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Overcoming Psychological Barriers to Peaceful Conflict Resolution

The Role of Arguments about Losses

Corinna Carmen Gayer

Otto Suhr Institute for Political Science

Free University Berlin, Germany

Shiri Landman

Swiss Center for Conflict Research, Management and Resolution

Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

Eran Halperin

Lauder School of Government

IDC Herzliya, Israel

Daniel Bar-Tal

School of Education

Tel-Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

One of the most important psychological barriers to conflict resolution is the rigid structure of the sociopsychological repertoire that evolves in societies immersed in intractable conflict. This article examines ways to overcome the rigidity of this repertoire in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Specifically, in line with the prospect theory, the authors assumed that elicitation of beliefs about losses stemming from the continuing conflict may bring about a process of “unfreezing.” To test this assumption, an exploratory study with a national sample of the Israeli-Jewish population and two subsequent experimental studies were conducted. The results demonstrated that exposure to information about losses inherent in continuing the conflict induces higher willingness to acquire new information about possible solutions to the conflict, higher willingness to reevaluate current positions about it, and more support for compromises than the exposure to neutral information or to information about possible gains derived from the peace agreement.

Keywords: *intractable conflict; conflict resolution; sociopsychological barriers; prospect theory; framing*

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Introduction

Since the 1990s, the study of intractable conflicts has gained prominence within social sciences (see also Bar-Tal 2007; Coleman 2003; Crocker, Hampson, and Aall 2005; Kriesberg, Northrup, and Thorson 1989). Intractable conflicts are classified as extremely severe, violent, and protracted intergroup confrontations that persistently resist peaceful settlement.¹ Whereas the immediate causes of these conflicts are disputes over tangible and/or nontangible goods, their severity and longevity can at least be partially attributed to the evolving sociopsychological repertoire that accompanies them (Bar-Tal 2007). This repertoire, which consists of conflict supporting societal beliefs,² serves as a prism through which society members absorb information about the conflict and interpret their experiences. During the course of the conflict, society members tend to validate these beliefs and are inclined to reject alternative information. This tendency reflects the rigidity and freezing of the described repertoire of societal beliefs that leads to the diminished possibility of their possible change (Bar-Tal and Halperin forthcoming-b). Consequently, one of the major challenges for the process of peace making is to alter the rigid character of the sociopsychological repertoire that supports continuation of the conflict in order to make it possible to acquire new beliefs that facilitate a peaceful conflict resolution.

The present article empirically examines ways of overcoming this particular psychological barrier by relying on the principles of the seminal prospect theory. Our point of departure is that the rigid structure of the sociopsychological repertoire leads to nonconciliatory positions about possible solutions to the conflict and thus constitutes one of the most significant psychological obstacles to be addressed. The key assumption is that “instigating beliefs” about losses stemming from the continuation of the conflict may unfreeze the rigid and change the nonconciliatory positions.

The following briefly outlines the functions and characteristics of the societal repertoire and then presents a proposed method of mitigating its rigidity and initiating a process of unfreezing. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is used as the contextual location to test our hypotheses empirically.

Evolvement of Sociopsychological Barriers in Intractable Conflicts

Barriers to conflict resolution have been analyzed in nature, scope, and functioning during the past two decades and have been classified into diverse sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and psychological types (see Arrow et al. 1995; Ross and Ward 1995; Zartman 2007). The psychological barrier has been depicted as one of the most powerful obstacles to conflict resolution (Kelman 1987; Ross and Stillinger 1991).

Through the years, there have been various attempts to illuminate the nature of psychological barriers (see the review by Bar-Tal and Halperin forthcoming-b). While some focused on long-term societal beliefs and attitudes (Coleman 2003; Eidelson and Eidelson 2003), others explored various cognitive, motivational (Mnookin and Ross 1995; Ross and Ward 1995), and emotional (Bar-Tal 2001; Halperin 2008; Halperin, Sharvit, and Gross forthcoming) factors and processes that underlie the desire to maintain the conflictive situation.

Despite their diverse foci, most of these approaches agree that a rigid sociopsychological repertoire plays a central role in the maintenance of intractable conflicts (see the variety of empirical evidence provided by Fisher and Kelman [forthcoming]). The major part of this repertoire consists of an ethos of conflict, which is composed of eight major themes about issues related to the conflict, the in-group, and the adversary.³ This rigid sociopsychological repertoire reduces the perceived complexity of the conflictive situation and draws a simplistic black-and-white picture of reality, leading to a selective, biased, and distorted processing of information about the conflict (Lodge and Taber 2000). As a consequence, it fosters mistrust, hatred, and animosity; perpetuates vicious cycles of violence; and ultimately prevents the consideration of compromises required for a peaceful resolution of the conflict (Bar-Tal 2007; Coleman 2003).

The rigidity of the repertoire of beliefs can be explained using several theoretical approaches. From a cognitive perspective, rigidity is attributed to its structure, which is characterized by minimal complexity and great differentiation from alternative beliefs (Rokeach 1960; Tetlock 1999). From a motivational viewpoint, the rigidity is attributed to the epistemic motivation of specific closure needs that cause individuals to consider their own knowledge as being truthful and valid, explaining why people refrain from searching for alternative information (Kruglanski 2004). Finally, the rigidity of the repertoire is further reinforced by its institutional dissemination through cultural, educational, and governmental channels and of its control and maintenance (Bar-Tal and Halperin forthcoming-b).

As noted, the rigid character of the sociopsychological repertoire related to intractable conflicts is responsible for the fact that societal beliefs and attitudes do not change easily, but are maintained even when the most convincing alternative arguments are presented. Hence, the rigidity of the repertoire ultimately constitutes a determinative psychological barrier to conflict resolution. The challenge is to make this structure more flexible and to allow for the penetration of new information into societies involved in intractable conflicts.

Unfreezing the Held Repertoire

Bar-Tal and Halperin (forthcoming-a) have recently proposed a comprehensive theoretical framework for overcoming the rigidity of the sociopsychological repertoire drawing on Lewin's ([1947]/1976) classic conception that every cognitive

change begins with “unfreezing.” According to this framework, unfreezing involves a threefold process: first, a reevaluation of societal beliefs acquired in the course of the intractable conflict; second, openness for new alternative information and ideas; and third, acceptance of new ideas arising from the alternative information. The first two phases are necessary for unfreezing, while the third phase, called *seizing*, is needed for endorsing new beliefs and attitudes to facilitate a peace process that replaces the conflictive repertoire.

