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# The dialogue between the 'Self' and the 'Other': A process analysis of Palestinian–Jewish encounters in Israel

*Ifat Maoz, Shoshana Steinberg, Dan Bar-On and Mueen Fakhereldeen*

ABSTRACT

This study assumes that the collective identities of both Jews and Palestinians in Israel have long been constructed around the Jewish–Palestinian conflict, a major focus of social and historical reality in the Middle East region. Monolithic in their early stages, these constructions of identity underwent a process of deconstruction and reconstruction, primarily due to changes in the political reality (the peace process), globalization, and the surfacing of conflicts that were hidden within the monolithic construction. The deconstruction process, though painful and problematic, creates new opportunities for a dialogue that engages elements of identity, which no longer 'fit' the contenders. Such a dialogue took place in 'laboratory' form at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev from October 1996 and June 1997 between two leading participants in an ongoing workshop for Jewish and Palestinian Israeli students. Most conflict group encounters are measured by outcomes, not by process. We identified problems when the method common for these groups was used at Jewish–Palestinian encounters and this led us to try another way. This study employs a qualitative methodology to analyse the process of groups in conflict. It looks into how the process of questioning one's own self and the other's perception takes place in this context. In describing the dialogue that evolved between a Jew, Avner and a Palestinian, Nasser (both pseudonyms), the tension between the individual and collective identity levels, between the internal group process and the asymmetric social and political reality, is revealed.

We suggest that the confrontation and friendship between Avner and Nasser created a new quality of dialogue, enabling a more complex identity construction to emerge on both the Jewish and the Palestinian sides.

KEYWORDS dialogue ▪ empathy ▪ identity construction ▪ Jewish–Palestinian ▪ Self and Other

## Introduction

Although the importance of dialogue processes for groups in conflict has been acknowledged, the question of what actually happens in such dialogues has scarcely been analysed. The dialogue is assumed to bring about changes in identity constructions and in the way the groups represent each other, yet there is almost no investigation of the actual dialogue process through which these transformations take place. The present study aims to fill this gap through investigating the dialogue that developed between an Israeli Jew and an Israeli Palestinian in a series of structured encounters between them.

The study assumes that collective identities in Israel have long been constructed around the Jewish–Palestinian conflict; that self is monolithically[1] constructed in counter-distinction to several internal and external 'others' (Bar-On, 1999). The wish to maintain a clear monolithic image of one's self as the victim of the other may hinder the possibility of internalizing other roles (of being a victimizer or a bystander) (Bar-On, 1995) and thus may serve to maintain the conflict. Rarely, an open dialogue between two parties acknowledges the unresolved conflicts embedded in the identity constructions of each side.[2]

Constructions of identities that were monolithic during their formative stages are undergoing deconstruction and reconstruction. We refer specifically to a process in which internal discrepancies and contradictions that have been previously ignored surface, thereby deconstructing a monolithic self-representation.

This process can happen as a result of changes in the social and political reality, both local and global, and as a result of internal conflicts that probably existed in these collective identities from the outset. There are those who deplore this process and long for 'the good old days' (Kimmerling, 1983). Others view the deconstruction of monolithic constructions as a positive albeit painful development that will create new possibilities to work

through the unresolved internal conflicts and ambivalence that were inherent all along (Bar-On, 1999; Ram, 1995). For, however painful and problematic, the process of deconstruction and reconstruction creates new opportunities for acknowledgement and dialogue that engages 'bits and pieces' of self that may never have fit a unified whole. If the process is successful, monolithic constructions of identities are re-examined and deconstructed, both internally and externally (Holquist, 1990; Priel, 1999; for a related discussion of the dynamics of identity in conflict, see Northrup, 1989).

Identity constructions among Jews and Palestinians largely evolve around the conflict between the sides. In this conflict, each national group historically holds extreme monolithic constructions of the other group as the enemy, as inherently evil, and of itself as just, right and moral (Bar-Tal, 1990; Maoz, 2000c). Such constructions justify one's own right to self-determination and fulfilment of identity and security needs, while denying and delegitimizing such rights for the other side (Bar-Tal, 1990; Kelman, 1999).

In the past two decades we have witnessed a gradual deconstruction of these monolithic agendas on the part of both Israeli Jews and Palestinians. This process became more pronounced after the beginning of the Israeli–Palestinian peace negotiations in Madrid in 1990, and perhaps reached its peak in the period following the signing of the Oslo Israeli–Palestinian peace accords in September 1993.

On the Jewish Israeli side, this deconstruction involved the strengthening of left-wing, dovish peace camp voices calling for acknowledgement of Palestinian rights. On the Palestinian side, more pragmatic voices were heard that accept the right of the state of Israel to exist alongside a Palestinian state.

These new and different voices are sounded alongside the old monolithic ones, leading to a situation of multiple conflict (Bar-On, 1997; Ross, 2000), which characterizes the deconstruction process: each side simultaneously confronts internal conflict as well as conflict with the other side.

Dialogue encounters between Jews and Palestinians in Israel are targeted to help each group deconstruct part of its own monolithic self-determination while helping to reconstruct the personal and collective worlds of the two sides. The confrontation with the 'other' can cause the participants to clarify issues that are related to their identity constructions preceding the encounter. Still, there are elements that they become aware of only as a result of the encounter itself.

The dialogue that can develop between the two sides in such encounters can be expected to lead to a more complex construction of one's own side and of the other side. The quality of such dialogue can be assessed by its potential for letting the different voices be clearly heard – unlike the single

voice of monolithic constructions, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, also unlike the tense disharmony of competing voices that no one can listen to which characterizes the earlier phase of multiple conflict.

We assume that Israeli society, still deep in the process of deconstruction of its monolithic identity construction, is yet unable to carry out this form of dialogue. But we sought the potential for a deeper dialogue in laboratory settings (Bar-On, 1999, 2000). We focus here on an example of such a laboratory setting: an ongoing workshop at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev that brought together Israeli students, Jews and Palestinians, for three hours each week during part of the school year. In their encounters they confronted each other over issues related to the collective level of the conflict. Two facilitators from the Neve Shalom School of Peace, an Israeli Jewish woman and an Israeli Palestinian man, facilitated the meetings of this workshop.[3] We try to identify the basic dilemmas of the intergroup process through a qualitative analysis of the verbal exchanges between two prominent representatives of the two groups. We focus our analysis on the tension between their personal and collective identity constructions; between the external asymmetry and conflict and the internal, more symmetrical intergroup relations; between the hegemonic and the marginal; between espoused values and those that were manifested in practice (Maoz, 2000a).

Our interest in studying these questions was a result of observations through a one-way mirror of similar student workshops at the university from 1994 to 1998. We began with the question of whether the workshops created a genuine intergroup dialogue that evolved during the sequence of the encounters and what the specific characteristics of such a dialogue were. Would we be able to identify expressions of personal empathy between Jewish and Palestinian participants, despite collective animosity over a conflict that is entangled with differences in history, language, culture and religion? Would the process of addressing each side's negative stereotypes of the 'other' enable a more complex process of 'holding the other' within one's own identity construction (Winnicott, 1988)? Would this create a 'good-enough' solution (Ross, 2000) to the ethnic conflict? Our hopes turned out to be naive. In the initial encounters we observed a lack of deeper mutual listening and understanding. The two groups seemed to be motivated by very different agendas. The Jewish groups strove for encounters between individuals (thereby disregarding the collective of the Palestinian 'other'), believing that their own enlightenment should be inferred from their positive declarations toward the Palestinian participants. The Palestinian group wanted a collective acknowledgement of the harm done to their people by Israeli Jews and was not interested in the Jewish declarations of good will. The asymmetric power relations of the external society entered the room

through struggles over speech time-sharing, each side trying to dominate the session, struggling for moral superiority (Maoz, 2000b). At that point, we decided to open our observations to a 'grounded theory' approach (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) with which we would try to identify what was actually happening in the process rather than looking for specific outcomes. The present analysis is the result of this approach.

