Israeli and Palestinian Collective Narratives in Conflict

Israeli and Palestinian Collective Narratives in Conflict:

A Tribute to Shifra Sagy and Her Work

Edited by

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SHIFRA SAGY

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PALESTINIAN ARAB CITIZENS IN ISRAEL: ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

In this book you will see several ways that the Arab population inside Israel may be identified. "Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel," "Palestinian Moslems in Israel," "Palestinian Christians in Israel," the "Palestinian community in Israel," and more. Although not all Israeli citizens of Arab origin identify as Palestinian, the Arab community in Israel, including leading civil society organizations and political parties, increasingly use this terminology.

The use of these terms reflects both the community's self-identification as part of the Palestinian people and as citizens of the state of Israel. The Israeli government often refers to this community as "Arab Israelis" or "Israeli Arabs," "Moslem Arab Israelis," "Christian Arab Israelis," "the Arab sector," "non Jewish," "minorities," or as "non-Jews."

While these people identify as part of the wider Arab world, the Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel represent part of national (Palestinian), ethnic/racial (Arab), linguistic (Arabic), and religious (Muslim, Christian, and Druze) minorities in Israel.

Moreover, the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel are members of the Palestinian peoples who were dispersed in 1948, during the Nakba and with the establishment of the State of Israel some of the population became citizens of the state. As such, they share deep familial, national, religious, social, and cultural ties with Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, and beyond.

The inconsistencies in terminology in this book and in other research are a result of the complexity of this reality and we therefore made the decision to leave these inconsistencies and varied terms in the text.

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INTRODUCTION

ADI MANA AND ANAN SROUR

This book is dedicated to the work of Professor Shifra Sagy. Her work is based on more than three decades of empirical research, social and political activity, many intergroup encounters, and most of all, many years of dialogue and listening with the enormous hope of finding a way to connect between separate groups living in the reality of social and political conflict.

Shifra Sagy is a school psychologist, family therapist, and professor emerita in the Education Department, as well as the head of the Martin Springer Center for Conflict Studies, at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (Beer Sheva, Israel). Throughout her research, she integrates theories from social psychology and conflict resolution with techniques from family therapy and school psychology including empathic listening and accepting the "other." This integration use and blending of multiple theories, psychological practice, and empirical research has driven her investigation into how each group's members, in the context of intergroup conflict, perceive their social reality. Adopting the understanding that there is no true or false way to understand reality, Sagy demonstrates that there is no objective truth, since every group processes its grasp of the world through its own collective narratives. Therefore, incongruent, and sometimes even opposite, collective narratives can be developed regarding the same event. Shifra has participated, led, and/or organized numerous group dialogues in Israel (e.g., Israelis & Palestinians; Muslims & Christians; right-wing & left-wing Jewish Israelis; Jewish religious groups) and in other countries. The main contribution of Shifra's work to the understanding of the concept of collective narratives has been the development of an empirical model and a scale for exploring incongruent collective narratives, borne from researching in-group and out-group members discussing the same "objective" event. Sagy, Adwan, & Kaplan (2002) and later on, Sagy and her students and colleagues, discovered that perceptions of incongruent collective narratives have a major role in intergroup relations. The incongruent collective narratives were defined as

essential collective narratives that are consensually shared in one group and perceived as truth, yet challenged by the other relevant group members, in the context of intergroup conflict. These incongruent collective narratives towards main events in the life of the group were found to play a central role in positioning the identity of one's own group in relation to the other by a large number of studies in different social contexts and conflicts. Shifra's main finding was that the ability of in-group members to know the collective narrative of the other, accept it as legitimate, and to feel empathy and reduced anger towards them, is an extremely powerful, positive variable in conflict resolution. On the other hand, rejecting the other's collective narratives was found to relate to higher levels of conflict, strong negative feelings towards the other, segregation strategies, and right-wing attitudes. In addition to empirical studies, Shifra also continues to seek ways to facilitate the ability to accept the other's collective narratives. The viability of this goal has been investigated in many intergroup encounters and intervention studies.

