

Within-Group Variance as a Facilitator of Dialogue: A Jewish-Arab Israeli Encounter Group Focused on Family Stories

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Abstract

Since October 2000, there has been a great increase in tension between Arabs and Jews in Israel. Recent surveys show that approximately forty percent of Jews in Israel support the prospect of removal of Arabs by their government from the State of Israel. It is clear that the media contributes to a negative and polarized presentation of Arabs and Jews in Israel through its coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The present article shows that when a suitable context is created, this polarized negativity still exists but is not the sole model of discourse between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel. The article describes patterns of dialogue developed in a group of eight Jewish and nine Arab students who met together for a year for a workshop entitled, "Life Stories as a Means Toward Co-Existence," led by the first and third authors. Each student interviewed two family members, one from his or her parents' generation, and one from his/her grandparents' generation. The discussions in the seminar fluctuated between mutual inclusion and political confrontations. Both within- and between-group variance emerged among Jewish and Arab participants while listening to the stories. Two basic types of stories were created, those that were "good enough" to be accepted by most of the other group's participants, and those that were "bad enough" and thus rejected by the other side. The article describes the stories told in the group and analyzes the components of "good" and "bad" enough stories. It then examines the contribution of life stories and the attendant model to creation of intra-group dialogue, in marked contrast to the threatening and violent external context.

Since the outbreak of the second Intifada in September 2000, Jewish-Arab relations in Israel have become increasingly negative. The killing of thirteen Arabs by Israeli police during the first outbreak; the conclusions of the Orr Committee¹ and their lack of implementation, together with Israeli army operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, have further radicalized viewpoints among Israeli Arabs. (Kimerling 2004; Rabinowitz &

Abu-Baker 2002; Samooha 1989) At the same time, continued bombings and involvement of Arabs from within Israel in many of the bombings have radicalized much of the general Jewish populace toward Arab citizens of Israel.

A survey by the Steinmetz Center (Herman & Yaar 2004) found forty percent of Israel's Jewish population does not oppose a proposition to remove Arabs from Israel. Reactions such as, "Kill them," and "Expel them," have been received by university lecturers and teachers who meet students from schools around Israel. (Julia Chaitin, personal communication; Tzelmeir & Perry 2002) Media are partially responsible, particularly due to use of concepts that define the Palestinian "Other" negatively (e.g., terrorists, perpetrators of murder) and by one-sided presentations of sensational negative events with no alternative perspective.

From a social psychological perspective, this polarization between Jews and Arabs can be understood as a construction of collective identity. Each side defines itself as a collective in opposition to the self-definition of the other collective (one's group is totally good, the other totally evil). (Bar-On 2005) The Israeli Jewish identity was created as an homogenous monolithic in the initial years of the State, mainly by the dominant Ashkenazi group. This monolithic construction later began to disintegrate (1970s-1990s), exposing internal frictions between different groups. These groups began to demand independent self-expression and compete with the dominant hegemony in Jewish-Israeli society, captured in the mainstream Zionist view that Israel is Homeland for the Jewish people. In 2000, with the second Intifada and alongside this deconstruction of identity, a neo-monolithic process began in which attempts were made to recruit the public to unite in struggling against the external (Palestinian) enemy. (Bar-On 2005) Among the Israeli Arab public, we detect a similar construction process of monolithic collective identity, where Arabs view themselves as totally different from the Jewish majority, identifying with Palestinians, Muslims and other Arab countries.

Rationale for a Workshop

In this context we asked: Can the polarization in public discourse be overcome, even on a small scale? Are there no possibilities for a more complex dialogue between Jews and Arabs in Israel despite the polarization? Dialogue is essential to overcoming the intergenerational effects of silence and conflict.² Yet it was clear that dialogue required a safe space somewhat protected from the polarized, violent reality outside.

¹ - A National investigation committee, chaired by Supreme Court Judge Orr, was set up to investigate what caused the killings of the thirteen Israeli Arab citizens.

² In work with families of Holocaust survivors on long-term effects of the Holocaust on descendants and even grandchildren, the lead author, Bar-On, found that silence about what happened during the Holocaust supports transmission of trauma to succeeding generations. Similar psychological processes were found among descendants of Nazi perpetrators in Germany. Representatives of the two sides were brought into dialogue (Bar-On 1989; 1995a; 1995b; 1999; 2000; 2006).

The first and third authors (Bar-On and Othman) designed a workshop through the Department of Behavioral Sciences at Ben Gurion University of the Negev in which Arab and Jewish students met regularly as part of their studies during the 2003/04 school year to try to create such dialogue. Students were required to interview two members of their family, one from their parents' generation and one from their grandparents', about their personal experiences with the Israeli or Arab "Other", to transcribe the interviews and present them for discussion in the workshop. The workshop was organized on the assumption that personal family stories can create dialogue between two sides on the basis of complex personal and collective issues. This can reduce polarization and political tension between groups inside, which is heavily influenced by the charged atmosphere outside. (Bar-On & Kassem 2004) Workshops were designed around two sets of ideas:

First, small groups are organized as encounters between Jews and Arabs. Dialogue can be understood as learning how another group feels and thinks differently from one's own group. In Israel, of course, Arabs and Jews represent the "Other" with whom their group is in conflict. Small group encounters aimed at promoting dialogue among members of groups in conflict are traditionally organized along one of three models.³ (Maoz 2000a)

Human relations model: Some groups are organized on the principles of the Contact Hypothesis (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998), that is, the idea that increased contact between members of groups in conflict will lead to greater dialogue. Organizers of such groups generally work to create strong personal relationships among participants. The basic premise is that personal contacts alter participants' stereotypical attitudes and perceptions, therefore improving relations. Interventions of this type provide little discussion of historical background or current political realities of the groups. Studies have shown that this approach has short-term advantages but little long-term impact, as hostile political and/or historical reality overcomes the beneficial effects of interpersonal connections. (Maoz 2000a) Personal goodwill is difficult to sustain without addressing the asymmetries of power outside.