The use of laboratory-planned intergroup encounters investigated here can be seen as linked to a wider conceptual approach. This approach views planned group contacts between groups on the micro-level as a major device for learning about and improving relationships within societies that are in transition from conflict to peace-building on the macro-level (Kelman, 1998, 1999). The next sections briefly survey major theories, studies and findings associated with this approach.

## Earlier studies of intergroup contact in conflict settings

The most influential paradigm for planned intergroup contact was presented by Allport (1954). According to his hypothesis, contact may be effective in bringing positive attitude change if several conditions are fulfilled:

1. Equal status between the two groups within the contact situation.
2. Personal and sustained interactions between individuals from both groups.
3. Cooperative interdependence, whereby members of both groups work together to achieve common goals.
4. A consensus among relevant authorities in regard to social norms favouring equality (Amir, 1969, 1976).

In recent reformulation of the contact hypothesis, Pettigrew (1998) added a fifth condition: the encounter should carry a potential for the formation of friendship with members of the other group.

In the last decades Allport's contact hypothesis has inspired numerous studies concerned with the reduction of hostility and conflict between ethnic and national groups. (For examples of such research and reviews of it, see Amir, 1976; Cook, 1984; Jackson, 1993; Pettigrew, 1998; for a recent summary of literature in this field, see Forbes, 1997.) The many existing studies that investigate planned intergroup contact seem to concentrate on the effects or outcomes that these encounters had in terms of before–after measurements of achieved attitude change (Amir, 1976; Gaertner et al., 1997; Schwarzwald et al., 1992; Wood & Soleitner, 1996). Less attention has been devoted to examining intervening mechanisms through which change

occurred or was assumed to occur (Pettigrew, 1998) or to examining the processes and interactions that took place as part of the contact itself.

Most studies that did address intervening mechanisms in intergroup contact were investigating artificially formed groups in controlled laboratory settings. Only a small body of research addresses the dynamics of the encounter between groups in an actual ethnic and national conflict. In the Palestinian–Israeli context, studies by Bargal and his colleagues (Bar & Bargal, 1995; Bargal, 1990) looked at processes and dilemmas in planned encounters between the two sides. Participants in workshops studied by Herbert Kelman were members of Israeli Jewish and non-Israeli Palestinian elites (Kelman, 1992, 1998, 1999). Studies by Maoz (2000a, 2000b, 2002), Rouhana and Korper (1997), Sonnenschein et al. (1998), and Suleiman (1997) examined manifestations of power asymmetries and power struggles in encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. The present study continues this tradition of research into processes and interactions within the encounter and focuses on verbal dialogue between Palestinian and Jewish Israelis.

The dialogue between conflict groups is a central mechanism within the planned encounter. Thus, encounters held in areas of ongoing conflict can often be aptly defined as dialogical events (Zupnik, 2000). Theorists of constructionism such as Kenneth Gergen and his colleagues (Gergen, 1999; McNamee & Gergen, 1999) describe intergroup dialogue as a crucial transformative process. The dialogue enables the sides to deal with disagreements or conflicts between them through self-expression, listening to the other, and 'taking in' the emotions, experiences, views and values of the other. Through such dialogue, each side comes to reconstruct its own identity and that of the other differently.

The boundaries of the self are extended toward the inclusion of the other within the self. That is, the other is included within the realm of relational moral responsibility; perceptions of and relations to the other are transformed; and there is a greater understanding, acceptance, and connectedness to the other's experiences and positions (Gergen, 1999; Lannamann, 1999; McNamee & Gergen, 1999).

## Description of the case study

This study examines an academic semester of dialogue meetings between Jewish Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli students that were conducted between October 1996 and January 1997 as part of an undergraduate course on intergroup processes in the Jewish–Arab conflict. The eight Palestinian participants (four females and four males) were undergraduate and graduate

students in education, behavioural sciences, social work and business management. The nine Jewish participants (five females and four males) were undergraduate and graduate students in behavioural sciences and education. As noted, the meetings, held once a week and lasting three hours each, were facilitated by two professional group leaders (a Jewish female and a Palestinian male) from the School of Peace at Neve Shalom.

Generally, these meetings consisted of free discussions, with relatively few interventions by the facilitators. The discussions, centring on the participants' experience of the conflict, their national group identities, and their intergroup relations, looked at political issues and power issues.[4] This focus followed the Neve Shalom concept of intergroup workshops, stressing group identities and power relations (Sonnenschein et al., 1998). The studied period included 13 dialogue meetings of the group, most of which were guided by both facilitators for the entire time. Three meetings were uninational for the first hour and a half – Jews and Palestinians met separately, each group guided by its own national facilitator. Generally, every third or fourth encounter began as a uninational one.

The period in which this study was conducted can be generally characterized as part of the post-Oslo accords era, during which the Israeli forces withdrew, according to the agreements, step by step from the major cities of the West Bank and Gaza. Mr Benjamin Netanyahu, who was then the Israeli Prime Minister, tried to delay the implementation of such steps of withdrawal, because of terrorist attacks by Palestinians against Israel.[5] Therefore, only in January 1997 were major parts of Hebron (the main town in the southern West Bank) finally evacuated by the Israeli forces and handed over to the Palestinian Authority. Still, in light of the outbreak of violence between Israelis and Palestinians that began four years later, in September 2000, this 1996–7 period can be viewed in retrospect as a relatively calm period, and as optimistic in terms of perceived prospects for the implementation of the peace accords. Indeed, public opinion surveys conducted at the period of 1996–7, indicated that a significant part of the Israeli population (approximately 45%) supported the Oslo peace process, and approximately 40 percent believed that it would lead to peace between Israelis and Palestinians in the near future (Yuchtman-Yaar & Herman, 1997).

## Database and methodology

All the binational meetings, as well as all the Jewish uninational meetings, were tape-recorded and fully transcribed[6] by the second author and two research assistants. The second and third authors also sat behind a one-way mirror and observed the whole group process. The present study is based on

close analysis of seven meetings (four binational and three uninational) that took place during three phases of the dialogic process: one binational and one uninational encounter from the initial phase, one binational and one uninational encounter from the middle phase, and two binational and one uninational encounter from the final phase of the studied period.

It is very difficult to analyse a whole group process. There are too many interactions between participants and too many verbal and non-verbal activities happen simultaneously. In order to concentrate on the basic dilemmas of the intergroup process, we tried another method: a qualitative grounded theory analysis of the verbal exchanges between two prominent representatives of the Palestinian and Jewish groups, Nasser and Avner (see below). The grounded theory approach emphasizes emerging social conceptualizations by looking at the raw data with as little a priori theorizing as possible (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). This phenomenological approach tries to follow how people construct their social and inner worlds and make sense of them. In deciding to investigate two individuals in depth, we assumed a connection between the meanings that these individuals attribute to their inner and social worlds and certain social processes they are part of and try to represent in their narratives. In some cases, a single paragraph of speech may represent elements of a much wider social context. The main tool we used in our qualitative analysis was abduction. Unlike deductive or inductive methods, abduction starts by identifying themes that reappear in the narrative. These themes led us to hypothesis construction and testing. Thus, the theory was constructed while we thematically analysed and reanalysed the transcripts again and again.