This book sheds light on the concept of perceptions of collective narratives from the individual experience to the collective experience of the group. It also presents the power of perceptions of collective narratives - the negative power of rejecting the out-group collective narratives on intergroup relations, and its positive and healing power in conflict resolution.

This book starts with Shifra Sagy's individual narrative, and her relationship to the collective narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as she embarked on her odyssey - her journey as a Jewish female researcher living in the context of a conflict zone and the struggle to integrate theoretical and empirical knowledge with the aim of resolving conflict. Amia Leblich presents her own narrative as a Jewish female researcher who investigates collective narratives using a variety of methods and reaches a similar conclusion. Leblich studied the personal stories of different groups. Based on her rich experience, she proposes that our situation involves a process of change in conceptualizing strength, from a mere physical, military capability to a mental strength which includes risking trust, taking responsibility for past injustice, compassion toward self and the other, and the ability to forgive.

The book contains 17 theoretical and empirical chapters and is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the above-mentioned model of perceptions of collective narratives as an empirical tool for understanding intergroup relations, as well as the theoretical and empirical development

of the model. This part opens with the theoretical chapter of Prof. Daniel Bar-Tal, which proposes the term 'conflict-supporting narratives' and its importance in understanding the relationship between intractable conflicts and collective narratives. Sagy, Adwan, and Kaplan's chapter is a republished manuscript of an original that described the model and the development of the research tool. The tool was developed at the beginning of the 2000s, after the Oslo Agreement and a period of aspiration for peace in the context of the national Israeli-Palestinian intractable conflict. This scale was reproduced in the same social context in different periods and adapted to other social contexts to become a useful tool for investigating conflictual intergroup relations. The different versions of the scale, in different social contexts, and the procedure for contextual adaptation are described in the the third chapter of Part 1 by Srour, Mana, and Sagy. Next, Kalagy and Srour explore the model in the context of the relationship between ultra-Orthodox and national religious Jews in Israel. They employed a thematic analysis of collective narrative clusters based on an analysis of similarities. The last two chapters in the first section discuss connecting perceptions of collective narratives to other intergroup variables. Mana et al. connect the perception of collective narratives to sense of community coherence and identity strategy by looking at conflicts between two pairs of religious groups: Palestinian Muslims and Christians in Israel, and ultra-Orthodox and national religious Jews in Israel.

The second section focuses on understanding how collective narratives are woven into individual narratives. This includes two chapters dealing with the collective narratives of different groups, and provides two examples of personal and collective narratives. Prof. Gabriele Rosenthal describes we-images of Christians and Muslims in the West Bank based on personal narratives collected as part of a trilateral research project funded by the German Research Fund (DFG), which included German, Israeli, and Palestinian researchers. Levinas & Berkovitz write about justice and injustice in the life stories of three generations of women in a small town in the Negev. They suggest that in contrast to the limited and stereotypical image of women and mothers prevalent in conflict literature, the role of 'mother' was a driver for action - mainly in the public realm, an action with which women challenged the traditional perception of motherhood and expanded it to include also the roles of breadwinners and protectors.

The third section, entitled, 'The healing effect of perceptions of collective narratives: From socio-psychological barriers to peace-making to promoting conflict resolution' includes eight chapters that deal with varying aspects of encountering the other and the other's collective narratives. This section

opens with a theoretical contribution by Prof. Björn Krondorfer. He conceptually introduces a number of psychosocial and emotional dynamics that are operative in bridge-building efforts as either stumbling blocks or building blocks - master narratives, testimonial injustice, chosen trauma, and unsettling empathy. He has illustrated his analysis with a case study from his work with a group of Israelis, Palestinians, and Germans.

Bar-On and Adwan present a unique bottom-up project of a joint school textbook containing two narratives, the Israeli narratives and the Palestinian ones, around the main milestones in the history of the conflict. The chapter describes the process of developing the textbook with a dedicated group of Israeli and Palestinian teachers, in the context of one of the most violent periods of the conflict in 2001.

The next chapter continues with Germany as a third party in the Arab-Jewish Israeli conflict. Dr. Orit Sonia Waisman used a semiotic, sign-oriented analysis of verbal and non-verbal mismatches in the narratives of participants in an intergroup dialogue group to support her suggestion that societies involved in intractable conflicts form conflict-supporting narratives that illuminate and justify their position in intergroup conflicts.