Confrontation model: This approach, developed at the Neveh Shalom School of Peace in response to criticism of the Contact Hypothesis, focuses on collective identity and the asymmetrical power relations⁴ between the two conflicting sides. (Maoz 2000b) The method attempts to empower the Arab minority group, thus helping the dominant Jewish group develop insights regarding their own identity ambivalence and power orientation.⁵ (Sonnenschein et al. 1998; Suleiman 1997) Studies have shown that this method encourages participants from dominant groups to engage in internal work, that is, the work of facing the internal contradictions between their wish to relate positively to Arabs and their wish to maintain the status quo of superiority of power. Members of the dominant group are forced

³ Similar groups have been established between white and blacks in the USA and South Africa, between descendants of Holocaust survivors and Nazi perpetrators, and between parties in the Balkans and Northern Ireland.

⁴ The asymmetry derives, of course, from the greater concentration of political, financial and military resources and thus power on one side, here the Jewish side.

⁵ They want to be human and just to the other side but are not willing to give up their superior power.

to cope with the difficult discussions that arise when encountering newly-empowered minority group members. The main drawback regards the true difficulty of external,—and sometimes internal—struggles in the group, and the frustration when participants return to life outside the workshop where power asymmetries remain. (Halabi 2000)

Life story-telling model: A third, integrative, model has recently been developed by Zahavi-Vereta (2000) and Bar-On (Bar-On & Kassem 2004), whereby the members of both sides present and discuss family stories in group encounters. This method combines the opportunity for personal relationships from the first model with the second model's potential for empowering the Arab minority group and presenting asymmetric realities (illustrated in family stories) within the group process. The mutual story-telling allows and encourages a more emotional dialogue, as well as an intellectual discussion of the collective components of the stories (for example, the Holocaust for the Jews and the 1948 Catastrophe for the Arabs). Being relatively new, the method has not been thoroughly assessed. Studies suggest, however, the approach's potential to stimulate personal acquaintanceship between members of opposing groups, willingness to listen to each other, and to create mutual awareness and empathy toward the less powerful side.⁶ (Litvak-Hirsch, Bar-On & Chaitin 2003; Bar-On & Kassem 2004)

Secondly, life stories are used to create dialogue between groups. Life stories provide a self-introduction. When one tells one's life story, one constructs it carefully, choosing which parts of story and identity to present. Thus, listening to stories as an intervention and research technique presents several methodological issues. For instance, should one accept the teller's narrative as told, or should one attempt to comprehend the meaning or "untold stories" beyond the narrator's words? (Bar-On 1995b; Josselson 2004) Rather than "believing" one story-telling level at the expense of the other, we suggest the researcher-listener learn to recognize both latent and manifest narratives. It is thus important to hear the story told by the narrator but also to seek the untold stories hidden within the text. This requires a willingness to understand the narrator and his social context deeply. (For example, Bar-On might tell his story as a strong Israeli-born hero of several wars, with an untold story of being a weak, inferior Holocaust survivor. Seeing both strong, heroic Israeli and weak, Holocaust survivor provides a richer picture of Bar-On.)

At the same time, central place must be given to the interviewee's narration, construction, and subjective—sometimes fragile—language, with care to not overpower personal constructions with strong, well-worded conceptual frameworks. (Bar-On 1995b) Those who have experienced traumatic events do always relay their experiences in cohesive, coherent narratives. Sometimes they do not speak of them at all. Consider for example the fragmented language of refugees who can hardly find words to describe their bad experiences

⁶ According to Bar-On, this method is actually the logical progression of intensive dialogue through story-telling within the To Reflect and Trust (TRT) group that he initiated, in which dialogue took place involving sharing of personal family stories descendants of Jewish Holocaust survivors from Israel and America, on the one side, and children of German Nazi Holocaust perpetrators, on the other. (Bar-On 1995b, 2000)

during evacuation. Jackson (2002) suggests that when an individual is confronted with traumatic life experiences, his or her coherent story may disintegrate.⁷ A number of the family members interviewed by students in the workshop presented such “broken,” non-cohesive descriptions. Indeed, several students heard their parents’ and grandparents’ life stories for the first time during the workshop interviews.

Telling a story from one side of the conflict can silence the other side’s voice, particularly in a context of asymmetric power relations. (For example, a Jewish Israeli reference to the 1948 war as a war of independence (for Israel) silences Palestinians who see it as their catastrophe. The “potential space” of one side may unintentionally overpower the other’s potential space.⁸ Listening to silent voices requires that the dominant side provide potential new space, as its hegemonic stories do not traditionally give space to silenced voices. The dominant side has to reconstruct its own stories, to understand how its own narratives prevent recognition of the legitimacy of the weaker side’s stories. Even so, participants on the dominant side may feel, at times, that the other side’s stories undermine the legitimacy of their own stories. This can lead to anger, even guilt and shame. By telling their stories to each other, participants work to overcome the adversity of their previous “paradigmatic narrative” -- hegemonic narratives that are seen as the sole truth. (Bruner 1990) Such stories, created by each collective, function as a protective wall to defend each group from the personal and collective pain of losses suffered throughout intractable conflict. Each side focuses on its own losses, unable to see the losses “the Other” has sustained.