## Analysing the group processes through the verbal exchange of two representatives

Jewish and Palestinian groups often attempt to negotiate ways in which to relate to each other: through struggle and dispute, acts of domination and subordination, emotional manipulation, joining or a combination of all or some of these. The negotiations through which relations are formed thus become the story of the group – the unfolding drama of constructing and deconstructing relations between Jews and Palestinians through dialogue.

In our study it transpired that a good portion of the confrontational exchange[7] was carried out by two men who emerged from the initial meetings as the central actors in the developing story of the group. One was a Palestinian graduate student in business management whom is here called Nasser. The counter figure, who confronted him from the Jewish side was an

undergraduate student in behavioural sciences, here called Avner. Nasser started the encounters by exhibiting an Israeli Jewish mannerism of *chutzpa* [audacity] that surprised the Jewish group members and made them feel uncomfortable. They were probably expecting, at least at the beginning of the intergroup process, more submissive behaviour on the part of Israeli Palestinians as members of the minority group (Ellis & Maoz, 2002). Avner was the only Jew who was not taken aback by Nasser's mannerism and confronted him right away, as if they were two Jewish Israeli students with a long-standing argument. During the course of the workshop the two befriended each other and finally decided to conduct an observation task together outside the group. But even when they became personal friends, they did not stop arguing in the group, confronting each other on collective identity issues and reflecting on that in their uninational meetings. The dialogue between them became a kind of central stage in the life of the investigated group. The response of the other participants of the group to this exchange could be described as acceptance or 'giving the floor' to the dynamics that evolved between the two. Certainly, Nasser and Avner were never marginalized by the group and in some respects they could be viewed as leading the group process.

Viewing an intergroup process through the lens of the interaction between two participants involves certain reductions of the intergroup phenomena. Obviously, each one of these reductions may cause problems: the process between the two does not always represent the entire group process and the extracts chosen from selected meetings do not necessarily represent everything that happened in the group,[8] or even between the two featured subjects. However, the advantage of this method of representation is that it enables an illustration of certain processes that evolved at the workshop without requiring a more detailed presentation of all participants or of the whole web of relationships between them.

We attempt below to describe and analyse how Nasser and Avner moved between anger, resentment, disconnecting and joining, sometimes even within the same session. In order to allow the reader to follow how the complex relationship between them unfolded, we present in the following sections extracts from sessions at the beginning, middle and end of the dialogic process studied here.

## The beginning of the dialogic process

### The first encounter

> Avner: If they (the facilitators) relate to us as two groups, discussion will take place between groups and not among individuals and this will be rather difficult for me.

It might be hard to understand Avner's words without the introduction of the Palestinian facilitator. In fact, Avner is suggesting an alternative to the facilitator's proposal. He is saying: 'Even if the facilitators suggest relating to the issue under discussion in terms of group identities, let's relate to one another on a personal basis, not as one group to another.' Though not what he is saying, the hidden message conveyed to the Palestinians by this request seems to be: 'We, members of the dominant group, don't need to relate to each other based on our national identity. If you are also willing to put yours aside, our dominance will be preserved and we will then be happy to get to know you on a personal basis.'

> Nasser: I am a Palestinian. There is a difference between national and political affiliation. I will never feel Israeli.

An analysis of these two opening sentences indicates a full-scale drama. Nasser confronts Avner authoritatively: 'I am a Palestinian.' We can identify in his statement several layers:

1. Nasser will not consent to Avner's suggestion. Nasser is defining himself through his group identity.
2. In Nasser's collective identifications, he is a Palestinian and not an Israeli Arab; Avner should have no illusions about this.[9]
3. Because Nasser differentiates between nationality and political attributes, he does not feel Israeli (more so, in authoritative future tense: 'I will never feel Israeli'). That is, even if a process develops here, it will not change his position on this matter.

> Avner: I want to know about everyday life. I'm not really interested in where your loyalty lies, to Arafat or to Peres. Why aren't you comfortable here? What's so bad about it?

For the first time we feel the different axes along which Avner and Nasser are 'dancing.' Avner is trying to be 'nice' to Nasser but in fact ignores his answer, while trying to 'tempt' Nasser by stating his own political

openness, in contrast to others in the Jewish Israeli population who might begin with a loyalty test ('I'm not really interested in where your loyalty lies, to [Palestinian Authority head] Arafat or to [Israeli statesman] Peres'). He is trying to turn the discussion back to personal, daily problems: ('Why aren't you comfortable here? What's so bad about it?') At this point, Avner is not aware of the paternalism implied by his words and by his avoidance of Nasser's position.

> Nasser: I think that when someone has something, he doesn't appreciate it. This is why it is very hard for you to understand. I have been living here for twenty years now; on Fridays and Saturdays the shops are closed, there is nowhere to go. I stay here for the holidays and there's nothing for me to do. A mosque – to go and pray – it's been turned into the Beer-Sheva Museum. I miss a lot of things here. You don't feel this because you have it all. There's folk dancing, discos, films, but not one film in Arabic, no Arab music.

In Nasser's words there is a sharp change from the general level of discussing identifications that characterizes the discussion up to this point, to the concrete level of talking about different definitions of weekend and the mosque that has been turned into a museum. Nasser's words can be interpreted in various ways. On the one hand, he ostensibly responds to Avner's suggestion and begins to describe 'what is so bad for him,' indicating that there is no place in Israel for Palestinian culture or the Muslim religion. On the other hand, he opens with a strong statement ('Someone who has something does not appreciate it, this is why it is very hard for you to understand'). Nasser thereby hints that Avner cannot really comprehend him: 'If you were in my place, perhaps you would understand what it's about.' He uses the example of the mosque in Beer-Sheva to illustrate the insult to his people and the brusque disregard for their feelings on the part of the Israeli Jews. The additional examples ('There are no films in Arabic, no Arab music') reinforce the feeling of obliteration.

> Avner: That's because you did not organize yourselves properly.

Avner disregards Nasser's claim. Perhaps this is a defence by means of attack. Avner is still talking in the plural, ignoring Nasser's personal challenge. Avner emphasizes the responsibility of the other side. He is making the argument that if the Palestinians wanted to organize and did so effectively, they would get the cultural and other benefits, just as the Jews do. This is

characteristic of the self-serving attributional bias of the majority group; it attributes the minorities' disadvantaged situation to internal causes such as lack of effort or motivation. Nonetheless, without noticing, Avner has by now responded to Nasser's request to communicate on the collective level and not on the individual level.

> Nasser: Students' Day is a day for Jewish people.
>
> Avner: You've got representatives on the students' committee, they should do something. Take your complaints to your representatives. I understand the facts, but the question is whether this situation cannot be resolved. I ask you why you feel uncomfortable. You tell me you have no leisure activities. It shows your own lack of action, that you aren't organized.