Prof. Zehavit Gross explores in the fourth chapter how Palestinian Arab and Jewish Israeli university students in Israel, attending a course on conflict resolution, deal with their stereotypical views of and prejudices to the other, as well as their complex emotions of fear, hate, anxiety, and love during a period of tension and violence. This violence changes the power structure and the dynamics of the mutual relationships between the students who identify with different narratives and sides in the conflict, while attending a course that aims to construct bridges of hope.

In the fifth chapter, Efrat Zigenlaub and Shifra Sagy compare an intra- and an intergroup, both of which were created to increase acknowledgment of the collective narrative of the other and participants' willingness to reconcile. The comparison was conducted between two dialogue groups of students at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, in southern Israel. The intra-group included only Jewish students and the inter-group included Jewish and Arab-Bedouin students.

The next two chapters are based on a year-long intragroup dialogue process that was conducted among Israeli-Jewish undergraduate students at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, where Jewish Israeli students encounter the Palestinian collective narrative rather than meeting and

dialoguing with Palestinian students. Michael Sternberg explores the contribution of encountering narratives of the other to induce reflexive learning about the realities of conflict during intragroup dialogue. The study focuses on the contribution of this type of intragroup dialogue to changes in students' perceptions and positions regarding relations during ongoing conflict. Yael Ben David and Orly Idan focus on the gendered intragroup dynamic, suggesting that the way narratives were presented to the group induced corresponding reactions. They present how participants' responses mirrored the patriarchal social order in which men are the dominant group and gatekeepers of the common narrative. They claim that a greater acceptance and inclusivity towards women as the other in the room, led to greater acceptance towards the other outside the room. And Benheim looked at the long-term impact on Palestinian, Jordanian, and Israeli participants in a long-term, full-time residential program via retrospective interviews with alumni. This program allowed Jewish Israeli and Palestinian participants to learn about each other in a multigroup dialogue setting enhanced by a semester long face-to-face program.

Finally, at the closure of the book, we (the editors) have shared with the readers our own narratives. We focused on our experience of working with Shifra Sagy as students and colleagues. Our two different personal narratives meet the collective narratives of Jewish Israelis and Palestinians - a younger generation of researchers, born into the reality of intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Researchers who are still seeking a way to understand the incongruent collective narratives, to accept the other's collective narratives without giving up our in-group identity and the secure and coherent perception of the in-group, and to make sense of the societal reality within which we live.

PART I –

THE PERSONAL ODYSSEY OF RESEARCHERS LIVING IN THE CONTEXT OF INTRACTABLE CONFLICT

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:
CAN WE EMPATHIZE WITH THE NARRATIVE OF OUR ENEMY?
A PERSONAL ODYSSEY IN STUDYING PEACE EDUCATION

SHIFRA SAGY

Abstract

The reader is taken on a journey spanning some 30 years devoted to the author's involvement in practicing, teaching, and studying peace education. The core concept in this journey is active bystandership, which is the capacity to disengage from our ethnocentric narratives and perceptions, face the emotional challenges of acknowledging narratives that contradict our collective assumptions about the conflict, and accept the moral obligation to address our contribution to violence. The author describes her personal activity as well as her professional activity in academia - participating, initiating, teaching, and facilitating peace education projects. She describes inter- and intragroup encounters and attempts to identify the limitations and opportunities of each type. Finally, some research methods and results of recent studies in peace education, especially regarding perceptions of collective narratives, are presented and discussed.

I have called this chapter a personal odyssey, for my intention is to take the reader on the journey which I have travelled in practicing, teaching, and studying peace education over more than three decades. Let me start with my personal story, which has led me to be so involved in peace education. I was born in 1945, towards the end of World War II, in what

was then Palestine, to parents who had arrived as pioneers from the Ukraine in the 1930s with the aim of building a Jewish state: Israel. In 1945, they found themselves the only survivors after they realized that their families had been completely wiped out in the Holocaust. My childhood memories, as well as my evolving identity, are rooted in this background. The Israeli-Jewish identity became the most significant value for my parents; it was a value that could give them some feeling of comfort, a sense of belonging, and a sense of coherence in the chaotic world they lived in. These ambivalent, somewhat contradictory feelings of victimhood, but also of coping and survival, have been deeply integrated in my identity and later on, in my research and academic activity in peace education. In many ways I have assumed the role of the 'memorial candle' in my family, but also the role of the 'successful survivor.'