To set a process of unfreezing in motion, society members have to be motivated by an *instigating belief* to access and process alternative information. This instigating belief should reflect an idea that is inconsistent with the beliefs and attitudes of the accepted repertoire and therefore creates a kind of tension, a dilemma, or even an internal conflict, which may stimulate people to move away from their basic position and to search for alternative beliefs (e.g., Abelson et al. 1968; Festinger 1957). In intractable conflicts, the function of this belief should be to question the profitability of continuing the conflict and lead to the reevaluation of the societal repertoire that supports the conflict. Instigating beliefs may arise spontaneously within particular individuals but are likely to be more effective if they arise in response to modified external conditions that force the society members to reevaluate their commonly held societal beliefs (Bar-Tal and Halperin forthcoming-a).⁴

Although the contents of these beliefs may be of different kinds, we suggest that contents about losses entailed in continuing the conflict may be especially effective. This assumption is based upon the influential theoretical cornerstones of the *prospect theory*, according to which information about losses appears to be more influential than information about gains because human beings are more reluctant to lose what they already have than to gain something that they still do not have. This psychological asymmetry applies to identical goods and commodities that can be framed as losses or gains. Studies in different domains have demonstrated the existence of this phenomenon (Kahneman and Tversky 1979, 2000). Prospect theory has also been embraced by political scientists to analyze its political implications on the international system (see Jervis 1992; Mintz and Geva 1997). For example, Robert Jervis (1992) argued that striving for loss aversion can to a great extent explain the continuation of violence in wars. In line with this predication, psychological studies have found a negativity bias showing that negative events and information tend to be more closely attended and better remembered than positive ones and that they have a stronger influence on evaluation, judgment, and action tendencies (see also Baumeister et al. 2001; Cacioppo and Berntson 1994). Summing up, we hypothesize that instigating beliefs about losses unravel the sociopsychological repertoire of intractable conflicts and lead to a process of unfreezing.

However, certain clarifications should be made. Prospect theory points out that people’s evaluations in decision-making processes are usually not based on absolute assets, but are made in relation to a reference point (Kahnemann and Tversky 1979). By and large, people tend to evaluate new information with reference to a possible

improvement of or decline in the status quo (Kahnemann, Knetsch, and Thaler 2000). In the context of intractable conflicts, this means that people tend to attribute higher weight to possible losses due to a change in the situation, namely, concessions entailed in the peace process. The challenge is therefore to change the common reference point from the usual focus on losses entailed in changing the status quo to the concrete losses that the society will suffer if the status quo (the conflictive situation) is to be continued. Thus, we propose that to enable a process of unfreezing, instigating beliefs that outline the losses entailed in *maintaining* the status quo should be introduced.

This modification of the reference point can be achieved by framing the *continuation* of the conflict in a negative way, which contradicts the conflict-perpetuating rigid societal beliefs of the sociopsychological repertoire. *Framing* is considered a central element of prospect theory (Mintz and Redd 2003) and has been illuminated conceptually and empirically by a variety of researchers (see e.g., D'Angelo 2002; Entman 1993; Geva, Astorino-Courtois, and Mintz 1996, Kahnemann and Tversky 2000; Maoz 2006; Mintz and Geva 1997). "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entmann 1993, 52). Of special interest in intractable conflict conditions is the process of *evaluative framing*, which refers to the aforementioned manipulation of the reference point to which the current situation is compared (Mintz and Geva 1997).

Bar-Tal and Halperin (forthcoming-a) highlight at least three major guiding principles for the framing of the way the conflict is presented that might lead to an unfreezing of the sociopsychological repertoire. First, the framing should lead people to consider a belief that the situation actually deteriorates during the course of time. Second, the framing can focus on other local, regional, or global super threats or super goals that the society respectively faces or aspires to. A third strategy is to highlight the direct and indirect conflict costs of the past and project them in clear terms on the future. This type of framing may focus on the casualties of the conflict, but also on the economic and social deprivation for the society as a whole.

The goal of the current study was to test the effects of instigating beliefs of these types on the unfreezing of the rigid repertoire in a realistic context of an ongoing intractable conflict. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was chosen for that purpose.

The Context of the Current Investigation—The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been considered one of the most prototypical examples of an intractable conflict (Sandler 1988). It has persisted for more than two generations and is characterized by a high level of violence. In addition, it

demands great investments from society members and is of high centrality to them. During its course, it has been perceived as total, insolvable, and a “zero-sum game” by both adversarial and third parties. The major reason for this intractability is that the conflict has touched on needs that have been perceived as existential for both rival nations. These range from tangible resources, such as territory and natural resources, to symbolic, identity-related needs, such as self-determination, national rights, and historical justice.

The late 1970s marked the beginning of a shift away from the intractable extreme of the Israeli-Arab conflict. The peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1979, the multilateral Madrid Conference in 1991, the Oslo Agreements between Israel and the Palestinians in 1993 and 1995, and the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan in 1994 were seen as milestones that were gradually altering the nature of the conflict.

Nevertheless, these events also caused deep internal polarizations within the respective societies about the required concessions to reach a peace agreement. The most stubborn core issues under dispute are the division of the territory, the status of Jerusalem and its holy sites, and the right of return of the 1948 Palestinian refugees. In very general terms, it may be noted that a dovish camp emerged on one side of the Israeli political spectrum, propagating a division of the land into two states (Israeli and Palestinian), while on the other side, the hawkish camp objected to these compromises and advocated retaining the whole land for the Jewish people. Parallel division characterizes the political spectrum of the Palestinian society. The breakdown of peace talks in December 2000 led to the outbreak of the violent “Al-Aqsa Intifada,” indicating that the Israeli-Arab conflict was moving back toward the intractable extreme (Halperin and Bar-Tal 2007). Both adversarial parties lost trust in the other side, and their leaders were no longer considered as partners for peace negotiations.

Although during the time of the study peace negotiations had recommenced (Annapolis process), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was still perceived by at least half of the Israelis as total and unsolvable (Ben Meir and Shaked 2007). Absolute majorities in both Israel and the Palestinian Authority expressed pessimism regarding the possibility of meaningful Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in the following years and even decades (see Yaar and Hermann 2008). The rapidly changing arena of the conflict contributed to an even more pronounced resistance to alternative information and further reinforced the rigid conflict-promoting repertoire of societal beliefs. This context allowed us to empirically examine our research hypotheses.