The workshop enabled individual stories to develop—albeit momentarily—in place of such “paradigmatic narratives,” creating a bridge over the abyss between the two sides. “Good enough stories” are those that allow the construction of such a bridge, while “bad enough stories” fuel conflict between the two groups. (Maoz et al. 2004)

Objectives of the Life Story Workshop and Means to their Achievement

One aim of the life story workshop was to foster self examination of each group’s identity (in this case of Jews and Arabs) through encounter with the “Other”.⁹ The workshop helps participants acknowledge the complexity in constructing both self-identity and that of

⁷ This resembles the concept of “ruins of memory” that Langer coined to relate to Holocaust survivors’ descriptions of their traumata, when they cannot tell a coherent story, just bits and pieces of what they went through (Langer 1992), as well as Bar-On’s (1995b) conceptual formulation of the “double wall.” The double wall refers to the almost tangible psychological barrier that survivors built between their experiences during the Holocaust and the reality of their lives afterwards. Feeling acutely this barricade between themselves and their parents, many children of Holocaust survivors constructed their own emotional wall in front of that of their parents. (See Bar-On 1995b) This double wall meant that when one side attempted to open a space in his own wall, he was frequently confronted only with the closed side of the other’s wall.

⁸ A term developed by Winnicott (1988), suggesting that a mother has to create an appropriate space between her and her baby for the baby to develop emotionally and grow up.

⁹ This theory of identity focuses on an internal process of reflecting who am I in relation to others, and an external process of arguing with a relevant other (who are they; who am I in relation to them?)

the “Other”, and of the need to create internal and external dialogues between different components of identity which do not fit neatly together or have been partially silenced.¹⁰ By creating life stories of family members and then sharing these stories, workshop participants are able to clarify specific issues for themselves (for example, Where did my parents come from? What is the meaning of their name in their own culture?), or concerning their own identity (How do I perceive my Israeli-Jewish identity versus how my ancestors perceived theirs?) Similarly, participants are able to examine ways in which their own construction of identity is affected by listening to voices of the “Other” (How does the Arab “Other” perceive my grandfather’s Zionist story, and how does his/her response affect my own identity?)

The workshop process was designed to achieve these objectives in a series of stages. First, participants are acquainted with their own families’ life stories, while simultaneously reading theoretical material to learn about the construction of identity and about the conflict itself. Participants then share and discuss their stories with the group. Soon, an intellectual and emotional “challenging process” occurs, in which participants’ identities are tested, and questions emerge regarding collective perceptions of themselves as ‘victim’ or ‘aggressor.’ (Individuals who have seen themselves as members of a group which primarily suffered from war, for example, might see how they have harmed others in that war.) As part of this process, social conventions upon which participants were brought up and are now taken for granted are contested (e.g., collective narratives of the 1948 war, the Naqba¹¹). Participants feel an acute need to cope with these challenges, as confusion about identity coherence is brought, painfully, to the surface. Throughout the workshop, participants reexamine subjects put into doubt by group encounters. (Individuals certain of their Israeli identity, might, for example, on hearing Palestinian stories, question the belief that they were always the good ones in war.) This process is anything but easy and requires great effort, both within and outside the workshop. Uni-national meetings are important, to provide internal discussions in a safer social context, before returning to the bi-national setting, where participants have to react publicly to the told stories of the “Other”.

The primary goal in the final stage of the workshop process is creation of an internal dialogue between the various components of an individual’s identity—particularly those that raise doubts—alongside an external dialogue with the identity of the “Other”. This process takes place over the year of the workshop but continues to occupy participants afterwards (depending on an individual’s own pace and ability to accept what the workshop offered). At the end of the workshop, participants are required to complete in Jewish/Arab pairs an analysis of each interview and reflections on the year-long process.

It is important to note here that this process is influenced and burdened by the hostile reality between Israelis and Palestinians. Despite location of the workshop in a relatively

¹⁰ Bar-On, for example, is son of parents from Germany, an Israeli-born strong guy, a cellist, a psychology teacher, parts that do not fit neatly. He can repress ill-fitting parts, or create a dialogue among them. (Bar-On 2005)

¹¹ This term in Arabic means Catastrophe and refers to the expulsion of Palestinian refugees and the destruction by Israeli army forces of Palestinian villages and neighborhoods in 1948.

detached university setting and a conscious attempt to preserve relative symmetry within the group (equal numbers and similar academic statuses of Jews and Arabs; one facilitator from each national group), it is impossible to ignore the violent external conflict that at times erupts and takes control of the workshop, requiring great effort to return to the life stories and identity processes within the group. Also, the fact that the workshop is conducted in Hebrew, despite Arab participants' mother tongue being Arabic, puts additional constraints on the minority in an altogether uneven situation. (Maoz et al. 2004) Nevertheless, despite external difficulties, an interesting and complex dialogue has taken place both between Arab and Jewish participants and within each group as a result of these internal experiences.¹²

In the workshop discussed here, the socio-psychological processes that emerged within both Jewish and Arab groups created a rich diversity of perspectives and reactions to life stories told by participants from both sides. This in-group variance played a critical role in the dynamics and reciprocal relationships in the mixed group, and in the resulting dialogue.

Group Composition and Process

The workshop was conducted in 2003/04 at the Behavioral Sciences Department, Ben Gurion University of the Negev. Of 16 Jewish student applicants, eight were accepted based on interviews by facilitators. Nine Arab students, representing several departments (Education, Social Work and Middle East Studies) were chosen. Three of the Arab students had participated in a previous workshop course (in 2000/01) and, along with their continuing Master's degrees studies in Education and Middle East Studies, were asked to participate in this second workshop. Each was interviewed individually by the first author (group facilitator during their first workshop), and each expressed a need to continue the learning experience. Two Jewish students were studying for Master's degrees; the remaining Jewish participants being mostly third-year Bachelor's degree students in Behavioral Sciences. Most advanced degree students were Arab, thus creating a unique power dynamic within the group. Jewish students were chosen for diversity, an attempt to represent minorities in the department (men, Sephardic, political conservatives).