My country is a violent place, where people's lives are completely dictated by their ability to cope with the reality of never ending wars, terror, and violence. My way of coping with this violent reality, from the time I was a young woman until today, has been that of an active bystander. As we know from history, passivity by witnesses or bystanders has greatly contributed to the evolution of violence and harm carried out by groups. Passive bystanders have allowed this violence to occur without condemnation. There is no doubt that positive social-cultural change requires active bystandership by individuals and collectives (Staub, 2003). The shift towards active bystandership implies the capacity to disengage from our ethnocentric narratives and perceptions. It demands that we face the emotional challenges of acknowledging narratives that contradict our collective assumptions about the conflict and accept the moral obligation to address our contribution to violence (Staub, 2015).

As for myself, being an active bystander, I have never stopped raising questions about our way of conducting the conflictual situation. I have never stopped my political and social involvement with the hope of finding ways toward reconciliation.

For many years, my active bystandership was not on a professional level. I was very much involved in different political activities, those connected to left-wing parties as well as those connected to NGOs (the Association for Civil Rights; Peace Now; I was one of the initiators of the Mental Health Workers for Peace; etc.). It was only later that I began combining my activities in these areas into my academic work: conducting joint research projects with Palestinian colleagues (Sagy, Adwan, & Kaplan, 2002; Sagy, Ayalon, & Diab, 2011) or joint workshops with Arab and Jewish university

students (Sagy, Steinberg, & Fahiraladin, 2002; Sagy, 2002; Srour, Mana, & Sagy, in press). Most recently has been my involvement in a trilateral project called 'Encountering the Suffering of the "Other" (ESO)' which I will describe later (Ben David, Hameiri, Benheim, Leshem, Sarid, Steinberg, Nadler, & Sagy, 2017). This is the kind of academic work, however, that completely sweeps me away. My personal involvement is intense. Therefore, perhaps it is still hard for me to define it as "academic".

A major part of this activity has been my exciting journey into personal group encounters with Palestinians. The personal group encounters are very meaningful to me whether as a participant, a facilitator, or as an initiator. As a "product" of the Israeli educational system, I had not met any Palestinians until I was a university lecturer, when some of my students were Israeli-Palestinians. Unfortunately, my students today (some of them) also meet with Palestinians only in the context of being soldiers in the army.

Despite the differences between the activities, workshops, and encounters in which I have been involved, they all were attempts by people on both sides, to have an open encounter and to try to gain a better understanding of the difficult conflict between us. The meetings have always been fascinating and emotionally loaded but, at the same time, they have raised questions. Very often I felt these encounters to be very detached, distant from reality. Each time the question of the significance of the specific encounter beyond the meetings arises. Does it impact our conflictual reality?

What has usually arisen in these encounters is the question of the pain connected with "me being a victim" and "me being a victimizer" (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Sometimes we have avoided confronting the question of the ability of the "victimizer" to feel the victim's pain and the question – perhaps the most difficult one of all – of the victim's ability to feel the pain of the "victimizer." The question of our ability to understand and to sense one another, in our authentic identities, is much more complicated than this difficult dichotomy. Is it possible at all to do this within the framework of such intergroup encounters?

This question has arisen particularly in trilateral encounters of Germans, Palestinians, and Israelis. The most influential, for me personally, was the TRT project (To Reflect and Trust) under the facilitation of Prof. Dan Bar-On (Bar-On, 2000). The method used in the TRT was life story telling. I do not have enough space in this limited article to discuss these encounters

in detail, but I will describe one session that took place in Hamburg, 1998. We sat in the room in a circle – American Jews (sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors), Germans (sons of perpetrators), Israeli Jews, and Palestinians. A lot of pain was present in the room. A Palestinian story followed that of a Jew, a child of survivors who had immigrated to the United States, which followed that of a Jewish-Israeli daughter of survivors who had tried to set down roots in Israel, and, once again, to a Palestinian story of a mother who was prevented from being unified with her children. Before the encounters I was afraid of meeting the story of Martin Bormann, the son of the Nazi officer. Could I empathize with his life story?