Potential “Losses” within the Current Context

Among the most significant processes related to the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the demographic trend that may change the proportion of the two national groups between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Demographic surveys and analyses of recent years indicate that the much higher

population growth of the Palestinian communities in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority will soon affect the balance of proportion between the two largest ethno-religious communities in the region, and is expected to lead to the creation of a Palestinian majority within the next few decades (Soffer 2008). From the Israeli perspective, this development threatens the heart of the Zionist idea: the establishment of the Jewish state in Israel. Indeed, public opinion polls have repeatedly demonstrated that the majority of Israeli Jews rank the Jewish character of the State of Israel as the most important value shaping the interests of the Israeli politics (Ben Meir and Shaked 2007; Shamir and Shamir 2000). Because “the demographic threat” has important implications with regard to conflict-related policies such as annexation of or withdrawal from territories inhabited by a Palestinian majority, we expect that information concerning the expected losses to Israel in terms of demography might encourage a reevaluation of conflict-related beliefs.

A second significant development in the conflict arena, which has not yet penetrated the political discourse in Israel, is the growing interest in a one-state solution to the conflict in the Middle East. This idea has recently been expressed by important international actors as well as moderate Palestinian leaders. Since the UN General Assembly adopted the Partition Plan in 1947, the dominant paradigm regarding the future solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been the two-state solution, namely, the partition of the contested territory into two states—one Jewish and the other Palestinian. Recent trends, however, reflect an ideological inversion toward the support of a one-state solution, based on the principle of equal voting rights to all citizens, that is, the establishment of one binational democratic state. This inversion stems from frustration at the lack of progress in the peace process based on the two-state solution, rests on liberal-democratic justifications (Reut Institute, 2007), and is highly attractive to the Palestinians, who expect to become the electoral majority in a democratic, binational state (Reut Institute 2008).

A third widely discussed issue refers to the influence of the conflict on the Israeli economy. It has been shown that the financial costs of the conflict decisively reduce Israel’s gross national product (Eckstein and Tsiddon 2004). Other authors have underlined the continued economic costs of the Israeli occupation, which will only come to a halt if the two-state solution is adopted and Israel withdraws from the West Bank (Swirski 2008). Complementary to this, the benefits of peace are assumed to enable a decrease in military expenditures and thus the possibility to divert financial resources in Israel to other domains such as health, education, or welfare sectors. Estimations of the so-called peace dividend further suggest an increase in trade, foreign investments, and productivity following a sustainable peace that includes free economic trade within the region (Fischer et al. 1994).

The aforementioned developments hint at future losses in terms of values and interests that Jewish-Israelis perceive as highly important if Israel does not soon compromise on the two-state solution. These conflict-related matters were used in our studies to create an instigating belief that questions the profitability of protracted conflict and leads to a willingness to reconsider the hitherto held repertoire that supports its continuation.

However, there might be an important mediating factor that influences the success of framing scenarios in intractable conflicts. Studies carried out in the Israeli-Palestinian context have found that people may be differently affected by framing scenarios according to their political orientation (Geva, Astorino-Coutrois, and Mintz 1996; Maoz 2006; Maoz et al. 2002). Based on findings of a recent study by Maoz (2006), we assume that hawkish Israelis (called *rightists* in Israel) will be less receptive to the hypothesized framing effects. This is explained by the fact that Israeli hawks are generally more committed to conservative and national values that strengthen their opposition to making concessions for the sake of a two-state solution. These rightist Israelis are thus more entrenched within the rigid sociopsychological repertoire of the conflict (Arian 1995).

The Current Research

In line with the theoretical framework, we assumed that the belief that the continuation of the conflict is not beneficial for Israel, namely, the perception of the continuation of the status quo as a state of loss will lead to greater signs of unfreezing and seizing (reflected in the willingness to compromise). That assumption was tested first in an exploratory, correlative study. Then, the second and third studies aimed to experimentally investigate if exposure to information about losses inherent in continuing the conflict would provoke higher levels of unfreezing and more support for compromises than the exposure to neutral information or to gain scenarios derived from a peace agreement.

Study 1

Study 1 utilized a telephone survey among a representative sample of the Israeli Jewish population to examine correlative associations between the belief in future losses embedded in the continuation of the conflict on the one hand and the tendency to unfreeze and to support compromises to peacefully resolve the conflict on the other hand. The study was exploratory in nature and aimed to identify the existence of the aforementioned relations within Israeli society, without implying causal directions. We assumed that the results of the study would constitute a basis for the experimental studies that followed it. We expected to find positive correlations between the belief in future losses resulting from the continuation of the conflict and openness to new ideas (proxy of unfreezing) as well as between the belief in future losses and the support for compromises (proxy of seizing, in the context of intractable conflicts). This relationship was expected to be moderated by the political orientation of the participants.

Method

Participants. The telephone survey was conducted with a representative sample of the Jewish population in Israel during August and September 2008. The final

sample included 500 respondents, of whom 48.4 percent were men and 51.6 percent women. The mean age was 45.5 years ($SD = 16.49$), and the distribution of education levels and places of residence represented that of the Israeli Jewish adult population at the time of the survey (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008). Regarding political orientations, 41 percent of the respondents defined themselves as rightist (i.e., hawkish), 28.9 percent as centrist, and 18.3 percent as leftist (i.e., dovish); 11.3 percent refused to answer that question. Additionally, 15.8 percent of the participants described themselves as religious or ultra religious (*charedim*), 27.7 percent as traditional, and 51 percent as secular.

Procedure. We used random sampling within stratified subgroups to obtain a representative sample of Jews living in Israel at the time of the survey. Interviews were conducted by an experienced computerized survey institute in the interviewee's native language of Hebrew or Russian. The entire questionnaire included 105 items, and most participants completed it in no more than 25 minutes. Oral, informed consent was obtained at the onset of the interview. The overall response rate was 38.55 percent, and the cooperation rate 50.35 percent. In other words, the final sample of 500 participants who completed full interviews constitutes 38.55 percent of the original pool of 1,298 individuals who were selected to participate in the study. This compares favourably with studies in the United States, especially given that recruiting with the dialing methods in Israel, unlike the United States, include business phones (approximately 10 percent to 15 percent), which cannot be removed and are treated as failed attempts (Canetti-Nisim et al. 2008).

Measures

To assess the main independent variable—belief in future losses—we used one item, asking, “To what extent (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *very much*) do you think that time is on the Israeli side—as time goes by, the Israeli position in the negotiation with the Palestinians improves?” The scale was reversed so that a high level represents belief in future losses.⁵ Unfreezing was also measured with a single item assessing the level (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *very much*) to which individuals rely exclusively on formal (governmental and military) sources to collect new information about the conflict and its potential resolution. This item was also reversed, so that a high level symbolizes high openness to alternative/informal information. Support for compromises was measured using a three-item scale ($\alpha = .76$). Participants were asked to rate their level of support (1 = *strongly oppose*, 6 = *strongly support*) toward a peace agreement that includes (1) withdrawal from most of the occupied territories, (2) some compromise on Jerusalem, and (3) symbolic compromise about the refugee issue.

