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The nature of socio-psychological barriers to peaceful conflict resolution and ways to overcome them¹

Kurzfassung: Die vielen verheerenden Gewaltkonflikte, die in verschiedenen Teilen der Welt wüten, stellen ein dringliches Problem dar. Solche Konflikte erwachsen aus dem Streit über inkompatible Ziele und Interessen auf verschiedenen Gebieten, mit denen man sich bei der Suche nach einer Lösung auseinandersetzen muss. Obwohl eine Lösung dieser Konflikte grundsätzlich möglich ist, sorgen starke sozio-psychologische Barrieren für ihre Aufrechterhaltung. Diese Barrieren blockieren den Fortschritt einer friedlichen Konfliktlösung. Sie beruhen auf dem Zusammenspiel von kognitiven, emotionalen und motivationalen Prozessen in Verbindung mit einem präexistenten Repertoire an rigiden Überzeugungen, Weltanschauungen und Emotionen, die eine selektive, voreingenommene und verzerrte Informationsverarbeitung begünstigen. Der vorliegende Aufsatz untersucht die Natur dieser sozio-psychologischen Barrieren und schlägt Wege zu ihrer Überwindung vor.

Abstract: The many devastating, violent inter-group conflicts raging in different parts of the world are very current and actual. Such conflicts arise from disputes over incompatible goals and interests in different domains that must be addressed in seeking to find a solution. It is well established that these conflicts might be resolved were it not for strong socio-psychological barriers that help to sustain them. These barriers block progress toward peaceful conflict settlement. They pertain to the integrated operation of cognitive, emotional and motivational processes combined with a pre-existing repertoire of rigid supporting beliefs, worldviews and emotions that favor selective, biased and distorted information processing. This paper elaborates on the nature of socio-psychological barriers and proposes ways to overcome them.

1. Introduction

Human societies have for millennia continually become entangled in highly destructive inter-group conflicts. Of special interest to us are inter-group conflicts regarded as *intractable* that have very marked distinguishing characteristics and are a seemingly unavoidable part of inter-group relations. They arise over conflicting goals viewed as existential and are violent, perceived by the parties as irresolvable and of a zero-sum nature. Such conflicts heavily burden the contending societies, which invest enormous resources in them, and continue for at least a generation (Bar-Tal, 1998, 2007, 2013; Kriesberg, 1993, 2007). Up until today such devastating conflicts have continually broken out and inflicted intense suffering in many regions of the world, as for example in Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Chechnya, Northern Ireland and the Middle East. They center on disagreements over incompatible goals and interests in different areas, including disputes over territorial claims, natural resources, economic wealth, self-determination, and/or basic values, and these very real disagreements must be addressed in conflict resolution. Potentially resolvable with various different cooperative procedures, such as negotiation, mediation or arbitration, in reality conflicts over goals perceived as existential are rarely settled within a short time. They often persist for decades or even centuries, accompanied by horrifying acts of violence and unimaginable suffering for the afflicted societies. We propose that one major cause of their persistence is the various nearly insurmountable barriers that fan and sustain conflict.

These barriers, which underlie the basic disagreements, are strong pressures that completely block or at least impede progress towards peaceful conflict resolution. They pose major obstacles to beginning talks, continuing negotiations, achieving agreement and later engaging in reconciliation processes. We will specifically focus here on socio-psychological barriers that are of special importance because they exert strong pressure against peacemaking (Arrow, Mnookin, Ross, Tversky, & Wilson, 1995; Bar-Siman-Tov, 1995; Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011; Ross & Ward, 1995). These barriers function on the levels of both leaders and society members.

This paper will first describe the evolution of a culture of conflict that provides the context for the emergence of socio-psychological barriers. Then it will discuss the barriers functioning on the societal level. The next section will introduce a general integrative model of socio-psychological barriers on the individual level. A conceptual framework will then be presented, indicating various ways to overcome the socio-psychological barriers. Finally, several conclusions will be summarized.

2. Development of socio-psychological barriers

Our point of departure is that intractable conflicts have an imprinting effect on individual and collective life in affected societies. The above-described characteristics of intractable conflict imply that society members living under harsh conditions

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of inter-societal conflict experience severe ongoing negative psychological effects, such as chronic paranoia, stress, pain, uncertainty, exhaustion, suffering, grief, trauma, misery, and hardship, with both human and material consequences (see for example, Cairns, 1996; de Jong, 2002; Milgram, 1986; Robben & Suarez, 2000). Furthermore, intractable conflict necessitates the continuous mobilization of society members to support and actively participate, even to the extent of demanding a willingness to sacrifice their lives and fortunes. In dealing with these experiences, society members need to adapt to the harsh conditions, continue to meet their basic human needs, learn to cope with stress, and develop psychological characteristics conducive to successfully opposing the rival group.