Again, one senses the different axes that don't meet, along which Nasser and Avner are moving back and forth: Nasser takes another step in brusquely stating that Students' Day is for Jews. He thereby suggests for the first time the one-sided Jewish meaning of 'Israeliness': a students' day is organized for the Jewish Israeli student population, but there are other Israelis whom the Jews disregard. Avner is defending himself, while trying to ignore the challenge presented by Nasser using the same attributional bias as before. Although Avner momentarily approached Nasser personally ('why do you feel uncomfortable?'), this seems to be a rhetorical question: he again answers the question by suggesting the explanation is inaction and lack of organization on part of the Palestinians themselves.

This ends the initial dialogue between Nasser and Avner. They have defined their frame of reference, a space where they 'experiment' with each other. At this stage, it is clear that Nasser is more adept in his responses and Avner has to defend himself. They confront each other again toward the end of this encounter when the discussion in the group turns to the establishment of a Palestinian state. Here Nasser starts a monologue in which he expresses additional aspects of the collective Palestinian narrative:

> Nasser: The Jews get very sensitive and feel hurt when they are criticized for being racist. We Palestinians live here, we are one people. . . We paid the price in order for the Jews to have a state. There are many sad stories. We are one people, but we have to live all over the world. What happened to the Jews is now happening to us because of your desire to establish a Jewish state; because of this we live in the Diaspora. We have [national] feelings, and we want to establish a state. I don't want one uncle to live in the States,

one in Jordan, another in the Territories. A Palestinian state threatens you. The name of this country is Palestine. This is why I am known as a Palestinian.

In contrast with Nasser's earlier laconic expressions, this presentation of the Palestinian narrative is much more explicit, dramatic, emotional and openly accusatory, claiming that the Palestinians pay the price for the Jews to have their own state.

Avner: Tell me, do you want Haifa and Tel Aviv?
Nasser: (laughing) I do, but I can't have them.

Avner has apparently felt a threatening tone in Nasser's earlier sentences and he reacts accordingly. For the first time Avner asks a direct question, but he is nonetheless responding in fear: 'Is it true that you want Haifa and Tel Aviv as a part of your Palestinian state?'. This response to Nasser's last words helps Avner ignore Nasser's entire Palestinian narrative. Nasser, who may be enjoying the immediate emotional effect he has elicited in Avner, answers laughingly, as if, by his laughter, he wants to re-awaken the previous effect of his own potential strength, of Avner's fear.

Avner: I would like you to answer a question. I more or less know what is happening with my people. My ideas are based on the Israeli consensus, or whatever you want to call it, but I don't know about you, this is truly an innocent question: At what point in history, as you see it, does your definition of a Palestinian people begin?

Avner changes the subject, trying to engage Nasser from an unexpected angle. He seems to imply that the Palestinians, unlike the Jews, do not have a national history that is deeply rooted in the past. This topical change represents an interesting turnabout in his argumentation. Avner's new fear that the Palestinians are too well organized and their intentions toward the Jews are not sufficiently clear has replaced his earlier claim that the Arab students are not sufficiently organized. Interestingly, Nasser has now adopted Avner's assumption of symmetry in power, whereas Avner completes the 'dance' by accepting Nasser's definition of collective identity. He has stopped relating to the Palestinian side in the plural (as he did in relation to Students' Day) and begins to speak directly to Nasser. Yet Avner is also ambiguous: Is he trying to understand the extent of the Palestinians territorial intentions (an expression of his previous fear), or does he try to regain his initial superiority through the presentation of his 'innocent' question?[10]

Nasser: I don't know anything about history.
Avner: I'm just asking, I'm trying to understand . . .

Nasser does not respond, perhaps because he feels he has not enough time left to go in to the issue or perhaps because he neither knows the facts nor wants to continue in that direction. It might be that the very presentation of the Palestinian narrative was more important for him than going into the complex maze of 'who was here first.'

The second conflict between the two ends in a stalemate, as if Nasser and Avner have learned to appreciate each other's strength. Toward the end of the encounter, Avner tries to divert the discussion between them. Perhaps he does it out of a last-minute desire to restore a personal, rather than a group context to the discussion.

> Avner: I define myself according to my political views and according to my perceptions . . . I don't think we are so far apart, you and I. I hope I am right, but you understood the things I said very differently, and you related to them in a very hostile manner. I don't know where it's coming from, but it definitely has to do with the atmosphere, which isn't pleasant.

Avner uses here a well-known strategy of the dominant group in asymmetric group processes. He brings up his own vulnerability together with an attempt to create feelings of guilt in the other. Had Nasser accepted the complaint and asked himself why Avner felt hurt, Avner would have ended the meeting with the moral advantage of having aroused guilt. But Nasser seems quite practiced and ready for such attempts to 'put him in the corner':

> Nasser: We came here to argue, to talk about things, and it isn't at all personal.
> Avner: You haven't hurt me and I'm not having a hard time, I don't have a problem with being attacked, I can take it. . . You attack me for things I didn't mean.
> Nasser: You aren't in touch with what you're saying. You don't know how things come across. How we understand you.

Nasser redefines the purpose of the workshop as he sees it, re-emphasizing the importance of its confrontational nature that concerns group identities and not personal relations. However, Nasser is also saying that he did not intend to hurt Avner, that he has nothing personal against him, perhaps implying that Avner is also important to him.

## The middle of the process

### The fifth encounter

This encounter took place following a visit by the Palestinian group to Bir Zeit University in the Palestinian Autonomy. The students arrived excited after the visit and particularly noted the favourable conditions that they lacked at Ben-Gurion University, such as Arab music and lectures held in Arabic. Members of the Jewish group asked if the Palestinian participants would therefore go there to do their graduate studies. Following is the discussion of this issue that developed between Nasser and Avner.

Nasser: I would like to clarify this point. I would study there if they had an MA in my subject. Someone who hasn't been there can't understand it . . . the problem is one of conditions.

Avner: All your considerations are practical. The question is whether you decide not to study at a university where you feel at home for these practical reasons. If so, why not do the same thing when the Palestinian State is established? Why go on living here? It's impossible for you to feel at home here. You're saying something that sounds very odd. You're saying, in fact, that when the Palestinian State is established, you won't go and live there.

A few Arab participants answer simultaneously: Why should we go? Our land is here!

This time, Nasser shows an ambivalent attitude: on the one hand he identifies with Bir Zeit University (and, through this, perhaps with Palestinian national identity since the university is seen as a national symbol) and on the other hand he presents practical considerations: the reasons why he won't study there. Avner immediately identifies Nasser's ambivalence: 'After all, it is impossible for you to feel comfortable here as a minority in a Jewish State, so why go on living here once the Palestinian State is established?'

A Jewish participant (reflecting general amazement among the Jews in the group at the Arab participants' response): Our fathers or forefathers yearned for generations and travelled thousands of kilometres to live in a Jewish state in order not to go on living and raising children as a minority among non-Jews. You are not willing to travel fifty kilometres so that your children can be raised together within the majority of your nation and religion. All because of your connection to your parents' land?

This amazement reveals the magnitude of the gap between the monolithic belief systems of the two national groups. The Jews who believe in Zionism are willing to detach themselves from a tradition of hundreds of years of Diaspora, whereas the Palestinians in Israel believe that their bond with the land is more important than the possibility of participating in the creation of their own independent state. These Palestinians may have difficulties in disclosing other, perhaps economic reasons why they do not want to move out of Israel. The Jewish students, however, fear that their stance reflects only the first stage of the well-known 'theory of stages', according to which the Palestinians are believed to be striving to gain control, step by step, of the whole of Israel, as they had intended in 1948.