In addition, we inserted various socio political items to be used as control variables: educational attainment (1 = *elementary*, 5 = *BA or higher*), gender (1 = *men*, 2 = *women*), income level in comparison to average (1 = *much below average*, 5 = *much above average*), age (in years), religious definition (1 = *secular*, 5 = *ultra orthodox*), and self-definition of political stand (1 = *extreme dovish*, 5 = *extreme hawkish*).

Results

Descriptive analysis of the data shows that most Israelis believe that the continuation of the conflict will bring about losses to Israel ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.55$). At the same time, however, levels of unfreezing or openness to alternative information ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.25$) as well as the levels of support for compromises ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.67$) were relatively low. As expected, the belief in future losses is positively correlated with the measure of unfreezing ($r = .18$, $p < .001$) and with the support for compromises ($r = .21$, $p < .001$). Also as expected, the correlation between unfreezing and support for compromises turned out to be significant, but low ($r = .12$, $p < .05$).

In Table 1, multivariable linear regression equations for predicting unfreezing and support for compromise are presented. The results show that hawks are less supportive of compromises and display lower levels of unfreezing. In addition, men and individuals with higher education tend more toward unfreezing and those with high religious convictions tend to oppose compromises. Furthermore, as we predicted, even when controlling for all relevant socio political variables, the belief in future losses is a significant predictor of the support for compromises and the most powerful predictor of unfreezing and openness.

Discussion

The results of the first study met our expectations and demonstrated that people who believe that time is not on their side, namely, that the continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will bring about losses to Israeli Jewish society, showed a somewhat greater tendency to look for alternative information about the conflict. In addition, people who held these beliefs in future losses also showed a higher willingness to make compromises for the sake of a peaceful resolution of the conflict. However, despite the fact that levels of perceived loss from the conflict were medium to high, the general levels of openness to new information, as well as the support for compromises, were considerably low. The low level of openness within the Israeli Jewish population confirms the theoretical premise that societies exposed to intractable conflicts tend to freeze on their sociopsychological repertoire and allow only for limited information processing. Hence, in the following studies, we want to examine whether and how beliefs in losses may be manipulated by outlining them in new and concrete ways and thus increase the level of unfreezing and compromise.

Study 2

The main goal of the second study was to examine the causal role of new and concrete information about possible future losses in stimulating a process of unfreezing and in inducing levels of support for compromises. For that purpose, we utilized an experimental design based on a real-life situation that enabled us to manipulate the level of exposure of Israeli Jewish citizens to relatively new and unknown

Table 1
Linear Regressions Predicting Unfreezing (Openness to Alternative Knowledge) and Support for Compromises

Variable Name	Unfreezing		Support for Compromises	
	Beta	<i>t</i>	Beta	<i>t</i>
Future loss	.20***	4.26	.14**	3.08
Political stand (hawks+)	-.15**	3.07	-.23***	5.18
Income per family	.02	0.37	.06	1.25
Religious definition	-.04	-0.79	-.20***	4.39
Gender (woman+)	-.11*	2.26	.01	0.14
Education	.09*	1.89	.03	0.71
<i>R</i> ² (adjusted)	.09 (.07)		.15 (.14)	

Note: Cells contain standardized parameter estimates with *t*-values in parentheses.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

information about potential losses that are embedded within the continuation of the conflict. Specifically, the failure of the Oslo peace process and the growing difficulties in implementing the two-state solution to settle the conflict have raised the possibility of a shift away from the traditional support for that idea to a new idea based on a one-state solution, namely, the creation of a binational state. This idea accurately serves the purposes of our study due to its innovativeness and the fact that it indicates future losses in the event that Israel does not compromise to facilitate the settlement of the conflict within the framework of the two-state solution in the near future.

We assumed that the presentation of such information might lead Israelis to reconsider their previous positions about the conflict. We hypothesized that individuals exposed to such information would tend to reevaluate their societal beliefs, tend to be more open to alternative information about the conflict (proxies of unfreezing), and would be more supportive of making compromises to achieve peace than individuals in the control group. We also assumed that these effects would be moderated by the individuals' political orientation. To examine these hypotheses, levels of openness to new information about solutions to the conflict and levels of support for different kinds of compromises were measured following the presentation of loss frames or neutral information regarding the future of the conflict.

Method

Participants. Data were collected by a student research assistant thoroughly instructed in research methodology from a convenience sample of train passengers in different parts of the country. We aimed to include respondents with demographic characteristics paralleling the national averages. In total, 130 random passengers were asked to fill in the questionnaire, and 104 (40 women, 58 men, 6 who did not specify their sex) provided complete questionnaires (80 percent). Their ages ranged between 18 and 72 years ($M = 31.24$, $SD = 13.37$). About 83 percent of the participants were born in Israel, 14 percent were born in the former Soviet Union, and

3 percent were born in other countries. In terms of political orientations, 46.4 percent self-identified as rightists (hawks), 19.2 percent identified as leftists (doves), and the remaining 34.3 percent identified as “center.” With regard to religiosity, 6.8 percent were religious, around 33 percent traditional, and around 60.2 percent secular.⁶

Procedure. Participants were told that the experimenters were conducting a study on attitudes about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and were asked to fill in the questionnaires. Those who consented were given a booklet of questionnaires, which began with measures of individuals’ political positions and measures of general beliefs about the conflict, followed by the experimental manipulation presented as an ostensible academic article. Participants were randomly assigned to an experimental or a control group and each participant received one version of the article corresponding to his or her experimental condition. The article was followed by a manipulation check and measures of unfreezing and support for different kinds of compromises. Finally, participants filled out a short sociodemographic questionnaire.

Future loss manipulation. Each of the groups read a different paragraph that had allegedly appeared in a recent academic article. Both versions of the paragraph were of similar construct and word count. The control condition paragraph included a neutral description of the roots and the current situation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁷ It did not include any innovative information about the conflict or content that might point at possible future losses to the Israeli side.

On the other hand, in the experimental (loss) condition, the emerging idea of the one-state solution was discussed in detail. The paragraph described arguments that were recently raised by leading academic institutions for Middle East studies in Israel and abroad. According to this framing scenario, the international community and the moderate Palestinians will alter their current political position and support the one-state solution if no agreement in the framework of the traditional two-state solution is reached in the near future. The framing paragraph concluded in presenting the consequences of such a change by emphasizing that Israel would most probably cease to be a Jewish state if the one-state solution was implemented.