Workshop meetings took place once a week for two hours throughout the academic year. Students enrolled in the elective class, receiving academic credit. After a short introduction, students received the central assignment of the course, to interview a family member from their parents' generation and another from their grandparents' generation. Students were instructed in interviewing techniques and were required to audio-tape and

¹² Though the workshop was organized similarly to that used in the Jewish-German TRT group (Bar-On & Kassem 2004), a very different process took place. It is difficult to predict outcomes of such group processes. For one, the external political reality is dynamic and can change rather dramatically from one year to the next. The personal makeup of the group, in particular its "main characters," can also shape the development and trajectory of group processes. Group facilitators learn from previous groups and modify strategies and methods. Initial experiences can also create a specific pattern of a group that can vary quite significantly from that of previous workshops. (Maoz 2000b) Finally, group facilitators learn from previous groups and modify their strategies and methods.

transcribe interviews accurately. Each student was asked to present at least one interview during the bi-national workshop sessions. Students were also required to pair up with a member of the opposite group and present a theoretical article or a film dealing with the group process in a stimulating and engaging manner. The final assignment involved co-preparation of a concluding summary paper. Each partner read the four interview transcripts (two each by Jewish and Arab partners), analyzed each interview, commented on each other's analysis, and, together with the partner, prepared a summary relating theoretical material and the workshop process as a whole. Over the year, five uni-national meetings were held. Presentations of theoretical material by student pairs were integrated throughout the year. Toward the end of the year, students held three additional group meetings outside the regular school year to enable all workshop participants to present at least one family interview.

The Stories

In retrospect, there were two general patterns of difference within the Jewish stories, 1) stories with dominant "Zionist" motif contrasted with dominant motifs of "refugeeism"; and 2) Ashkenazic stories versus Sephardic stories. (See Table 1).

Ashkenazic "Zionist" stories emerged in the admiring description of heroism of family member from previous generations who immigrated to Israel or grew up in Israel. Such stories were nurtured on a Zionist ideology that talked of drying out swamps, building roads

Table 1. Typologies of Stories, Jewish and Arab

Jewish Stories	
Ashkenazi origin	Sephardic origin
Zionist traits- Israeli heroism, Zionist ideology	Refugee traits- suffering, lost, pain
Arab Stories	
Bedouins from the south of Israel	Northern Arabs
Less recruited for national struggle: Men- masculine stories, connection to land Women- tribal stories, struggles of women in the tribe	Recruited for national struggle

and settlements, fighting in wars, loving the country, belief in the justice and righteousness of that cause. Adva (JF),¹³ for example told a story about her grandmother, who was born in Israel and grew up as a pioneer in the 1930s and 1940s in an urban settlement in the north. Adva included stories of family heroism in wars and other momentous events, noting that her ancestors founded a *kibbutz* in southern Israel and developed an school system there, eventually repeating the process in another remote southern town. Similarly, Yonit's (JF) story about her father represented a typical Zionist experience, though in a later generation. Yonit told of her father's support of the *kibbutz* movement and his political activities, of his active participation in the 1967 and 1973 wars and in reserve duty including tumultuous stints in Sinai after the war. Yonit's father belonged to a left-wing *kibbutz*, and he believed strongly in the political solution of a Palestinian State aside the State of Israel. Nevertheless, most of Yonit's interview had militaristic overtones, it dealt primarily with his army experiences.

Family stories of participants with Sephardic ancestry could be characterized as late-comer immigrants from Arab Countries. Batya (JF) told a story of her grandfather, who came from Iraq in the late 1940s where he had lived in luxury as a well-known Baghdad photographer. After immigrating to Israel, he was forced to take a humiliating temporary job as a street photographer, until photography shops in the city caused him to lose that job as well. In spite of this, Batya's story was full of Zionist spirit ("He escaped the pogroms that were done to Jews in Iraq and wanted with all his heart to come to Israel.") and an obvious message regarding what she perceives as her mission in the group to emphasize her family's religious struggles and nationalistic yearnings.

In contrast, Sigal's (JF) story had no such Zionist overtones. Her grandfather came from Tunisia in the early 1950s with no particular Zionist ideology, but rather on the basis of religious belief. Despite experiencing the immigration difficulties generally endured by that generation (living in a transit camp, building a settlement in the desert, poverty conditions in a large family—thirteen girls and two boys—who were dependent on his meager teaching wage), Sigal's grandfather's story contained no suggestions of discrimination. On the contrary, her grandparents chose to establish a settlement with other expatriate Tunisians, and found ways to educate their children in an independent and positive manner.

As with any typology, some cases melded into multiple categories. For instance, we found "Zionist" stories with "refugee" elements (as in stories by Batya's grandfather and Adva's great-grandfather), as well as the opposite (as with Sigal's grandfather, who came to Israel with no prior Zionist outlook but became actively involved in building the country). There was an "Ashkenazi" story that included a great-grandfather who came to Israel from Syria in the early 1900s, with a blending of ethnic groups in the family. Still, we found four stories with dominant "Zionist" traits (one of which, Batya's, was Sephardic) and four stories with dominant "refugee" traits (of which, one, Sigal's story, was Sephardic). As discussed

¹³ All participant names in this article are aliases and personal identifying details have been deliberately omitted. For reference, (JM) refers to a Jewish male student; (JF) refers to a Jewish female student; (AM) refers to an Arab male student; and (AF) refers to an Arab female student.

later, these differences affected the dialogue with Arab students within the bi-national meetings.