> Avner: The question is how you, Nasser, a man who has no intention of moving to a Palestinian state, can say you have demands. I just want to know (turns to the Jewish group), I want to understand their point of view, how can he make demands to have an independent state he has no intention of living in. You, Nasser, have you no intention of moving there? He isn't answering me (looks round in triumph, referring to Nasser).
>
> Nasser (uneasy): I can't live there.
>
> Avner: Why not?

It is Avner's turn to 'enjoy' Nasser's distress. He turns from him to the group, taking advantage of Nasser's lack of an immediate answer. The latter tries to answer in two ways:

> Nasser: My land is here. Most Palestinian people, should a state be established, will feel they belong there. But there are those who won't leave their land to live with their own nation. Do you understand? There are two issues here. Why didn't you agree to go to Uganda[11] You said that you differentiate between the nation and the land. So why didn't you go to Uganda? After all, you wanted a Jewish state. Had you gone to another country, you would have felt comfortable [there] with each other and you would not have felt anti-Semitism. [But] another place has no meaning for you; it's the same for us.

First, Nasser tries to differentiate between the right of the majority of the Palestinian people to fulfil their national aspirations and the Israeli Palestinians who are connected to land and are thus willing to give up living in their own nation-state ('There are two separate issues here'). Second, Nasser

gives the example of Herzl's Uganda plan in order to try and show a similar need by Jews to fulfil their national aspirations in a location that has had a special meaning for them ('No other place has any meaning for you? It's the same for us').

> Avner: So, this means that the establishment of a Palestinian state, even with Jerusalem as its capital, will not resolve the Arab–Jewish conflict. . . . Now, if I have an argument with some hawkish extremist and he says to me: 'Listen, they want the Territories, they want Jerusalem and tomorrow they will want Haifa and Jaffa,' I won't be able to tell him it isn't true. . . . You are fighting for a state you have no intention of living in. In my opinion, you are wrong, because once the Palestinian state is established and you come along with complaints, the first thing you'll be told is: 'You have a state, go and live there.' You are only making your own situation worse.
>
> Nasser: I think that once there is a Palestinian state, it will be easier for us to define ourselves as Palestinians living in Israel.

This last exchange expresses the deep gap between Avner's assertion ('you are making things worse for yourselves because you are in favour of a state you don't want to live in'), which is a pragmatic claim, and Nasser's belief ('it will be easier for us to define ourselves'), which is an emotional claim.

> Avner: Speaking for myself, I identify with the struggle to establish a Palestinian state. Today I admit that the idea that the conflict will not be resolved when the Palestinian State is established came as a complete surprise to me.
>
> Nasser: So the solution is to throw us out . . .
>
> Avner: That's not true! You just want to be a minority: that's all. If I didn't have a state I would go anywhere I could to live in my own state, never mind the land. Your attitude to land makes things very difficult for you. You're divided among yourselves and you cannot resolve it.
>
> Nasser: You want to resolve our problem and you tell us to leave. Maybe things could be good for us here?

Nasser suggests that what Avner really means is that he doesn't want the Palestinians in Israel. Avner is outraged ('That's not true!') and throws the problem back to the Palestinians ('You just want to be a minority').

And then Nasser asks him softly, 'Perhaps things could be good for us here?' But it seems that Avner doesn't grasp the concrete intention of this question – to make him think about what could be done to make things better for the Palestinians – or he does not want to deal with it. (The cat is out of the bag in Avner's later remarks during the uninational discussion. There, Avner says he was frustrated by the discussion because he discovered that politically he was more hawkishly oriented than he had thought. He had thought that he knew what was 'good for us' and what 'was good for them' and during the discussion with Nasser he was surprised to discover otherwise.)

Avner: You cannot persuade me to agree with the idea that we live in conflict and want our children to live in conflict. I don't understand the logic of it. This idea of land isn't clear to me.

Nasser: You don't appreciate it because you have the land. You want to get rid of us. Do you want me to convert [to Judaism]? Soon you'll want us to celebrate your Independence Day.

Nasser repeats his initial claims – accusing the Jews of wanting to get rid of his own national group, the Palestinians, or at least of wanting to eliminate their separate national identity by making them more like Jews. In these sentences he also shows his own fear of assimilation into the majority group, the fear of losing his unique identity as a result of living as a minority in Israel. It may be that this sense of threat, which has still not received acknowledgement or empathy from his Jewish counterpart, causes him to re-emphasize his separateness and his group identity in his interaction with Avner.

Avner: I have now reached a new awareness that the conflict will continue even when a Palestinian state is established. This can be acceptable and legitimate. What I don't understand is, what status do you perceive for yourselves once there is a Palestinian state? Will you be Israeli citizens? Will you be first and foremost Palestinians or Israelis? Or will you create some sort of synthesis? What obligations will you take on yourselves? You'll really have a problem. The question is whether you are willing to take on the status of a minority.

Nasser: We have been here all the time, so how can this be a Jewish state? Any Russian Jew who has recently immigrated to Israel has more rights than I do. . . . This is racism, the Jews are a racist nation.

Several Jews (answering simultaneously): The Jews here don't see themselves as living in a state that isn't Jewish.

Nasser (smiling): We'll change you.

Nasser ends the encounter with a powerful statement ('We'll change you'), emphasizing that his identity is part of the collective identity of the Palestinians in Israel that is distinct from the Jewish Israeli identity. Avner, for his part, expresses apprehensions regarding the role of the Palestinian minority in Israel after the establishment of the Palestinian state. Still, this confrontation reflects an important turning point in the dialogue between these two. Avner expresses a willingness to contain Nasser's position within his own ('We have now reached a new awareness that the conflict will continue. . .'). This is different from the exclusion and rejection that he demonstrated earlier in response to the positions, experiences, and fears expressed by Nasser. It seems that in the confrontational dance between the two, the first step towards acknowledging and accepting the other is taken by Avner – a member of the majority group. This may reflect a general characteristic of asymmetrical majority–minority disputes; their resolution may demand that a member of the majority group make the first step of accepting the other, acknowledging his or her positions (Maoz, 2000b).

Avner reflects on the intergroup process in the Jewish uninational meeting that followed the above described binational one: What frustrates me the most at this workshop is that I came here knowing exactly what I want, and what is good for them, and with each meeting that passes I leave the workshop agreeing less with them. Not because of the ideas they present, but because of how they present it. And I am angrier with myself than I am with them. Sometimes I'm angry with myself because I don't have the courage to say: 'This and this is important to me. Right, it might sound primitive; maybe I sound like some hawkish representative. But it's important to me.' Why can't I say so? That's the feeling I have at this workshop. Now I can say that I am afraid of what will happen, of the idea that the conflict will not end with the establishment of a Palestinian state: I told my family this at home and they said, 'So what's new?'

We see that Avner expresses frustration. But it may be that the confrontational and frustrating nature of the discussions also helped to reveal in him a more complex representation of himself in relation to the other. Avner is now also able to recognize within himself a more complex construction of his collective identity that includes, alongside the dovish, peace-loving parts, hawkish sentiments that he did not acknowledge earlier.

