to similar events elsewhere. This method of inductive theorising raises the question of the heuristic validity of deriving general

hypotheses from strongly contextualized observations. Bar-Tal (2004) addresses this point explicitly, in a rather strong statement about the expected universality of these observed patterns:

> It is possible to ask whether the observed patterns of behaviour are unique to Israeli Jews. The answer is that it is highly probable that groups living in a similar context would behave in a similar manner and I assume that patterns of Palestinian behaviour are similar, reflecting a kind of mirror image of the above described Israeli patterns (…) I would like to propose that a context that evokes strong experiences of threat, danger and fear cannot be greatly moderated by other factors because human beings are programmed to act in a particular way in such a context in order to adapt and cope with it. (p. 693)

Such strong assumptions about universal psychological programming might run the risk of circumventing the difficult but necessary task of drawing boundaries between psychological potentialities that are universal, because a human being is a human being, and patterns of behaviour that *cannot* be universally predicted, because they depend on contingent factors and on concrete actors in concrete situations. One of the most systematic attempts, so far, to clarify the significance of hypothesized universals in cross-cultural research has been made by Norenzayan and Heine (2005), who proposed a hierarchy, involving three successive layers: existential, functional, and accessibility. In this classification, *existential universals,* defined as psychological tendencies that are "in principle cognitively available to normal adults in all cultures" (p. 774), but that might not be used for the same purposes or with the same likelihood across different societies. These are the most easily achieved and hence empirically most frequent phenomena. In the third column of Table 2.1, we have tried to make explicit the three existential universals that are implied by the three chosen principles proposed by Bar-Tal. For example, if the principle that "violence and threat perceptions cause homogenized delegitimization of the rival group and its leaders" (Bar-Tal 2004, p. 686) is generalizable to other societal contexts, then this implies first of all that the (cognitive) capacity to categorise others into foes and friends, and to be more receptive towards information congruent with the categorisation of "foes" as malevolent and dangerous, can be found among "normal adults in all cultures".

Since the Milgram's classic study in the early 1960s, social psychologists have moved towards a perception that it does not require a particular type of human being, produced by a particular type of authoritarian socialization, to be able to behave very differently towards others seen as legitimate authorities than towards ordinary people. The growing impact of social identity theory since the late 1970s has further entrenched a consensus that every "normal adult" is able to categorize others into ingroups and outgroups, and to treat information received from or about other people differently depending on how they are categorized. Everyone can do this, and is likely to use this capacity for better or worse. In this sense, it is safe to say that the three existential universals spelled out in Table 2.1 are part of a consensus among contemporary social psychologists. Even those who argue for more contextualized social-psychological theories do so on the grounds that "our nature bequeaths us so many possibilities" (Reicher 2004, p. 927), including the possibility to make (sometimes tragically) consequential differentiations among human

beings, which is not bounded to particularly pathological individuals or particularly uncivilized societies.

In the last column of Table 2.1, we tried to extrapolate the accessibility universals that are implied if Bar-Tal's principles were generalizable in the strictest sense. Norenzayan and Heine (2005) define *accessibility universals* as psychological tendencies that are actually accessible to the same degree across cultures. A particular psychological ability hence constitutes an accessibility universal only if, when, and how it will actually be used (or not) can be predicted by a similar model across different societies. As a consequence, the threshold for identifying accessibility universals is the highest, and their empirical occurrence the lowest.

None of the three inferred formulations appear plausible in light of available studies. Systematic comparative research on so-called "rally effects" (Baker and O'Neal 2001) has shown that the rise of patriotism and national unity is by no way a ubiquitous phenomenon in times of violent crises. Lai and Reiter's (2005) quantitative historical analyses even suggest that clear-cut rally effects might represent very salient exceptions rather than the statistically most likely pattern. Furthermore, recent literature reviews, which distinguish between different ways of categorizing victims of past violence, highlight that the actual variability in responses to victimization is probably much higher than what previous accounts suggested. Notably, some people or groups prioritize narratives of inclusive victimization—that is narratives that explicitly refer to the suffering of outgroups—over narratives of exclusive victimization (Vollhardt 2012). In a related vein, our own research on collective vulnerability has shown that even in highly war-traumatized communities one can still find significant tendencies to recognize that universal human rights of the other side need to be protected and to condemn violations of these rights by ingroup members (Elcheroth 2006). Given the reality of such variability in people's actual reactions to violence, it does not appear to be a promising heuristic road to further look for psychological universals at this level. Rather, more case studies in the style of Bar-Tal (2004) are needed, which take into account the agency of particular actors in the production of particular outcomes, instead of promoting an apolitical perspective on inherently political processes.