Surprisingly, the most painful stories for me were those of the Palestinians in our circle. Their stories evoked feelings of shame and guilt in me. After the meeting I wrote: "Painful comments came from the Palestinian side: 'Did the Holocaust really happen?' or 'Give me a break from Holocaust stories.'" Is this an expression of an inability to absorb all of these painful stories – especially when they are told in the first person: I, my mother, my son? Do I also have permission to express my inability to take in all the pain in the room? Martin Bormann's response to these Palestinians' remarks was: "Please hear my life story…" The story told by Martin, the son of the Nazi officer, was an attempt to create a bridge between the Jews and the Palestinians, between the two expressions of pain which almost could not exist together in the same room…

> "I do not remember when it was my turn to talk. Neither do I remember what I told and what I did not tell of my life story. I do remember that I felt that it was a personal story – not a collective story, not a national representation, not a representation of my cohort. Just me, my mother, my husband, my children. But…all of the points in the personal story touch upon the collective memory. How significant is this?" (Sagy, 2000 p. 106-107)

> "One of the hard parts of my personal story was about my son who was sent as a soldier to Ktziot (an Israeli jail for Palestinian prisoners). We visited him there, as parents, bringing food and cigarettes. There was a dark look in his eyes during that period. I had a feeling that I couldn't "save" him from that terrible task. And against this – there was Sammy's story about how he was imprisoned there, in the same camp, for a number of months, probably at the same time. His son had been born a bit before that. We worked out the dates with one another and we even laughed. A sad, embarrassed laugh.

> When I finished, the first hug that I got was from Sammy. A real hug from
> a person, a personal friend. I couldn't wear any other, more collective hat
> at that moment. That is how I felt toward him. I believe that is how he also
> felt towards me. That hug still remains with me today as my strongest
> experience during the meeting in Hamburg. But I still have the question –
> can the creation of such personal relationships between individuals, solve
> some part of the conflict between our two peoples? I would like to believe
> that it can. And if so – how?" (ibid, p.107)

I could conclude then that the political argument - which was taking place,
at the same time outside the seminar, in the real world – in the end,
paralyzed the possibility of deeper insights concerning the conflict. This
argument, more than anything else, had the effect of forcing the
participants to confront their helplessness concerning their ability to
significantly change external reality on the macro level. Azar (1979) calls
this situation "structural victimization". The collective identity in these
intergroup encounters emphasized this feeling of helplessness.

I also wrote: "I didn't feel especially comfortable either with the
representational hat of the Jewish-Israeli identity. After long years of
growing up, completely identifying with my national collective (which
characterized the entire Israeli group, at the time), I went through a deep
change. Today, I have more difficult, mixed feelings. The clear sense of
collective identity slowly turned into a feeling that includes alienation
toward political – social elements of Israeli society today. It is not easy for
me to wear my national, collective hat today. However, when I come in
contact with other national groups, especially outside of Israel's borders, it
still pops up. Moreover, I am jealous of Europeans whom I meet, who
have developed a post-modernist, universalistic identity for themselves,
with no feelings of guilt, and having done so, are easily freed from
national and ethnocentric feelings. Can I also develop such a universalistic
identity? The significance of this kind of identity is that I can choose, at
any particular moment, to which group I belong (women, psychologists,
and grandmothers). Do I have such an autonomous ability within me?"
(Sagy, 2000, p. 65)

These open questions have brought me to my current joint project –
Encountering the Suffering of the "Other" - the ESO. It is a trilateral and
multidisciplinary project, but I will focus here on the Israeli part only, and
present some results from our evaluation research. What we have
attempted to create in this project was different from the previous
described encounters. For the first time this was an intragroup encounter in
which the participants were all Israeli-Jews. We developed this encounter