A basic premise of this study is that to meet the above challenges, societies locked in intractable conflicts develop relevant sets of functional beliefs, attitudes, emotions, values, motivations, norms, and practices (Bar-Tal, 2007a and b, 2013). These explain the societal meaning of the conflict situation, justify the society's actions, facilitate mobilization for service in support of the conflict, and help to foster a positive social identity and self-collective image. Gradually, the elements of the socio-psychological repertoire crystallize on the individual and collective levels. They form a well-organized system of shared societal beliefs,¹ attitudes and emotions that spreads throughout the society's institutions and communication channels and becomes part of the socio-psychological infrastructure. This socio-psychological infrastructure includes collective memories,² an ethos of conflict³ and a collective emotional orientation.⁴ These mutually interrelated elements provide the major narratives, motivations, orientations and goals that society members need in order to cope with life under the harsh conditions of intractable conflict and to maintain their support for continuing the conflict. Eventually this infrastructure becomes highly institutionalized and widely disseminated and serves as a foundation for the development of a culture of conflict. This in turn comes to dominate every society engaged in intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, 2010, 2013).

We propose that the consolidation of the socio-psychological infrastructure, as an indicator of the development of a culture of conflict, includes the following four aspects: 1. *Extensive sharing*: the beliefs of the socio-psychological infrastructure and the connected emotions are widely shared by society members.⁵ 2. *Widespread application*: the repertoire is not only shared by society members, but also put into active use in their public and private discourse and is continuously accessible to them. 3. *Expression in cultural products*: the socio-psychological infrastructure is integrated into popular literature, TV shows, films, theater plays, the visual arts, public monuments, etc. 4. *Inclusion in educational materials*: the socio-psychological infrastructure shapes the textbooks used in schools and even pervades higher education, as a central theme of socialization and indoctrination.

This introduction presents the basis on which the socio-psychological barriers evolve that serve as powerful forces in societies caught up in intractable conflicts. These barriers are grounded in the culture of conflict, whose pillars are the narratives of the ethos of conflict and the collective memory. The narratives provide a very simplistic, one-sided picture that serves as a prism for viewing the reality of a conflict. In addition, these narratives rest on a foundation of shared emotions that adds still another powerful vector to the functioning of the barriers. All these factors play a major role in blocking in-

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1. Societal beliefs are the building blocks of narratives. They are defined as cognitions shared by society members that address themes and issues that society members are particularly concerned about and that contribute to their sense of uniqueness (Bar-Tal, 2000).
 2. The collective memory of conflict describes the outbreak of the conflict and its course, providing a coherent and meaningful picture of what has happened from the societal perspective (Bar-Tal, 2007b, in press; Devine-Wright, 2003; Papadakis, Peristianis, & Welz, 2006; Tint, 2010).
 3. An *ethos of conflict* is defined as a configuration of shared central societal beliefs that provides a particular dominant orientation for a society in the present and for the future (Bar-Tal, 2000, 2007b, 2013). It comprises eight major themes about issues related to the conflict, the in-group, and its adversary: (1) *Societal beliefs about the justness of a society's goals*, which systematize the contested goals, indicate their *crucial importance*, and *provide* explanations and rationales. (2) *Societal beliefs about security* stress the importance of personal safety and *national survival*, and *outline the conditions for their achievement*. (3) *Societal beliefs about a positive collective self-image* concern the ethnocentric tendency to attribute *positive traits, values, and behaviors* to one's own society. (4) *Societal beliefs about victimization* concern the *self-presentation of the in-group as the victim* of the conflict. (5) *Societal beliefs delegitimizing the opponent* are beliefs that deny the adversary's basic humanity. (6) *Societal beliefs about patriotism* generate attachment to one's country and society by propagating loyalty, devotion, care, and sacrifice. (7) *Societal beliefs about unity* refer to the importance of putting aside domestic disputes and disagreements during intractable conflicts in order to unite society's forces in the face of an external threat. (8) Finally, *societal beliefs about peace* identify peace as the ultimate goal of the society.
 4. A collective emotional orientation refers to the societal characterization of an emotion that, on the individual and collective levels, is reflected in the socio-psychological repertoire, as well as in tangible and intangible societal symbols, such as cultural products or ceremonies (Bar-Tal, 2001, 2013).
 5. It has been observed that not all members of societies engaged in intractable conflict share the social repertoire equally. Societies differ in the extent to which their members share the societal beliefs of the ethos and the collective memory. Moreover, there are societies that have an ambivalent ethos even at the peak of the conflict, and others may develop them over time.

formation processing that could offer new perspectives for interpreting a conflict and thereby facilitate the peacemaking process. We can now elaborate on the socio-psychological barriers.