At an intermediate level, Norenzayan and Heine (2005) locate *functional universals*. These refer to psychological tendencies that are not necessarily accessible to the same degree in different cultures; but when the psychological ability is actually used, it fulfils the same function across cultures. For example, one may want to extrapolate a functional universal from Bar-Tal's (2004) principle that "Violence, threat perception and fear lead to group mobilization, patriotism and unity" (p. 691). It might then be translated into the hypothesis that when people's capacities to categorize into friends and foes are being used in a context of violence and perceived threat, they serve a similar function of facilitating and justifying action against internal dissent or impassiveness across different societies. To our knowledge, no previous study has directly addressed this issue, or provided decisive empirical arguments to either support or dismiss the three resulting hypotheses. Therefore, if future research wants to further engage with the goal of developing a general theory of intractability, this might be the most promising level to heuristically derive trans-

ferrable hypotheses, and to test them through systematic comparative studies. These might either lend more credence to the notion of functional universals in people's reactions to violence, or clarify our understanding of contextual moderating factors. In that prospect, in the next section we would like to raise a few suggestions regarding contextual factors likely to affect the functions of psychological reactions to violent conflict.

Three Questions About the Contexts of Intractability

What Makes Conflicts Differ from one Another?

Core to the logic of intractability is a restriction of pluralism in the views of the ingroup, the outgroup(s), and the history of their interrelations, and a consequent erosion of collective capacities to conceive alternative values and courses of action (Bar-Tal and Halperin 2011). The three selected principles discussed in the previous section all point to the self-sustaining role of violence in conflicts (Elcheroth and Spini 2011): at some point, a conflict is driven by the violent means used to manage the conflict itself, and by the undermining of pluralism provoked by the violence. In this sense, the first qualitative distinction is between conflicts that are still about initial grievances and those that organize primarily around the security concerns and moral grievances created by the armed struggle itself (see also Gurr 2000). The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is a prototypical example of long-term entrenchment in self-sustaining violence: while the military occupation is portrayed as necessary by Israeli leadership to address its own security concerns, it creates the core grievances and motives to continue the struggle among Palestinians.

However, even in protracted conflicts, it is still possible to identify partially exogenous factors, that is factors that are not entirely determined by the dynamics of intractability. Let us stress two such factors: symmetry and visibility of conflicts. First, conflicts are more or less *symmetric or asymmetric*. The balance of resources is largely exogenous to the intractability of the conflict, to the extent that it depends on external alliances and geopolitical strategies, more than on the interactions between the different sides in the conflict. It is however a critical variable structuring the psychological and moral climates that result from violence. In three different comparative studies (Spini et al. 2008; Penic et al. in press; Spini et al. in preparation) we have reached a similar conclusion that *asymmetric* violence, not violence *per se*, is the key obstacle to critically question the role of the own group. In asymmetric conflicts, acceptance of human rights violations and denial of responsibilities by members from the ingroup is systematically stronger than in symmetric conflicts—interestingly for both the powerful *and* the powerless sides.

These findings now prompt us to wonder if the functions of friend–foe categorizations too differ between symmetric and asymmetric settings. In symmetric conflicts, they might above all be a means for entrepreneurs of conflict to keep the frontlines meaningful, despite of the objective communities of fate created by

similar suffering on both sides. The fraternisation across enemy trenches between soldiers who preferred to play soccer together rather than to kill each other, as they occurred during the 1914 Christmas truce in World War I as well as in the Sarajevo trenches in 1992 (Broz 2013) and their subsequent repression in order to keep the fighting going, are telling examples of friend–foe categorizations that do not maintain themselves *because* of the course of events on the battle field, but *despite* of it. However, in an asymmetric conflict such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, a strong imbalance in the capacity to harm the other side makes the emergence of any community of fate highly unlikely, because the conflict experience is qualitatively different and the respective stakes incommensurable between opposing sides. In such settings, it is more plausible that friend–foe categorisation serves a central function of existential resistance (a motivation to continue to exist as a group despite of systematic undermining of group life) among the powerless group, and a central function of moral exoneration (a motivation to continue being a moral community despite of systematic harm done to others) among the powerful group.

The second distinction made is between more or less *visible or invisible* conflicts, in the eyes of the international community, that is between conflicts that attract massive attention by policymakers abroad, foreign media, international organisations, or global solidarity movements, and those who do not. Penic et al. (in press) compared political climates after the 1990s Yugoslav wars between Serbia and Croatia. Serbia experienced air raids, economic isolation, moral stigma, and criminal prosecution of several high-ranked political and military leaders including former head of state Slobodan Milosevic. Croatia has not experienced the same level of international surveillance of its war policies. The observed patterns suggest that the unchallenged (post-)war triumphalism in Croatia managed to create what the repressive policies of the Milosevic regime failed to achieve: a dramatic restriction of pluralism and an ethos of conflict that survived over the end of fighting.

Again, it is interesting to speculate whether the functions of friend–foe categorizations similarly vary between visible and invisible conflicts. In visible conflicts, international surveillance provides a permanent external audience (Klein et al. 2007). It creates a need and a strategic opportunity for conflict actors to tie the construction of friend–foe categories to international ideals and commitments, in order to mobilize broader support. In invisible conflicts, such an external audience cannot be taken for granted, which can make things easier for powerful groups and even more difficult for powerless groups. Depending on the strategic interests, functions of friend–foe categorization in invisible conflicts might then include attracting or deflecting attention from violence (especially against noncombatants), granting or denying recognition of a collective identity, and creating or preventing the creation of a legitimate interlocutor for international actors.