Arab stories were classified into two groups: 1) Bedouins from the south (nomads or those who dwell in villages with little stable infrastructure); and 2) Arabs from the north (those who live in larger and more established cities). In addition, there were stories that stood out as being more or less “recruited to the Arab-Jewish conflict.

For example, Amal (AF), who told the first story in the workshop, was originally from the north, but had lived in a southern Bedouin settlement for most of her adult life and was married to a Bedouin. Amal told the story of her mother-in-law, a woman who has endured great difficulties over her life. Because she preferred to work in the fields with her husband rather than care for her eleven children, she gave her husband consent to marry a second wife, who was barren and so raised the other woman’s children. The husband was murdered a few years ago in to a family dispute and the two wives now live together in the Bedouin village. The children respect them equally and visit both of them weekly for a joint family meal. The existence of multiple wives does not necessarily create conflict in the family.

Bedouin stories also varied in terms of gender. For example, Hassan (AM) and Abed (AM) told very “masculine” stories, describing the Bedouin male family member as a proud warrior connected to his land and family. They referred to the Bedouin man’s tribal authority, which has to find a solution to tribal disputes under strained conditions and relations with the Jewish government that usually result in negative outcomes—land expropriation, expulsion, harassment due to living in “unrecognized” villages. Contrarily, Iman and Zenab (AF) described their grandmothers much as Amal (AF) had, noting that the Bedouin woman is traditional and holds the lowest status in the family. They told stories of their grandmothers’ struggles for survival within the tribe and family, and battles for the sake of her children and for their right to raise them when additional wives came into the family. Interestingly, political realities outside of the tribe were almost completely absent from these descriptions.

In this group, Arabs from the north of Israel tended to tell stories of greater “recruitment” to the national struggle, in comparison to the Bedouins’ stories. This may be due to the fact that three of the four “northern Arabs” [Waleed (AM), Mukhtar (AM), and Nabiha (AF)] had participated in a previous workshop course and had returned with the proclaimed purpose of leading the Arab group in their national struggle. Apparently, part of their motivation to participate in this workshop was a desire to confront the Jewish students. Thus their family stories seemed to be “recruited” to fulfill this goal.

Nabiha told a story about her mother and aunt that she had not told in the previous workshop. She talked of childhood experiences in Ramle throughout the 1948 war, when most of the family was expelled from the city and sent to Ramallah. Nabiha’s mother and aunt were able to stay in Ramle because one of her family members was ill. They found shelter at the church and eventually became part of the ghetto under the Israel Defense Forces, but thereby were not expelled. Her uncle was imprisoned and tortured in a detention facility, then released and ordered to keep silent about his experiences there. Nabiha emphasized during the workshop that the interviews for the 2000/01 workshop were the

first she had heard any of these painful family stories. In that sense, Nabiha's stories showed a similarity to the silenced and fragmented stories of Holocaust survivors. (Bar-On 1995b; Jackson 2002)

Waleed had already told his father's story in the previous workshop, the story of a refugee of the 1948 war who remained within Israel. His father was raised in Haifa but escaped/was expelled¹⁴ during the 1948 war with the rest of his family to Acke, where they still live today. (Bar-On & Kassem 2004) Waleed chose to tell his father's story again in the second workshop, but this time the positive responses led him to elaborate with unusual candor about his own childhood. He described his attempts to assimilate himself with the Jewish friends and norm by disguising the "giveaway" signs of his Arab identity in his style of dress, hair color, and taste in music. Waleed had perceived the "Other" as the "Jewish God" that controls his own identity and sense of self. (Jews control everything, psychologically and materially, and are therefore are perceived to be like a god). Only when his Jewish friends joined the Israeli army did he understand the futility of his efforts to "blend in." Throughout his academic studies at the university, he began to accept his Arab identity and learned to express this part of himself with pride. Since the first workshop, Waleed also participated in training workshops to become a group facilitator, at Neveh Shalom School of Peace.¹⁵

It is important to note that for every generalization and categorization, there is the risk of hiding a more complex reality. For example, most of the time Mukhtar (AM) made statements clearly demonstrating his "recruitment" to the national struggle, but in certain situations—and certainly more often in the current workshop than the previous—he showed his "softer," less recruited side. Inas (AF), participating in the workshop for the first time, also presented a more complex story. On the one hand, she tended to join in discussions led by her three "northern Arab" friends—all of whom had taken part in previous workshops—emphasizing "recruitment" and national struggle in her discourse with the Zionist Jews in the group. In her personal story, on the other hand, Inas made a point to discuss and describe her post-high school employment at a gardening nursery owned by a Holocaust survivor. Inas stated that she was greatly impressed by the woman and her stories of survival, so much so that she later traveled to Germany to study the Holocaust and its continuing influence on Jewish people in Israel. To sum up, even this brief examination of personal family stories reveals a rich variety of stories *within each group*.

We now explore how these differences within national groups affected dialogue between

¹⁴ The concepts of "escape" and "expulsion" appear almost interchangeably throughout Waleed's story, which conveys the lack of a clear understanding of what really happened in Haifa during this period. This confusion is exacerbated by the fact that the Israeli Defense Forces did not conduct a "directed expulsion" in Haifa, as was done in Ramle. (During the 1948 war Palestinians left their homes— out of fear, or Arab propaganda or were forcefully driven out by the Israeli army. Haifa and Ramla are examples of these two processes). Actual figures report that 60,000 Arabs lived in Haifa in 1947 to early 1948, while only 3,000 remained after it was conquered by the Israeli Hagana (unofficial army) on April 22, 1948.