We divide this discussion of socio-psychological barriers into two sections. The first section deals with societal mechanisms that play an active role in positioning barriers to block the flow of alternative information differing from the narratives of the ethos of conflict and the collective memory and pointing to possibilities for peaceful conflict resolution. The second section describes the nature and functioning of the barriers on the individual level that influence the members of societies caught in intractable conflict and help to sustain this conflict. The chief argument advanced in this paper is that although socio-psychological barriers function on an individual level, this is greatly influenced by the dominant political culture of conflict that provides opportunities for communication and imposes restraints on the flow of information about the conflict. They create the social environment in which individual society members acquire information, form impressions and process them. Often societies locked in severe, long-term conflicts actively try to maintain the conflict-supporting narrative and prevent the spread of alternative views that could undermine its hegemony. They use various societal mechanisms to block the introduction and dissemination of information that offers alternative views about the conflict, about the rival, about their own group and/or about the society's conflict goals: The alternative information may humanize the rival and shed new light on the conflict. It may suggest that compromises are possible with regard to goals, that there is a partner on the other side with whom to negotiate a peaceful conflict settlement, that peace is mutually beneficial and conflict is costly, that continuing the conflict will harm the society. It may even provide evidence that the in-group shares responsibility for continuing the conflict and that it has in the past also been guilty of unethical conduct.

These mechanisms can be viewed as societal barriers, as is explained below.

3. Societal mechanisms as barriers

Societal mechanisms are used to block alternative information and narratives from entering societal domains. Even when they spread throughout society, societal mechanisms cause alternative information to be rejected, so that society members will not be persuaded by their evidence and arguments (Bar-Tal, 2007b; Horowitz, 2000; Kelman, 2007). The use of societal mechanisms can be activated by the formal authorities of the in-group – in some cases the state – or by other conflict actors with a vested interest in preventing the dissemination of alternative information. The following mechanisms should be considered:

1. Control of information. This mechanism refers to the selective dissemination of information about a conflict within society by formal and informal societal institutions (e.g., propaganda organs, the military, police and media) that provide information intended to support the dominant pro-conflict narrative, while suppressing contrary information. This is achieved, for instance, by selecting trusted sources for the dissemination of information, by establishing a central organization with responsibility for promulgating official conflict-supportive narratives, and by denying journalists or monitoring NGOs access to particular theaters of conflict (Dixon, 2010).

2. Discrediting counter-information. This category encompasses mechanisms used to discredit information supportive of counter-narratives and/or information sources (individuals or organizations) as unreliable and opposed to in-group interests. Occasionally these methods go as far as delegitimizing the individuals and organizations that originate such information (Berger, 2005).

3. Monitoring. This mechanism, used by formal and informal societal institutions, involves systematic scrutiny of the information disseminated to the public sphere (e.g., school textbooks, NGO reports, mass media news, scientific studies, etc.) in order to identify information contrary to conflict-supportive narratives, to discover the sources of such information and to use sanctions to suppress their informational activities (Avni & Klustein, 2009).

4. Punishment. When individuals and organizations challenge the hegemony of the dominant narrative, they may face sanctions. These sanctions can be formal or informal, of a social, financial or material nature, and are used to discourage challengers from carrying on their activities, and thereby in effect to silence them (Carruthers, 2010).

5. Restricting access to archives. This mechanism aims to block the public release of documents stored in archives (especially state archives) that may contradict the dominant narrative (Brown & Davis-Brown, 1998). Typically, such documents provide evidence of in-group malfeasance, including atrocities, rejected opportunities to make peace, or alternatively there may be information that challenges the negative image of the rival group promulgated by the conflict-supporting narrative. For example, there could be evidence of a sincere peace proposal offered by the rival. The restriction of access to archives can be comprehensive – applying to all persons and all documents – or may also be selective.

6. Censorship. This mechanism blocks information dissemination in various products (e.g., newspaper articles, cultural channels and official publications) if it challenges the themes of the dominant conflict-supportive narratives. Typically, these

products must be submitted to a formal or official institution for approval before they can be released to the public (Peleg, 1993).