## Closing

### The eleventh encounter

At this encounter, mixed pairs of Jewish and Arab students report about joint observations they did outside the group as an assignment for the course. They were asked to watch places where Jews and Arabs interact in the community (in the hospital, at government offices, etc.). Avner and Nasser observed a Jewish–Arab workshop at the regional teachers' college. Following is their report:

Avner: Nasser heard about a workshop similar to ours and he persuaded me to go, although at first it really didn't seem relevant . . . I understood the purpose of observation in the field and going to this workshop seemed a bit artificial. I was wrong. I discovered a lot about Nasser at this opportunity. You go on, Nasser.

Nasser: We arrived and were introduced as guests from the university. Two girls started lecturing about [each other's groups'] superstitions . . . and they tried, as I understood it, to understand each other [both Avner and Nasser laugh]. Last week they brought Arab foods. We compared it to the dynamic that takes place here; everything seemed so nice and quiet. They seemed to be like old friends. We began to ask questions, to talk to people in between activities. They told us that at the first encounter they had talked about politics. There was such an uproar: people hurt each other and they decided to drop that and do other, less painful things. They were just like little kids: they played group games. At first, Avner was convinced that it was a good method, and I said that they were acting as if they were friends. Tomorrow, something will happen, someone will get killed, and this fake friendship will collapse.

Avner: It didn't seem artificial to me at first; it seemed rather nice, in comparison to our way of confronting each other here, letting our painful feelings out. And I thought to myself: maybe what they are doing is a better way. It was also during one of my more difficult times in our workshop. I thought it might be a good way because they . . . were looking for subjects of mutual interest to both national groups. But Nasser made a point. They were trying to get closer and look for what they had in common during the first semester, and in the second semester they would confront each other with the difficult issues. This seems problematic, for when you get closer it is harder to confront each other openly. On the

other hand, there is an advantage in knowing the other nation. Coexistence is achieved within the workshop itself. But still, it's difficult for me to believe that any of these Arab and Jewish students will meet at a restaurant afterward or have coffee together.

Nasser: I felt they were trying to impose things and become artificial friends. They think they are friends and suddenly, in a second, it collapses, because they don't talk about what they are feeling deep inside. I think it is better to confront and even hurt one another than just sit around playing games. At first we didn't know how to evaluate their process, if it was good or bad. They clearly did not address the conflict. Maybe they could have been friends, but they would not have been able to be honest with each other . . . If we had begun this workshop like they did, I don't think I would have been able to talk to anyone here. I came to this workshop to learn new things, I came to voice my opinions, so that people would be able to see things the way I do.

Avner: We conduct our arguments in the workshop. I mean things don't go beyond the sessions. We socialize in the cafeteria; our arguments don't affect our relationships. So, maybe this is a higher level, but maybe this is also a game. Maybe when I talk with Nasser here, I dare tell him 'you are such and such.' When we leave here it's different; as if I hadn't said it, or as if it weren't Nasser, meeting with me, who heard what I said earlier. There's a difference between Nasser the participant in the workshop and Nasser meeting with me outside the workshop.

When I look at myself . . . there was a time when it was very difficult for me to relate to the workshop . . . As time goes by I feel differently: Nasser can say things to me, visit me in my home, talk and express all sorts of things, to some of which I can say 'OK.' That's Nasser's provocation, and he does provoke, saying things to spark awareness . . . I don't know if he does it on purpose, but that's my interpretation. I might reach a stage where I'd say: 'Enough, I don't want to hear anymore. There's also a risk involved in opening up these things.'

Nasser: If a hawkish extremist were sitting next to me, I would have no problem becoming his true friend, in spite of his views. It's not that there are two Nassers. It's that I can't reject his friendship just because he thinks that way about me.

Their joint observation assignment has brought Nasser and Avner to

reflect on the journey they have made together in the workshop. They feel that the tough things they have said to each other have created a possibility for a mutual closeness, in contrast to the process they have observed at the teachers' college, where avoiding confrontations may have prevented real closeness between the participants. Nasser maintains that when a space for confrontation at the workshop is established, the potential for closeness outside the workshop is created. Niceness in the workshop (without expressing negative feelings when these exist) might institute distance outside the workshop.

Avner is a bit more sceptical: 'Maybe this is also a game.' Is the Nasser inside the group the same Nasser who smiles at him outside the group? Avner admits that at first, since he was having a hard time in the workshop, he tended to prefer the approach he saw at the teachers' college. But he maintains that Nasser then convinced him that this process did not really facilitate friendship among the students. Avner is ready now to accept some of Nasser's statements as a 'provocation' though he still fears the risk in opening up the issues between them. Nasser, for his part, maintains that even if Avner were a hawkish extremist (perhaps he thinks that Avner isn't so far from this position), he could still be his friend. In the last part of the above exchange, it seems that Nasser and Avner's joint observation assignment outside their own group has allowed them to recognize the friendship that evolved between them during their own encounters. This friendship holds for each one of them a willingness to listen and accept a range of expressions from the other that include positions with which they did not agree at the outset. These manifestations of friendship are also reflected in the following workshop meetings.

### The thirteenth and last encounter of the first semester

Nasser: They've signed the [Hebron] agreement [between Israel and the Palestinian Authority].[12] I think Bibi [then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu] is quick (smiling). . . . Say congratulations. Maybe there'll be peace with all the Arab states, and there'll be no need for this workshop next year? (Laughs. Everyone laughs.)

Nasser (referring to another participant's question asking what each one of the participants has learned at the workshop): Hard to say. Maybe I've learned to listen at the workshop.

Avner (smiling): You've become quite human, in fact. (Everyone laughs.)

Nasser: I think we should be photographed and the picture exhibited

> in the Students' Hall, so everyone knows. These encounters are very important, but they are not enough, a small group like this out of thousands of students at the university. If the photographs are seen, even more students and lecturers will come next year. So much money is invested in the university. Why don't they invest in things like this? All of us will raise a family, have children, a lot of people can be affected by it. This group should be written about in Panim [a student bulletin]. We should do it. (He speaks seriously until this point; now he adds with a smile): We'll get money, go on trips.

The final encounter (and maybe also the signing of the Hebron agreement) created an euphoric atmosphere. Nasser says that he has learned to listen to others in the workshop. Maybe this, as well as the readiness Avner manifested in the previous meetings to listen to Nasser's opinions and to accept and internalize even extreme positions, brings Nasser to now present additional facets of his identity in the intergroup interaction – facets he had never presented before in this context. This is no longer only the Nasser who struggles and fights the majority for the rights of the collective he belongs to. He now shows his 'soft' side to the group. Alongside his aim to keep his separateness and confront the Jews, he also reveals the part of his identity that wants to join them, to do things together with them.

### Avner's epilogue

The insight that Avner has gained in the course of his encounter with the other side, is perhaps most clearly expressed in what he says during the summarizing at the uninational encounter of the Jewish group:

> From the last meetings and discussions I've had with Nasser, I can understand the source of their frustrations. I feel it's because of the way he expresses himself; he said a lot of things to make us think. They're angry. There's something about the label 'leftist' [a political dove] that goes beyond a political viewpoint. What was a shock for them and maybe for me is that we [the Jews] don't want peace, we want an absence of violence. Nasser asked me: 'Tell me the truth, if you could get up in the morning and find there were no Arabs in Israel, wouldn't you be happy?' It's true. He's disappointed in the enlightened among us. If we don't know what peace is . . . I mean, for us it's not an existential issue, for him it is. This disappointed them. Obviously one wants peace for its own sake, but they want something over and above what

> we want. It's a process. At first, I felt threatened. That is why I wanted to say things like: 'The homeland is important to me.' It was a reaction. I'm more immune now and can understand better. I used to say that I want peace and don't care about stones, and it's a pity that a soldier should lose even a finger, fighting for land. Today I know the value of land for them and I have no problem saying that the land is important to me too, and I don't want to give up Jaffa and Haifa. I'm willing to confront each and every one of them and feel I have the right to do so. At first I felt weak. These confrontations have somehow given me a balance. I can even take the shouting with humour. The one-to-one interactions with Nasser were very significant for me.