Measurements

Unfreezing was assessed using two different measures. The first measure consisted of two items ($\alpha = .62$) that explicitly asked the participants about their willingness (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) to reevaluate their positions and to acquire new, alternative information about possible solutions to the conflict. Acknowledging the disadvantages of this measure due to its subjective self-reporting, we also assessed unfreezing utilizing a behavioral measure. To this end, we included a section at the end of the questionnaire that stated that we were also interested in disseminating new information about alternative proposals for the resolution of the conflict. To maintain impartiality, we claimed that the information originated from sources that covered

the entire political spectrum. Furthermore, the participants were notified that the information would be delivered to them free of charge if they provided their mailing address. Assuming that agreement to the latter reflects openness to new information, we coded 0 for participants who did not provide their address (low unfreezing) and 1 for those who did (high unfreezing).

Support for compromises was measured using a three-item scale ($\alpha = .62$). In the first item, we employed an indirect strategy, asking participants to what extent (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) they believed that the information provided in the paragraph would make most Israelis more willing to compromise. The additional two items followed the work of Maoz and McCauley (2005) and directly measured levels of support for compromises on the core issues under disagreement (1 = *strongly oppose*, 7 = *strongly support*). Differentiation was made between support for tangible territorial compromise (“Support for Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders and evacuation of all settlements”) and symbolic compromise (“Support for declaring the Arab neighborhoods and villages in Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian state”).

Political orientation was measured using one item that assessed the individuals’ subjective political positioning on a dovish-hawkish (left-right) axis (1 = *extreme left*, 5 = *extreme right*). For purposes of analysis, we grouped this variable into three categories—doves, centrists, and hawks.

Results

Manipulation check. Prior to performing the main analysis, two items were used to verify the effects of the manipulation. An independent sample *t*-test showed that the content within the paragraph provided to the experimental group (loss manipulation) was less familiar ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 2.00$) than the one presented to the control group ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.86$; $t = 4.38$, $p < .001$). In addition, the individuals in the experimental group reported higher levels of concern ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.61$) regarding future losses as the result of conflict continuation than did the ones in the control group ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.61$), though the difference in that case was only marginally significant, ($t = -1.33$, $p < .10$). Similar to Study 1, correlation between the dependent variables (i.e., unfreezing and support for compromises) were positive and significant ($r = .24$, $p < .05$).

Loss manipulation and unfreezing. As predicted, participants in the loss condition expressed higher levels of declarative (attitudinal) unfreezing ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.63$) than participants in the control condition ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.30$), $F(1, 98) = 7.57$, $p < .01$. This pattern remained constant across the different political orientations of the participants; namely, the Political Orientation \times Experimental Condition interaction was not significant, $F(2, 98) = 1.36$, $p = .26$. Contrary to our hypothesis, no main effect of the experimental condition on behavioral unfreezing was found, $F(1, 99) = .03$, $p = .86$. However, in this case, the interaction effect of Political

Orientation \times Experimental Condition was significant, $F(2, 99) = 3.23, p < .01$. Further analysis revealed that while the loss manipulation had no significant effect on behavioral unfreezing among dovish ($t = .92, p = .37$) or hawkish respondents ($t = .61, p = .55$), it significantly increased levels of behavioral unfreezing among centrists (similar to American Independents; $t = -2.29, p < .05$).

Loss manipulation and support for compromise. In the final stage, we examined the effect of the loss manipulation on the levels of support for compromises for peace. As predicted, participants in the loss experimental condition were significantly more supportive of compromises ($M = 3.81, SD = 1.60$) than those in the control condition ($M = 2.79, SD = 1.36$), $F(1, 98) = 9.81, p < .01$. Interestingly, this effect was not moderated by the prior political positions of the participants; namely, the Political Orientation \times Experimental Condition interaction was not significant, $F(2, 98) = 1.10, p = .34$.

Discussion

The new and realistic scenario about future losses entailed in the one-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is clearly shifting the fear of losses implicit in the compromises for the two-state solution to the fear of losses embedded in the continuation of the conflict. A one-state solution would concuss the very foundations of the Jewish state and can thus be considered a very powerful loss framing.

As was shown, the information about possible future losses deriving from the one-state solution was new to the participants and led, albeit marginally, to greater concern regarding the continuation of the conflict. The instigating belief about the potential loss of the Jewish character of the State of Israel led to an attitudinal unfreezing among all political groups and to behavioral unfreezing among centrists. It is possible that committed individuals are less interested in actually receiving materials that might question their position, while centrists by the nature of their initial position are more open to the reception and the reading of new information. But the finding that the loss scenario moved everyone, namely, rightists, centrists, and leftists, to higher support for tangible and symbolic compromises for a two-state solution indicates a direct influence of the argument on the evaluation of the situation. This finding suggests that valid and new information about losses might go beyond the mere consideration of instigating beliefs and lead not only to questioning the profitability of the continuation of the conflict but also directly to the consideration of alternative solutions (i.e., compromise-oriented repertoire) to the conflict.

Study 3

The second study showed that new information about future losses leads to unfreezing of previous positions and to higher levels of support for compromises for peace. Nevertheless, this study did not compare the impact of the information about

losses with other kinds of information that could presumably lead to unfreezing and support of compromises. Hence, the main goal of the third study was to further strengthen our assumption about the superior contribution of concrete information about future losses to the process of unfreezing and support for compromises. Specifically, in this study, we wanted to show that information about future losses would have a more powerful impact on the process of unfreezing and on the level of support for compromises in comparison to parallel information about potential future gains from a peace agreement.

We used two different pivotal issues that can be framed both in terms of future losses and future gains as the basis for the experimental manipulations. The first is the economic issue—financial loss embedded within the continuation of the conflict versus financial prosperity embedded within a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The second one concentrated on the demographic issue—loss of the Jewish majority (and domination) if the conflict continues versus the assurance (and domination) of the Jewish majority within the State of Israel following the establishment of the Palestinian state. Based upon the rationale of loss aversion (Kahneman and Tversky 1979), we hypothesized that information emphasizing future losses would have higher influence on processes of unfreezing and on support for compromises than similar information about gains.

Method

Participants. Data were collected using the exact same procedure as in the previous study. For this purpose, 170 random train passengers were asked to fill out the questionnaires and 151 (65 women, 76 men, 10 who did not specify their gender) provided complete questionnaires (88.82 percent). Their ages ranged between 18 and 82 years ($M = 30.34$, $SD = 14.21$). In terms of political orientations, 39.2 percent self-identified as rightists (hawks), 30.1 percent identified as leftists (doves), and 30.8 percent identified their political orientation as centrist. About 81 percent of the participants were born in Israel, 16 percent were born in the former Soviet Union, and 3 percent were born in other countries. The sample was composed of 8.6 percent religious, around 25.8 percent traditional, and around 63.6 percent secular Jewish Israelis.