7. Encouragement and reward mechanisms. These mechanisms use “carrots” rather than “sticks” to reward and encourage sources, channels, agents and products that promote the socio-psychological conflict repertoire. Authorities may grant privileges to various sources that offer information, ideas, artwork, and other products that transmit and disseminate the official conflict repertoire. In the case of news media, for example, a particular correspondent may receive permission to examine classified information or hold interviews. In the case of cultural products, a writer or illustrator may receive a prize for creative work that praises the culture of conflict. The goal is to show that those who promote the official line can expect to enjoy rewards and privileges. They are meant to serve as models for others to imitate.

The described societal barriers throw light on the context in which society members function on the individual level. Nevertheless, it is important to note that although these mechanisms function to some degree in every society, societies in intractable conflicts differ with regard to their use. Their employment depends on various cultural, political, societal and even international determinants. Also, societies in conflicts differ with regard to how much they need to use societal mechanisms to obstruct the flow of alternative information. In asymmetrical conflicts, one society may have a more solid moral-epistemic foundation, more consistent with internationally accepted ethical codes.

We will now discuss how socio-psychological barriers work on the individual level.

4. Socio-psychological barriers on the individual level: Freezing

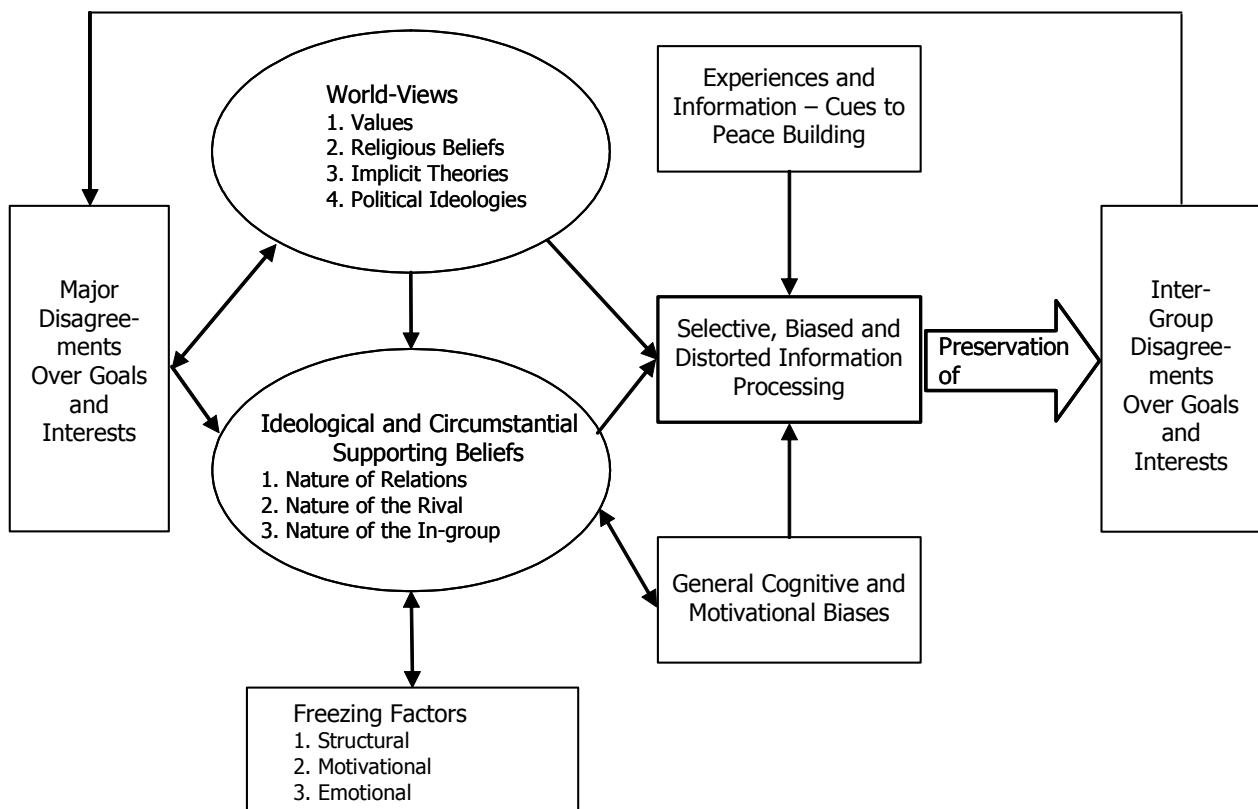


Figure 1: Socio-psychological barriers to peaceful conflict resolution

A discussion of the socio-psychological barriers on the individual level must begin with a generalization about societies taking part in intractable conflicts. At the peak of a conflict, at least a significant share of society members preserves in their repertoire narratives of the ethos of conflict and of the collective memory; some are even strongly convinced that they are central values. These conflict-supporting narratives form the bulwark of the culture of conflict, providing a specific view of the ongoing struggle that is widely held in a society. Theoretically, conflict-supporting narratives could easily be replaced by well considered, convincing arguments that include information about the costs of the conflict, humanizing characteristics of the rival, the rival’s willingness to negotiate a peaceful settlement, human-rights abuses by in-group members, etc.