¹⁵ The only Israeli Jewish-Arab village inhabited equally by members of both nationalities, halfway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, where the School of Peace leads such workshops.

Arabs and Jews in the workshop. Again, it is useful to emphasize that the workshop took place in a highly tense period, both politically and militarily, involving near-daily riots and killings of civilians on both sides, suicide bombing attacks by Palestinians and IDF-targeted killings by Israelis.

Effects of Within Group Differences on Jewish-Arab Dialogue

This workshop group proved to be unique in the unusual power relations that developed in response to Amal's (AF) story at the first meeting (see above). While members of the Jewish group admired her story and identified with it, several Arab participants (particularly Waleed and Mukhtar) were angry because she did not tell a "recruited" story ("Talk about Al-Naqba, not about your tribal stories"). In response, Amal told them quietly and decisively, "I will choose what to talk about. I have no desire to show the Jews a facade of unity that will only increase their strength and our weakness." And with this, Amal not only carved out a leadership position which she consolidated as the workshop proceeded, but also created relatively early a new norm of open controversy among Arab participants. The group facilitators interpreted this as evidence of a sense of safety within the setting to carry out essentially internal arguments in front of Jewish participants. This had not occurred often in previous workshops, especially in the early stages. (Bar-On & Kassem 2004; Maoz 2000b; Steinberg & Bar-On 2002)

In contrast, the Jewish group seemed to find it difficult to deal with internal tensions, even more so to exhibit differences of opinion in front of the Arabs. This was already clear in the first uni-national meeting, during a confrontation between Yonit, a secular Ashkenazic girl from a left-wing *kibbutz* and Batya, a religious right-wing Sephardic girl. Offending each other, they concluded essentially, "I have more in common with an Arab girl like me (religious or secular, respectively) than I have with you." Over the course of the uni-national meetings, many more statements of this nature were made, some more or less extreme, but all referring to within-group tensions and the discomfort it aroused among Jewish participants in bi-national meetings. For example, Adva (JF), Yonit (JF), and Limor (JF) all expressed discomfort with the Arab participants' attacks on their Zionist discourse, particularly because they regarded themselves as left-wing in their political orientation. They did not understand why their stories were not accepted as "good enough" by the Arab side. Sigal (JF), for her part, did not understand her Jewish friends' preoccupation with the Arab group's responses. Sigal was, in fact, involved in a more internal introspection; the workshop was her first real encounter with Arabs. She noted that she was learning from every meeting with them, and she had to re-examine the prejudices toward Arabs she had held and grown up with. Very few of these discrepancies within the Jewish group came up for discussion at the bi-national meetings.

The workshop group developed an unspoken norm regarding what constituted a "good enough" story. A "good enough" story arouses empathy and acceptance, even creating identification between the two groups, in addition to generating dialogic moments between

them. (Steinberg & Bar-On 2002) A “good enough” story from the Jewish group would most probably be a “refugee” story that did not have dominant Zionist overtones. Hence, the Ashkenazi stories told by Limor (JF), Pinni (JM), and Reuven (JM) were accepted with relative ease by the Arab group, particularly because of the absence of Israeli heroism or strong Zionist ideological motivations. These stories focused on difficulties and struggles, as well as alienation, persecution, and helplessness—both in their countries of origin and Israel—and thus more easily lent themselves to positive responses from the Arab participants.

There were, however, a few stories with dominant “Zionist” themes that generated positive responses from the Arab participants. Even so, this occurred when there were elements in the story that somehow deconstructed the Zionist overtones. For instance, Yonit’s (JF) story-telling manner had strong political left-wing overtones that seemed to prevail over the militaristic nature of her father’s story.

Arab “good enough” stories in the eyes of the Jewish participants tended to be less “recruited” for the national struggle, and thus did not lead to feelings of guilt or a need for defensive self-justification. Thus, the stories told by Amal (AF), Abed (AM), and Hassan (AM) were accepted with praise by the Jewish side. Hassan’s descriptions of the 1948 and 1967 wars did involve a militant element. He described how men organized themselves and collected weapons in defense against the Israeli army, and how in 1948 they even carried out an attack in the south. However, Hassan’s comments were made with humor (“They had only a few old rifles, most of which didn’t even work.”) that created less antagonism among Jewish participants; his description had Jewish participants laughing.

Waleed’s (AM) story about his father’s childhood, and his being forced to run from Haifa, engendered empathic responses from Jewish participants, who identified with the refugee role. Reuven (JM) asked Waleed why his family’s original house in Haifa was so important to him. Reuven shared a story about his grandmother losing her own home during the Holocaust, stating that he did not think that she wanted to return to her original home. Waleed responded that his family’s former house is more than simply four walls and a roof, but rather a symbol of the feeling of *having a home* coupled with the sense of personal security that was lost in 1948 and has yet to be recovered. This dialogue between Waleed and Reuven seemed to express the latter’s attempt to create a mutual feelings of being “in the same boat,” or having been through similar experiences.¹⁶ Regarding Waleed’s childhood perceptions of the “Jewish god,” Reuven claimed that the same “god” controlled his family when they came to Israel. Reuven asked Waleed, “Perhaps we both suffered from the same god?” Still, Waleed felt it necessary to emphasize differences he saw between their family stories rather than the commonalities.