Avner describes the changes he went through his exchanges with Nasser. He realizes that although he thought of himself as a political dove, he too would be happy to wake up one morning and find the Palestinians gone. Avner has also learned what is important to him (land) and has overcome his 'weakness' about stating it openly; about dealing with the other on a one-to-one basis. His insight about the complexity of his own position in relation to the Palestinian other led Avner to rebuke a member of the Jewish group for attributing Palestinian violence to their genes. Avner recognizes this as an untenable claim that prevents examination and progress in the dialogue.

This is the change in Avner's definition of his self: he is no longer a smug leftist, offended by Nasser's accusations, but someone who is willing to acknowledge the contradictions in his own identity and, therefore, in someone else's. The disintegration of his earlier monolithic identity construction created an opportunity for him to acknowledge various irreconcilable aspects of himself and, through this awareness, create a more significant dialogue with the other opposite him, accepting him too as a multi-faceted human being.[13] Obviously the process is incomplete, but the extract above indicates what can take place in a binational encounter of this nature, especially when the dominant side examines its own contradictions in identity as it confronts the minority group.

## Discussion

The present study investigated the changes in the construction of the collective identity of self and other through the analysis of a dialogue between Avner and Nasser, two participants in a Jewish–Palestinian student encounter group. As the analysis of this dialogue is based on the authors'

interpretations, it may be important to point out that alternative interpretations could be suggested. However, it is also relevant to note that during our process of work we found that the four of us agreed on the observations and interpretations that are presented here. These were first generated by each author individually and then discussed between us.

We may also ask to what extent Nasser and Avner are representative of other Arab and Jewish students. They are in fact somewhat unusual: Nasser's family was quite mobile, unlike most of the Arab Israeli population, and Nasser studied in a Jewish Israeli school. These factors could account for his confrontational behaviour, which was not typical of the other Arab students, at least at the beginning of the encounter. Though Avner belongs to the Israeli Jewish hegemonic (Ashkenazi) group, the fact that he grew up on a kibbutz may have made him more open to changing his identity construction as a result of the encounter with Nasser.

However, though they were atypical individuals in some respects, once Avner and Nasser took leading roles in the discussions, they expressed positions and concerns that can be seen as representative of their own collectives and are also heard in other Jewish–Palestinian encounter groups (Bar & Bargal, 1995; Maoz, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Suleiman, 1997).

During the initial encounters, a lack of open dialogue characterized the exchanges between Avner and Nasser. In the first group session Avner can be seen as trying to patronize his Palestinian partner or to disregard his feelings by asking him: 'Why are you not comfortable here? What is so bad about it?' Nasser can be viewed as expressing a strong monolithic construction of his own collective identity when he states that: 'I am a Palestinian. I will never feel Israeli.' A confrontation developed between the two, with each one trying to present his collective as better and as morally superior, thereby eroding the basis of the other's justifications. (Nasser: 'We paid the price in order for the Jews to have a state.' Avner: 'Tell me, at what point in history does your definition as Palestinian begin?') At that early stage, behaving as representatives of their collectives, they both tried to appear consistent and coherent. These attempts brought each of them, in turn, to a defensive stance. Once it was Avner who sounded defensive, saying to Nasser (in the first group meeting) 'You attack me for things I did not mean.' The other time it was Nasser (in the fifth meeting, after his visit to Bir Zeit) who had to justify his position that Israeli Palestinians would not move to a Palestinian state even if and when one is established: 'Why should we go? Our land is here.'

At a certain point in the dialogue process, from toward the middle of the process and onward (after the fifth meeting), Avner and later Nasser also began to manifest some readiness to accept and to empathize with each other's perspectives; to take on the complexity of each other's identity

and needs and not only compete for control and stake claim to ultimate justice.

This was apparent in Avner's reflections in the uninational part of the seventh meeting. Referring to a question he had addressed to the Palestinians at a previous binational meeting, he said: 'When I thought about it at home, I could see that it could be interpreted by the Palestinians as a provocative question.' Nasser, on his part, expressed his readiness for empathy later, in the thirteenth binational meeting, saying: 'Maybe I have learned to listen at the workshop.'

Alongside this understanding, each of them was able to acknowledge and reveal a more complex construction of his own collective identity and include in the dialogue parts of himself that were silenced up to that point. Avner was able to acknowledge during the uninational part of the thirteenth meeting that he was not simply a peace-loving dove and that a hawk that wants to keep his land also resided inside him. Nasser, for his part, was able to reveal during the binational part of this meeting more than the confrontational side of him that wanted to emphasize his separateness from the Jews. Once he felt his own positions acknowledged and understood by the Jews, there was also the part of him that wanted to join with them and try to plan a better future.

Again, one should take into account that the group process described here is open to different interpretations. The possibility of new tensions and even breakdowns at a later stage of such an encounter cannot be ruled out. Yet scholars have emphasized the importance of empathy: the ability to understand and 'contain the other' in group processes aimed at coping with conflicts (Gergen, 1999; Kelman, 1998, 1999; Ross, 2000). Nonetheless, little is said about how this happens and what in the dialogue creates this understanding and empathy to the other (Ellis, 2000). The complex, multilayered process presented here between Avner and Nasser – members of groups in conflict who through the dialogue between them came to understand and accept their own and the other's complexity of identity – shows that the moments of dialogue emerged through paradoxical, dialectical dynamics of confrontation and closeness.

The dialogical moment in which a new understanding of the other is reached (Holquist, 1990; Levinas, 1990), seems to emerge from a direct confrontation between the sides that breaks down the 'double-wall' of dichotomous monolithic constructions of identities that had separated the two before the confrontation (Bar-On, 1995). However, confrontation alone can lead to escalation of conflict and increasing of misunderstanding. The process that evolved between Nasser and Avner shows the importance of two elements in combination in achieving empathy toward an outgroup: friendship with an outgroup member (Pettigrew, 1998), together with the ability

directly to confront members of the outgroup and to express disagreement or difference in perspectives.

The evolution of the interaction described in this study, with the accompanying changes in representations of self and other, illustrates a few important points pertaining to group dynamics in the intergroup dialogue process. First, it is important to have facilitating leaders among the participants who are able actively to model the forming of a relationship between the two sides through the gradual creation of personal bonds. Second, the process described points to the possibility that intergroup empathy can be developed through a dialectical process. In such a dialectical process, the lack of mutual understanding and the extent of the lack of acceptance between the two parties have to first become clearly stated and visible to both sides. The parties then have to find a way to connect and relate to each other by developing more complex constructions of their own identity and of the other's.

The paradoxical notion of achieving empathy through confrontation requires further study in intergroup contexts. Such study may enable identification of inter- and intrapersonal and group processes through which the confrontation is able to facilitate empathy. In doing so it may draw the boundaries or define the necessary conditions for this confrontation–empathy connection.