Procedure. Participants were told that the experimenters were conducting a study on attitudes about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and asked to fill in some questionnaires. Those who consented received a booklet of questionnaires that was similar to the one described in the second study. Each participant randomly received one version of the article corresponding to his or her experimental condition, namely, economic loss ($N = 35$), economic gain ($N = 38$), demographic loss ($N = 40$), and demographic gain ($N = 38$). Again, the article was followed by a manipulation check and measures of openness to new information, support for different compromises, and sociodemographic items.

Experimental manipulations. We used gain and loss frames across two different issues (economic and demographic) to create four different experimental conditions. As in Study 2, each of the groups read a different vignette, which had ostensibly appeared in a recent academic article. All four versions of the article were of similar construct and word count.

The economic loss condition stated that recent academic studies had predicted fatal damage to the Israeli economy if the conflict continued. More specifically, the passage declared that a prospective increase in Israel's security expenses would entail a dramatic reduction in the budget allocation to public education, health, and social welfare. On the other hand, the economic gain condition claimed that recent academic studies had suggested that a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the Middle East might eventually turn the Israeli economy into one of the most prosperous ones in the Western world, thus allowing for additional investments in public education, health, and social welfare.

The paragraph about the demographic loss condition emphasized the fact that the continuation of the conflict would soon lead to an Arab majority within the borders of Israeli control (including Judea and Samaria). This scenario stated that according to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, in the year 2025 Jews would constitute only 43.5 percent of the population within these borders. On the other hand, the demographic gain frame concentrated on studies from the same source, suggesting that a peaceful resolution of the conflict would ensure the domination of a Jewish majority in the State of Israel.

Measurements. In the current study we used scales similar to the ones applied in Study 2, with only one minor improvement to the declarative (subjective report) unfreezing scale. To assess declarative unfreezing, we utilized the two items used in the previous study and added another item that focused on the participants' evaluation regarding the willingness (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) of other Israelis to consider new ideas for the solution of the conflict, following the findings of the studies they had read. The incorporation of this item slightly improved the reliability of the scale ($\alpha = .65$). The other measurements—behavioral unfreezing, support for compromises ($\alpha = .66$), and political orientation—were identical to the ones presented in Study 2.

Results

Given that our statistical analyses revealed exactly identical patterns of results across the two different contents (or issues), we collapsed the analyses across the issues, creating two distinct experimental groups: (1) loss condition (economic + demographic) and (2) gain condition (economic + demographic). To test the effect of the manipulations, we created a two-item scale ($\alpha = .67$): (1) To what extent (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) do you think that time is on the Israeli side, namely, as time goes by Israel will be in a better position? (2) To what extent (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) did the paragraph you read make you feel hopeful about the future? An independent

sample *t*-test showed that participants in the gain condition scored significantly higher ($M = 4.22, SD = 1.34$) on that scale than participants in the loss condition ($M = 3.82, SD = 1.25; t = 1.31, p < .05$). Correlation between the dependent variables (i.e., unfreezing and support for compromises) was positive and significant ($r = .21, p < .05$).

Loss, gain, and unfreezing. As predicted, participants in the loss condition reported a higher tendency for unfreezing ($M = 2.73, SD = 1.35$) than participants in the gain condition ($M = 2.40, SD = 1.11$), $F(1, 143) = 4.34, p < .05$. The possible interaction of the Loss Frame \times Political Orientation on the measure of unfreezing turned out to be only marginally significant, $F(2, 143) = 2.81, p < .10$, hinting that leftists and centrists were to some extent affected by the manipulation, while partisan rightists were not affected by it at all. However, because the analysis was only marginally significant, we treat the result with a certain level of caution. Contrary to our hypothesis, when we used the behavioral measure of unfreezing as a dependent variable, we did not find a significant main, $F(1, 143) = .06, p = .80$, or interaction effect (with political orientation), $F(2, 143) = 1.96, p = .14$, for the experimental condition.

Loss, gains, and compromises. Finally, we tested the differences between the effects of loss and gain frames on the willingness to compromise for peace. Corresponding with our hypothesis, participants who were exposed to the loss frame were more supportive of compromises ($M = 3.64, SD = 1.57$) than those who were exposed to the gain frame ($M = 3.20, SD = 1.37$), $F(1, 143) = 2.76, p < .05$. Interestingly, these relations were not moderated by the individuals' political orientation; namely, the Experimental Condition \times Political Orientation interaction was not significant, $F(2, 143) = .73, p = .48$.

Discussion

The third study confirmed our hypothesis, which suggested that the influence of loss on unfreezing and on the willingness to compromise would be higher than the influence of gain. People exposed to the loss conditions had a higher tendency to assume that time was not on their side and that hence, they were more pessimistic regarding the future emerging from the continuation of the conflict than were people exposed to the gain framing. In comparison to the provided gain scenarios, the negative framing of the conflict continuation with an instigating belief about losses significantly influenced levels of attitudinal unfreezing. The behavioral unfreezing did not yield the expected results. This measure reflects a specific behavior and there is a difference between the general attitude about unfreezing and agreeing to a specific behavioral act that has various motivational bases. This lack of consistency is well established in the research of social psychology (Eagley and Chaiken 1998). Nevertheless, the third study strengthens the conclusions of Study 2 and shows that even a small manipulation in the form of a loss-directed framing of information concerning the conflict can bring about attitudinal unfreezing of the sociopsychological

repertoire that feeds the continuation of the conflict. In addition, the loss scenarios increased the participants' willingness to compromise on core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

General Discussion

The purpose of the current research was to examine the effects of arguments about losses in overcoming the sociopsychological barriers in intractable conflicts. In general, our studies provided evidence that instigating beliefs about losses can lead to unfreezing of the rigid sociopsychological repertoire of intractable conflicts and to a greater willingness to compromise. Our findings show that insights from research about prospect theory, framing, and the negativity bias can also be applied to the understandings of the sociopsychological dynamics of intractable conflicts. More specifically, the present studies add an important layer to the vast accumulated data on loss aversion by demonstrating that even in the complex and real-life context of a violent intractable conflict, individuals can be more easily persuaded to reconsider their societal beliefs with arguments about potential losses than with arguments about potential gains.