The harshest rejection by Arab participants of a Jewish story came when Batya (JF) told her grandfather’s story, recounting his life in Iraq and later immigration to Israel. Immediately after Batya completed her presentation, Mukhtar (AM) erupted and attacked

¹⁶ See Litvak-Hirsch, Bar-On & Chaitin (2003), for a full discussion of the “house dilemma” and its implications.

her verbally, citing a lack of comprehension of the reasons for her grandfather's immigration. He angrily declared that if Batya's grandfather and his family had been doing so well in Iraq, there was no reason or justification for them to come to Israel and take over what was actually Arab property and Arab jobs. Nabiha (AF) concurred that she could understand and accept the Jewish "refugee" stories because she recognized that they had had no other choice. Though Nabiha felt her people did not have any part in what happened to the Jews in Europe, their being here is understandable on some level and must be accepted. But she could not accept a "Zionist" story, especially one that described immigration to Israel from an Arab state. She could not understand the motivations behind such a move; they seemed "to have had a good life" in Iraq.

The facilitators of the workshop felt that the attacking statements expressed by Mukhtar and Nabiha were more related to Batya's identity as the only religious right-wing participant in the Jewish group, than to the Zionist elements of her story or the fact that her family came from Iraq. Indeed, more than once during the workshop Batya had made unpleasant (for the Arabs) political statements, with no expression of guilt or regret regarding the Arab plight. Thus, it was not only Batya's "Zionist" story that infuriated Arab participants, but also her statements throughout the workshop. It is noteworthy that Batya's story generated little more empathy from Jewish participants, most likely for similar reasons. Indeed, within the workshop setting, Batya, because of her right-wing national-religious positions, was an exception even within the Jewish group.

When Yonit (JF) told her father's story the following week, she received positive feedback from most Arab participants. Facilitators wondered what led Arab participants to accept the story of Yonit's father but to reject Batya's (JF) grandfather's story. Was it that the story-teller's political orientation (left-wing pro-Palestinian state) helped the Arab group overlook the militaristic overtones of the story itself? Or perhaps it was the distinction made by Nabiha (AF) the previous week, that Ashkenazi stories centering on the Holocaust and "refugeeism" were more acceptable to Arabs. The stories of Sephardic Jews, coming from Arab countries did not have the same elements of suffering or a need to escape as those of the Holocaust. Such stories tended to appear to the Arab side as unjust, particularly when they included Zionist overtones. Arab listeners believed that Jews in Arab countries were not oppressed. They could (and should) have continued to live safely and securely in their homeland. To add insult to injury, when these Jews immigrated to Israel, they took over land, houses, and opportunities for livelihood that had previously belonged to the Arab participants' ancestors.

Therefore, the positive response that Sigal (JF) received after telling her Tunisian grandfather's story presented a particularly interesting analytic opportunity. If Arab participants had remained consistent with Nabiha's perspective, they would have rejected Sigal's story. Surprisingly, however, Sigal's story was warmly received, almost opposite the reaction to Batya's story. Perhaps the way in which Sigal told her story or her non-impassioned tone affected Arab participants. Or perhaps it was her manner in earlier encounters where she responded to Arab participants with curiosity, lack of judgment and positive interest.

Regardless, the disparity in Arab reactions was obvious. Mukhtar (AM), for example, who attacked Batya immediately after hearing her family story, responded with warmth to Sigal's quoting of her grandfather, saying, "Also in my family, it was said that women are supposed to work as teachers so that they would be able to take care of their children." Mukhtar also told Sigal, "You call it 'Sephardic tradition.' You have to understand that there is no 'Sephardic tradition.' This is an Arab tradition, and at my home also we have the same traditions that were in your home".¹⁷

Over the entire course of the workshop, there was an entwinement of family stories with political discussions and debates. The political element emerged both as a result of certain stories (particularly "recruited" or "Zionist" stories) and in response to external events that intruded and took over the workshop. During the previous workshop Al-Naqba Day had interfered with the workshop process (Bar-On & Kassem 2004). This year it was the assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.¹⁸ The class met the day after the assassination, though the Jewish group facilitator was not present. Planned for that day were two student presentations. However, the Arab group—in particular the four "Northerners"—simply would not allow the class to glide over this event and were adamant about having a group discussion.

Mukhtar (AM) declared that this act of exterminating a political leader, regardless of the fact that his political views were extreme, "crosses the line," increasing and deepening hatred between the two sides. Nabiha (AF) stated that actions such as this committed by Israel cause her to doubt the value and purpose of our attempts at mutual dialogue, giving her a feeling of despair and hopelessness. On the other hand, Niza (JF) and Adva (JF), while expressing their objection to targeted killings, noted that Sheikh Yassin played an active role in encouraging harm to innocent Jewish civilians. In response, Inas (AF) asserted that had Niza and Adva experienced what Sheikh Yassin had been through in his life—specifically being expelled as a young boy from Ashkelon in 1948—perhaps they too would take extreme political stands.

In the final analysis, however, this tumultuous and challenging encounter did not appear to harm the overall positive quality of dialogue that ultimately developed within the group. Though the following week's workshop meeting fell on Arab Earth Day, and Nabiha, Waleed, and Inas came to class wearing black ribbons, the sting of the political discussion that arose vanished quickly, and the group process continued with Nabiha telling her mother's story.

¹⁷ It may be that Arabs and Sephardic Jews may share more than is acknowledged by Ashkenazi hegemony (Shenhav 2003) Perhaps there is potential for more dialogue between these two groups.

¹⁸ Sheikh Yassin, leader of the Muslim Hamas movement, was killed by an IDF helicopter missile on March 22, 2004, as part of Israeli retaliation for a number of suicide bombing attacks in Tel Aviv.