Can Intractability be Contingent?

From the point of view of powerless groups, the combination of asymmetry and invisibility is likely to be a worst-case scenario. These are the facilitating

circumstances for mass killings or for military annihilation of one of the sides. In Sri Lanka, when in the post-9/11 "war-against-terror" context of new alliances, the power balance shifted in favour of the Sri Lankan state forces and against the Tamil Tiger fighters, while the international community remained largely uninterested and passive, the grounds were cleared for the decisive military offensive of the government. Here as elsewhere, the resulting context of post-war triumphalism is likely to maintain—and even exacerbate—many features of the previous ethos of conflict (Jayawickreme et al. 2010). On the opposite end, some symmetric and visible conflicts might never turn into full-fledged armed conflict, because the balance of forces opens clear prospects of military victory to neither party, and because significant international surveillance increases the cost of war for both.

The crossing of the symmetry and visibility dimensions of conflicts then mainly suggests three things. First, *intractable* conflicts in the strict sense most likely appear in the two intermediate configurations of *asymmetric but visible* conflicts or *symmetric but invisible* conflicts. While the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is a prototypical example of the first type, several armed conflicts in the African Great Lakes region, with their terrible death tolls, are tragic examples of the second type. Second, not all ways out from intractable conflicts are necessarily more desirable than the intractable conflicts themselves: when international surveillance is withdrawn from asymmetric conflicts, this might end the conflict, but potentially under the most tragic conditions. Third, intractability is not an intrinsic feature of the behaviours of the conflict parties themselves. External factors that are likely to shift with the broader international context play an important role.

That is not to say that the behaviour of the conflict actors is irrelevant to external factors. A good historical example is the active role of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress in the way apartheid has been overcome in South Africa: their capacity to draw international attention and mobilize international support against the apartheid regime not only protected the local anti-apartheid movement against the worst-case scenario of drifting into an asymmetric and invisible conflict; the combination of media attention and concrete weakening of the regime through economic and political embargos actually resulted in a situation where the cost of its repressive policies became much stronger to the regime than its expected gains. This constellation then created the necessary incentives for the political negotiations that paved the way for a regime change (Klotz 2002).

Does It Matter How the Groups are Defined?

Intractable conflicts presuppose that the definition of the conflict actors remains stable. Ironically though, conflict actors typically disagree about who is actually struggling against whom. Such disagreements always open the potential for conflicts to evolve through the redefinition of conflict actors or, more realistically,

through new recognitions of old definitions by key external actors. For example, when in the post-9/11 world order, the Sri Lankan government's definition of the Tamil Tigers as a terroristic clique won out over the Tiger's self-definition as the legitimate representative of a Tamil people threatened by genocide, the rebellion lost critical resources and the conflict evolved from symmetric to asymmetric. The opposite shift occurred in South Africa, when in the post-cold war international arena foreign recognition of the self-definition of the African National Congress as freedom fighters won out over its definition by the government as terrorists. Furthermore, internal cleavages, within sides opposed by the main conflict, always bear a potential for a redefinition of the conflict sides themselves. A key move can be when one internal faction claims that being treated or even targeted from the outside in a similar way does not automatically imply a motivation to fight together—"*this is not our war*"— as, for example, Scottish separatists claimed against British participation in the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Elcheroth and Reicher 2013).

Conclusion

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which served as the natural laboratory that inspired most of Bar-Tal's theorizing, is a specific type of a particularly asymmetric and visible conflict, with shifting patterns of internal pluralism and external legitimacy. The intractability of this conflict is likely to be closely tied to a stalemate in the balance of forces shaping international alliances and surveillance. In a broader comparative perspective, such a balance of forces can sometimes be very entrenched and sometimes very volatile; "intractability" should therefore better be conceived of as a descriptive rather than a predictive statement, about a particular conflict at a particular point in time.

While Bar-Tal's critical voice adds to pluralism within Israeli society, his lifetime contribution as an engaged scholar also invites new generations of social psychologists to critically address the problem of intractability in the conflict settings around the world. Bar-Tal's work on intractable conflicts is sceptical *and* engaged, fundamental *and* applied, ideographic *and* nomothetic. Such a broad scope is the theory's main strength, but it could also become its weakness if future applications of the theory choose to bypass, rather than to expand and clarify, the theory's potential bridging function between general psychological principles and contextualized case studies. In future developments of the theory, it will therefore be critical to clearly specify at what precise level social-psychological hypotheses about conflict dynamics are meant to be universal. The assumed level of universality has important theoretical and methodological implications; it should guide the research design as well as the interpretations of findings in future studies inspired by Bar-Tal's work.

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