In this article we have attempted to describe and evaluate a group process, through focusing almost exclusively on two central actors in the group. However, in future research, additional procedures should be considered that may be useful in evaluating such process changes more broadly and may thus be applied to entire groups or to larger social units. For example, a textual analysis could be performed to examine the extent to which complexity in the image of self and others, described here for the key dyad, is achieved in the entire group. Another possibility is to develop a coding system that would enable assessment of the level of empathy and of confrontation expressed in each group session, and changes in this level over time.

Developing and applying such procedures in additional studies would enable a more comprehensive understanding of the complex processes involved in the dialogue on the level of the entire group, beyond the specific interactions analysed here. Future research should also devote more attention to understanding the complex relations between events that occur in the political reality outside the group sessions, and changes and developments in the group process itself.

Clearly, it is difficult to transfer what we have learnt about this process in a micro setting to the macro social and political level. Still one can assume that conflict resolution will always need individuals like Nasser and Avner who are willing and able to become engaged in a mutual exchange that may

change their perspectives of themselves and of the other. The difficulty, however, may be determining how to achieve this change without giving up membership in and representation of the individual's own collectives.

Another aspect to consider here in view of the present deterioration in relations between Israeli Jews and Palestinians is that the issues and dilemmas discussed in an intergroup dialogue of the kind described in this study can be taken as a serious indication of unresolved problems and tensions in relations between larger groups that the members of the discussion groups represent.

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## Notes

1 Monolithic construction refers to defining oneself through relevant others in a unitary and unidimensional manner that involves negation of the others and a positive construction of the self, disregarding internal complexity, discrepancies, and contradictions.

2 It should be noted that there are important views of identity construction that do not relate to the 'other' as a major vector (Rawls, 1971; Taylor, 1985).

3 Neve Shalom is the only Jewish–Arab cooperative village in Israel. Its School of Peace is one of the largest professional organizations in Israel that conducts workshops, interventions and professional training for working through conflicts using group processes. This school is run jointly by Israeli Jews and Palestinians and equal numbers of Jews and Palestinians are on its staff.

4 Among the power issues is language, with Hebrew imposed on the Arab participants because the Jewish ones do not as a rule know Arabic.

5 For example, on 12 December 1996 there was such a terrorist attack on a Jewish family, while driving their car near Beit-El (a Jewish settlement in the West Bank), killing the mother and the 12-year-old son and injuring the father and daughters.

6 The Arab participants requested that their uninational meetings would not be recorded by the researchers who, at the time the meetings took place, were all Jews.

7 By confrontation or confrontational exchange we refer to a verbal exchange characterized by direct expression of disagreement, opposing interests and needs, or conflicting claims and interpretations.

8 For example, by choosing two male figures we totally eliminated consideration of gender issues that came up during the group process.

9 Israeli Arab is the common term for Palestinian citizens of Israel and is often used to differentiate between them and the Palestinians outside the boundaries of the state.

10 At the first uninational encounter two weeks later, Avner refers to these questions: 'The first time I asked them, I really wanted to know the historical source of the Palestinian people. I tried to find out if there was something mentioned in the Koran . . . that can tell us that the Palestinian people were born at such and such a time, an ostensibly innocent question. But, when I thought about it at home, I could see that it could be interpreted [by the Palestinians] as a provocative question: "What do you mean by it, that we don't have a right to be here, that we are a people without self-definition?" We say and mean the most innocent things in the world, from an honest desire to know and find out, but they seem provocative, because they [the Palestinians] are so sensitive. I don't go around everyday with a feeling that I am a Jew, a Zionist, and an Israeli. I know it exists, but before that I am a student, I work, and so on. I think that, with them, they get the Palestinian identity, this sense of deprivation and the occupation with their mother's milk. That's why they are so preoccupied and sensitive, everything is interpreted as provocation.' Avner's statement bears witness to what he understood in retrospect – how Nasser could interpret his 'innocent' question. But it is still difficult for Avner, even in retrospect, to see that the sensitivity concerning the legitimization of one's own national identity also characterizes his own people.

11 Nasser refers here to a proposal made by Theodor Herzl at the Fifth Zionist Congress to establish a Jewish state in Uganda.

12 The Hebron agreement, signed in January 1997, was, as specified earlier, part of the gradual implementation of the Oslo Accords in which Israel withdrew its forces from the major parts of Hebron, the main town in southern West Bank, and it was handed over to the Palestinian Authority.

13 An alternative interpretation can be suggested: that Avner's remarks indicate a substitution of one monolithic identity for the other and a stereotyping of the 'others' as 'them.' According to this interpretation (for which we thank an anonymous reviewer), Avner became more unsympathetic to the others' views as a result of the dialogue.

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**Ifat Maoz**, a social psychologist, is an assistant professor in the department of communication and journalism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and teaches social psychology, social information processing of interpersonal communication and media messages, and communication and psychological aspects of conflict and intergroup relations. Dr Maoz received her PhD in social psychology (on cognitive biases in negotiation) from the department of psychology at Haifa University, Israel (1997). She was a visiting scholar at the department of psychology, Stanford University. Her main research interests are: cognitive-perceptual mechanisms in conflict and negotiation, evaluation of intergroup contact interventions, peace building and reconciliation through dialogue, and patterns of communication and interaction between groups in conflict.

**Shoshana Steinberg** holds an MA in psychology and an MSc in guidance and counselling, and teaches psychology at the Kaye College of Education in Beer-Sheva, Israel. Since 1982 she has been conducting Interpersonal Relations workshops for Jewish and Arab teacher trainees, who are Israeli citizens. She has also led workshops for experienced teachers who work with Jewish and Arab populations in the Negev area. Her PhD dissertation, supervised by Prof. Dan Bar-On, from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, explores the structure and content of dialogue between groups of Jewish and Arab Israeli citizens who have taken part in workshops that deal with the Palestinian–Israeli conflict.

**Dan Bar-On** is the David Lopatie Chair for Post-Holocaust Psychological Studies and a Professor of Psychology at the Department of Behavioral Sciences at Ben-Gurion University. He launched a pioneering field research in Germany, studying the psychological and moral after-effects of the Holocaust on the children of the perpetrators, *Legacy of silence: Encounters with children of the Third Reich* (Harvard University Press, 1989 – also published in French, German, Japanese and Hebrew). His other books are *Fear and hope: Three generations of Holocaust survivors' families* (Harvard University Press, 1995), and *The indescribable and the undiscussable* (Central European University Press, 1999). In 1998, Bar-On was the Ida E. King Chair for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Stockton College of New Jersey from where he received an Honorary Doctorate in 1999. He was awarded and received recently the BundesverdienstKreutz from the German Federal Government. Together with Professor Sami Adwan from Bethlehem University he co-directs PRIME (Peace Research Institute in the Middle East). Together they won the Italian Alexander Langer Award for their peace-building efforts in July 2001.

**Mueen Fakhereldeen** finished his MA in Philosophy at Ben Gurion University of the Negev. For the last five years he has been the Director of Eran, a telephone mental health first aid agency in Beer Sheva. For the last six years he facilitated groups of Israeli Palestinians and Jews in a Democracy and Coexistence course at the Kay Teachers' College in Beer Sheva and at Ben Gurion University.