Within-Group Variance Appears to Foster Dialogue across Groups

The “Life Stories in Service of Jewish-Arab Co-existence” workshop of 2004/05 provided important additions to our knowledge of such workshops. (Bar-On & Kassem 2004; Maoz et al. 2004) This time we identified within-group variance, as seen in the variety of stories of both the Jewish participants (“Zionist” versus “refugee”, Ashkenazic versus Sephardic) and Arab participants (Bedouins versus “northerners”, more versus less “recruited” to the national struggle, male versus female Bedouin stories).

Our preliminary analysis suggests that in recent years more Jewish Israeli participants have told their family stories from within the context and construct of “refugeeism” rather than Zionism. This would provide an example of the deconstruction of Zionist monolithic identity. This slow but evident change can be seen also in the literary sphere. The most prominent example is that of Amos Oz’s (2003) book, *A Story of Love and Darkness*. In this book, Oz, who has always been thought of as an epitome of Israeli-ness and unquestioned Zionism, tells his family story for the first time as an unmistakable “refugee” story. This deconstruction, if true, could play an important role in developing “good enough” Jewish stories in the context of the Jewish-Arab conflict and internal ethnic disparities among Jews. Indeed, if Jewish participants all presented themselves as helpless refugees, there would be much more room for symmetry and mutual acceptance of their stories. On the other hand, acceptance from the Arab side would be unlikely if the dominant side’s stories were full of idealism or aggressive and masculine tales of heroism and fighting for the country, ignoring the Arabs or putting them down.

Perhaps this represents the ultimate end of the era of the naïve monolithic construction of Zionism in non-religious Ashkenazi family stories, and the beginning of construction of a more complex collective Jewish Israeli identity. (Bar-On 2005) This, in turn, will allow the inclusion of stories from other communities of refugees, gender groups, and members of other ethnicities and nationalities into the dominant identity. Perhaps it is through stories focused on personal “refugeeism” that Jews can begin to deal with guilt about the injustices done by their ancestors to Palestinians. This guilt was given neither space nor opportunity for expression in the public discourse of early decades after the establishment of the Israeli State, and only recently has it received a modicum of legitimacy in some branches of Israel’s Jewish community.

The uniqueness of this workshop shone through in the power dynamics between the two groups. As mentioned, it was clear early on that the two sides had very obvious differences in behavior. The Arabs argued loudly and vehemently amongst themselves, with the central debates being between “recruited” participants who had attended past workshops and the Bedouins, led by Amal (AF) and Abed (AM). The Jews, on the other hand, were hesitant to expose within-group differences in front of the Arabs, and in fact found it difficult to deal with even among themselves. This disparity created a kind of temporary reversal of power relations in the workshop. (Maoz 2000a)

What occurred in this workshop was different from encounter groups at the Neveh

Shalom School of Peace, where empowerment of the minority group is a stated policy and is achieved through concealing differences within the Arab group. (Maoz 2000c; Sonnenschein et al. 1998; Suleiman 1997) In the current workshop, the unique power relations between the groups were created *because of* the presentation of differences among the Arabs, which served to empower the Arab group in relation to the Jewish group. Witnessing members of a supposed monolithic group disagree among themselves raised questions about how monolithic either group was. Several factors contributed to this unusual situation, the focus on family stories, the number of Arab Master's degree students, the participation of three students who had taken part in previous workshops, and the personal composition of participants (i.e., the leadership stance taken by Amal (AF), and later by Abed (AM) and Hassan (AM), against the "recruited" Arab participants).

In terms of workshop objectives, many participants confronted elements of their identity as a result of encounters with the "Other" and the life stories presented in the group. Jewish participants discussed the injustices done to the Palestinians, and frequently emphasized the mutual suffering in stories of both sides. Arab students conducted internal and external dialogues amongst themselves as well as with the Jewish "Others." Some participants even permitted themselves introspection, both internally and in relation to their parents, revealing some of their personal difficulties in front of the other group. We are not claiming here that all participants reached the stage where they could conduct an internal dialogue between different components of their identity, in addition to holding an external dialogue with the "Other," but we certainly witnessed the beginnings of such exchanges. This came not a result of the life stories alone but rather, a number of factors: the interpersonal encounter and familiarization process, the assignments requiring pair work, and the group facilitation. (Steinberg & Bar-On 2002)

In the final analysis, however, we believe that the mutual sharing of life stories that combine both personal and collective narratives is perhaps the most powerful contribution to the encounter group process. Such stories allow a dialogue and an acceptance of the story of the "Other" on a personal level, while at the same time facilitating internal processes of examination and challenging of specific components of collective identity. This is certainly a lengthy and complex process, and it appeared to us that for some of the participants (in particular, those who had previously attended workshops of this nature), this workshop represented only a continuation and further flourishing of a process that had been initiated previously.

As recent surveys attest to the increasing polarization of opinions on both sides of the Jewish-Arab conflict at the macro social level, our findings show a different opportunity of creating dialogue and mutual acceptance in a micro social setting. (Bar-On 2004) This is an important observation and could serve as a way of beginning to work through the conflict. It is possible under suitable conditions. One condition, learned here, involves making it possible to reveal and express variances within national groups. Another regards a shift in the balance of power between the sides, toward an increased level of symmetry. This change must emerge from within the group, as opposed to being forcefully implanted into the workshop atmosphere

by facilitators. We are aware that the processes we have presented from these experiences in the workshop represent more of a “case study” rather than an inclusive theory or conclusion, and it is important to remember that there are inherent difficulties involved in generalizing from the micro level of small groups to the macro social level. It is still crucial, however, to call attention to the fact of an alternative to political polarization, and to begin to bring this possibility into the wider public sphere for recognition and utilization.

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