The current research introduces two interesting contributions to the conceptual understanding of loss aversion in the context of intractable conflicts as proposed by Bar-Tal and Halperin (forthcoming-a). First and foremost, it integrates the notion of loss aversion within the conceptual framework of cognitive unfreezing. Specifically, it was proposed that one of the most important psychological processes involved in unfreezing the detrimental sociopsychological repertoire in intractable conflicts is to create the motivation to reevaluate the held societal beliefs and attitudes, then to search for new information and ideas, and finally to accept the new alternatives. This three-phase process of unfreezing usually begins subsequent to the appearance of an instigating belief—a new idea that is inconsistent with the hitherto-held beliefs and thus motivates the reevaluation of the held repertoire. In line with prospect theory, we demonstrated that instigating beliefs about losses that refer to the fundamental question about the utility of continuing the conflict may induce a motivation to unfreeze. Moreover, whereas most studies dealing with loss aversion have demonstrated the consequences of loss framing in terms of preference reversal, the current study shows the application of loss aversion to the epistemic phenomenon related to unfreezing in the case of conflict. In other words, the results indicate that loss framing was related to all three steps of the unfreezing process: willingness to reevaluate held beliefs, willingness to receive new information, and more support for compromise solutions (the phase of seizing).

An epistemic explanation as to how loss framing induces unfreezing is what was previously defined as “fear of invalidity” (Kruglanski 1989). The fear of invalidity is an epistemic state referring to an individuals' fear of being committed to erroneous beliefs due to the perceived costs of such inaccuracies. This state is associated with

cognitive consequences such as delay in reaching closure, having less confidence in one's beliefs, conducting a more careful information search, and the like. Thus, it can be speculated that the information regarding losses raised a fear of invalidity among the respondents, which led to the observed results in terms of an increased openness to new information, and acceptance of alternative beliefs. In contrast to the loss manipulations, the neutral and gain manipulations did not directly undermine currently held beliefs, and thus did not lead to the arousal of a parallel fear. The mediating role of the fear of invalidity in the unfreezing process should be examined in future research.

Another contribution of the present study to the conceptualization of loss aversion relates to the definition of losses as leading to an aversive response. Specifically, whereas in most research on loss aversion losses were defined as costs entailed in changes of the status quo (see, e.g., Tversky and Kahneman 1992), in the present research the effects of loss aversion have been established in response to costs associated *with the continuation* of the status quo (i.e., the conflictive situation). The information presented in the experimental manipulations stressed the fact that the nature of the status quo is not static but that its mere continuation will lead to a negative change. Thus, the decision dilemma is in fact framed as a comparison between two processes of change leading to losses in terms of fundamental goals and values of the society: the costs of continuing the conflict versus the costs entailed in a compromise solution. It is possible that stressing the nonstatic nature of the status quo to some extent lessened the tendency of respondents to hold on to the current, familiar situation (i.e., the status quo), which was reflected in their increased willingness to tolerate the compromises entailed in the peace accord. In other words, it could be that the results of the present study provide a leading thread on how to successfully persuade society members involved in intractable conflicts to consent to the need of peace making. The formula seems to be to illustrate that the losses resulting from the continuation of the conflict are larger than the losses that will result from a peaceful resolution.

Furthermore, the present research focused on examining the effectiveness of beliefs about losses in inducing unfreezing and thus to provoke a cognitive change of the public in a particularly confrontational, intense, and intractable context. The findings indicate that parallel effects may be found in other, less intense conflictive contexts as well. Moreover, it is possible that stressing losses entailed in currently held positions can increase the openness to consider new information and creative alternatives to dispute resolution in other bargaining situations, such as conflicts between employee and employer associations. Although the current research was motivated by the aspiration to examine ways for overcoming barriers to the peaceful resolution of intractable conflicts, the proposed theoretical principles and their practical implications should be examined in the future in other contexts as well.

Even though the overall manipulation effects might seem modest at first sight, we consider them of great relevance. James Druckman (2001, 64) emphasized the conditional nature of framing effects and criticized the fact that most framing studies

isolated the respondents from any possible form of social interaction or credible information, which “should be readily available in many political, social and economic contexts.” His studies ascertained that framing effects might be significantly counteracted by facilitating the respondents’ access to credible advice. In contrast to usual laboratory-conducted framing experiments, our study scenarios were not of neutral nature to the respondents, but instead touched on ostensibly existential topics that are central in their lives. Additionally, the framing scenarios were based on issues that stand at the center of the public discourse. In line with this observation, in his meta-analysis, Daniel Druckman (1994, 549) found that bargainers adhere to their intransigent point of views “when the differences between positions on important issues are derived from long-held social attitudes.” His comparative analysis also found small effect sizes in previous studies that investigated framing effects on economic bargaining tasks as either potential profits or potential losses. Thus, in light of the rigidity of the sociopsychological repertoire, unfreezing in the tested context is extremely difficult to achieve and even small effect sizes are pertinent and may provide the first cornerstones in the overcoming of sociopsychological barriers to conflict resolution.

Descending from the general level of discussion, we would further like to qualify and explain our results in more detail. First, our hypothesis that framing effects will be greater on leftists and centrists than on rightists was only partly confirmed. While Israeli hawks showed lower levels of attitudinal unfreezing in the first study and, to a marginally significant degree, in the third study, they were equally affected by the second loss scenario and were persuaded into attitudinal unfreezing. This is a surprising and intriguing result. As mentioned in the theoretical part, previous studies in the Israeli-Palestinian context showed that rightist Israelis were less or not at all susceptible to framing effects. Thus, the question of why Israeli hawks reacted differently in the second study inevitably arises. Our assumption is that the answer lies in the specific content of the loss manipulation. Chong and Druckman (2007, 111) note that “the clearest limit on framing effects is provided by individual predispositions such as values.” Arian (2005) identified four basic values within Israeli society that frequently clash one with another: peace, Jewish majority, democracy, and Greater Israel, where the former two have been declared as most important values by the greater part of Israeli Jews. Indeed, the majority of Israeli hawks declared the Jewish majority as a value of utmost importance (see Arian 2005). Hence, there might be reason to assume that the endangerment of their primary value, presented as inherent in the conflict continuation, led them to be more receptive to loss framing and to show attitudinal unfreezing. This finding indicates that there is a potential to affect the frame of reference of Israeli Jewish hawks, which should be further explored in future studies.

Second, the hypothesized effects of the framing manipulations were observed in our experiments with regard to the attitudinal measures of unfreezing, yet only partially (see Study 2) with regard to the behavioral measure. As previously mentioned, this result is consistent with a well-established line of studies dealing with the gap between declared attitudes and their respective behavioral measures (Eagley and

Chaiken 1998). Moreover, the specific action required from the respondents to test our behavioral measure was the provision of their mailing address, which may have been perceived as threatening or suspicious by the interviewees. This measure may thus be influenced by other motivational biases, and it is not surprising that people respond to it in a less predictable manner. Ergo, prospective studies in this area may utilize more refined behavioral measures to clarify the ambiguous patterns revealed in the current study. One option would be to ask the respondents if they agreed to receive an information pamphlet about the issues right at the scene of the interview, without implying possible further commitments.

Despite the aforementioned, our second study uncovered a significant influence of the loss manipulation on behavioral unfreezing when tested for interaction with political orientation. Specifically, it turned out that only Israeli centrists showed signs of behavioral unfreezing following the exposure to our loss frames. A possible explanation for these findings would be that these group members have less confidence in their beliefs, and hence, they are more susceptible to new information. These findings are extremely important because centrists constitute the deciding factor in many processes aimed at resolving the conflict. Hence, in many ways, revealing ways to unfreeze beliefs of members of this undecided group can highly contribute to a peaceful conflict resolution.

The findings of the current research illustrate the strength of concrete and valid loss arguments in influencing participants with different political orientations. Moreover, our expectation that individuals with rightist political orientations would be affected to a lesser extent by the framing manipulations was only partially fulfilled, as the relations between the experimental conditions and the attitudinal measure for unfreezing, as well as the support for compromises, were similar for individuals from all political spectrums. The increment in the willingness to compromise across all political orientations is an absorbing finding that should be further investigated. In our studies, the loss framings induced a higher willingness to compromise on two of the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and thus hint that there is indeed a possibility to persuade people to agree to withdraw from the occupied territories and to accept East Jerusalem as capital of a future Palestinian state. A future parallel study with a Palestinian sample and adjusted framing manipulations is important to strengthen the theoretical implications of the study, as well as its implications for advancing conflict resolution.

Summing up, our results strongly suggest that the framing of the intractable conflict situation in a way that negatively portrays its continuation can decisively influence the society members to accept the exposure to different information, consider new alternatives, and even cause them to make a few major concessions to achieve a change. These are meaningful results. As discussed earlier, the sociopsychological repertoire adopted in a conflict is rigid in nature and very resistant to change. Societies living in intractable conflicts rely on this repertoire to satisfy various needs and cope successfully with the hardships and psychological distresses inherent in

this type of conflict (Bar-Tal 2007). The unfreezing of the hitherto-held sociopsychological repertoire is thus a first important step toward an attitude change crucial for supporting a sustainable resolution of intractable conflicts.

It should be reiterated that this change was created in our study by exposing the society members to a relatively short passage, containing information about the negative future outcomes of the conflict. Further research may test the effects of more intense exposure to loss framings. Politically, the effects can be expected to be much greater if educational systems, the media, and other institutions that usually reproduce the sociopsychological repertoire change their policies and present the future losses that parties involved in the intractable conflict must expect if the conflict continues.

Although literature has long recognized the significance of the sociopsychological repertoire of societies in hindering the peaceful resolution of intractable conflicts, the study of a process that can lead to the replacement of this repertoire with a repertoire of reconciliation is in its beginnings. The current research has shed light on the effectiveness of loss arguments in instigating unfreezing; however, this is only the first step for encouraging change in the sociopsychological repertoire of societies entrenched in intractable conflicts. Future research should examine other factors that may promote the replacement of the conflictive repertoire with a peace-oriented one, along different phases of this process. In applying the psychological findings to the socio political sphere, it is also important to take into consideration the reciprocal influences of changes in the repertoire occurring within the rival societies. It is possible, for example, that moves toward unfreezing and acceptance of ideas that propagate compromise in one society will also lessen the rigidity of the repertoire of the rival society, or vice versa. Using different contexts and contents related to other intractable conflicts around the world and revised measures to further illuminate the specific implications of arguments about losses to the unfreezing of the repertoire of conflict can advance our understanding of how to create the societal basis needed to promote sustainable conflict resolution.

Notes

1. Intractable conflicts are characterized as lasting at least for 25 years, over goals that are perceived as existential, violent, perceived as unsolvable and of zero-sum nature, greatly preoccupying society members that invest much in its continuation (see Bar-Tal 2007; Kriesberg 1993).

2. *Societal beliefs* are defined as the society members' shared cognitions on topics and issues that are of special concern to the society and contribute to its unique characteristics. They are organized around themes and consist of such contents as collective memories, ideologies, goals, myths, and so on (Bar-Tal 2007). They might be shared by the great majority of society members or by only part of them. We focus on these shared beliefs in our article as they have a great influence on societal systems.

3. The ethos of conflict is defined as a configuration of central societal beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society experiencing prolonged intractable conflict (Bar-Tal 2007). It has been proposed that in the context of intractable conflict, an ethos with eight themes evolves. These themes include societal beliefs about the justness of one's own goals, which first of all outline the contested goals, indicate their crucial importance, and provide their explanations and rationales. Societal beliefs about

security stress the importance of personal safety and national survival and outline the conditions for their achievement. Societal beliefs of positive collective self-image concern the ethnocentric tendency to attribute positive traits, values, and behavior to one's own society. Societal beliefs of victimization concern the self-presentation of the in-group as the victim of the conflict. Societal beliefs of delegitimizing the opponent concern beliefs that deny the adversary's humanity. Societal beliefs of patriotism generate attachment to the country and society, by propagating loyalty, love, care, and sacrifice. Societal beliefs of unity refer to the importance of ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements during intractable conflicts to unite the society's forces in the face of an external threat. Finally, societal beliefs of peace refer to peace as the ultimate desire of the society.

4. We realize that cognitive processes occur on the individual level, but we also recognize that individuals as society members are exposed to the same conditions and information and therefore pass through similar cognitive processes, which lead them to form a set of beliefs that is shared on a societal basis (Geertz 1973; Giddens 1984).

5. Retrospectively, this measure could also have been addressed through a more direct loss wording. To test the content validity of this item, we carried out a cognitive pretest (see Collins 2003). A group of twenty Israeli BA students were asked about their interpretation of the meaning of negative answers (1 to 3) to that item. All twenty students said that those who scored low on this scale believed that Israel's position in negotiation deteriorates as the time goes by. This way, content validity was substantiated.

6. We controlled for gender, religiosity, and education in Studies 2 and 3. The correlations of these variables with unfreezing and compromises did not render any significant results.

7. A complete wording of all vignettes used in Studies 2 and 3 are available upon request from the authors.

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