But in practice, such a change in beliefs rarely takes place in the short-term.¹ Even when society members receive credible alternative information that challenges their beliefs, they often do not alter them. Among the reasons for this response pattern are socio-psychological barriers. We understand a socio-psychological barrier as "*an integrated operation of cognitive, emotional and motivational processes, combined with a pre-existing repertoire of rigid conflict-supporting beliefs, worldviews and emotions that results in selective, biased and distorting information processing*" (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011, p. 220). Thus, the individual functioning of the barriers results in one-sided information processing that obstructs and limits the spread of new information that could advance the peace process. That means that because of these barriers people are not even interested in being exposed to alternative information that could challenge their strongly held societal beliefs about the conflict (see figure 1). The reason for this closure to alternative information is the *freezing* of societal beliefs by the narrative, which is the essence of how the barriers function (Kruglanski, 2004; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). The state of freezing is reflected in continuing reliance on widely held societal beliefs that support the conflict, reluctance to search for alternative information and resistance to well-founded arguments that challenge these positions (Kruglanski, 2004; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Kunda, 1990). The freezing of the narratives of the culture of conflict is based on the operation of cognitive, motivational and emotional processes, and also a number of socio-psychological factors that we will now elaborate on. (For a more detailed discussion, see the integrated model of socio-psychological barriers to peacemaking in Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011.) First, we begin our analysis with cognitive processes, focusing on the rigid structure of societal beliefs.

4.1 Cognitive-structural factors

Freezing is a cognitive process that is strengthened by the rigid structure of the conflict-supporting beliefs held by many society members. *Rigidity* refers to the robust nature of these societal beliefs, which are organized in a coherent manner with little complexity and greatly differing from alternative beliefs (Tetlock, 1989; Rokeach, 1960). Several factors contribute to this rigid structure. First, societal beliefs about a conflict are often interrelated in an ideological structure. These beliefs meet all the criteria of an ideology and as such provide a well-organized system that firmly resists counter-arguments and new information and is almost impervious to change (Jost et al., 2003). Second, as already indicated, these beliefs meet important human needs, e.g., for certainty, significance, understanding, predictability, a sense of security and mastery, positive self-esteem and identity, differentiation, justice, etc. (Bar-Tal, 2007a; Burton, 1990; Kelman & Fisher, 2003; Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003). As a result, because they satisfy such primary needs, they are relatively stable and permanent. Finally, they are also held with a high degree of confidence by many society members, are of central importance and are ego involving, which makes them more robust. All these factors contribute to the rigid structure of the societal beliefs of the ethos of conflict and collective memory, which, consequently, are very resistant to change. These are resolutely upheld even in the face of the most convincing alternative arguments that might lead to peaceful conflict resolution (Petrocelli, Tormala, & Rucker, 2007; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, 1998; Fazio, 1995; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Krosnick, 1989).

It is important to note in discussing cognitive aspects that closure is also affected by *general worldviews*. These are systems of beliefs not specifically related to a conflict that give orientations helping to perpetuate the conflict through the perspectives, norms and values they transmit (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011). The list of these general views is long, but among the more distinctive systems we can note, as examples, political ideologies (such as authoritarianism or conservatism) not directly related to the conflict (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1981; Jost, 2006; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), specific values such as ones related to power or conservatism (Schwartz, 1992), religious beliefs (Kimball, 2002), and *entity theories* about the nature of human qualities (Dweck, 1999). All these worldviews influence the way society members perceive conflict issues and form other beliefs about the nature of the conflict, the rival, and their own group (see, for example, Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; Dweck & Ehrlinger, 2006; Golec & Federico, 2004; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Maoz & Eidelson, 2007; Sibley & Duckit, 2008).

4.2 Motivational factor

A second factor leading to freezing is *motivation*, because accepted societal beliefs appear to be reinforced by specific closure needs (see Kruglanski, 1989, 2004). That is, society members are motivated to view the accepted beliefs of the ethos of conflict and the collective memory as true and valid, because they fulfill various psychological needs for them (see, for example, Burton, 1990). Therefore, society members use various cognitive strategies to increase the likelihood of reaching conclusions consistent with societally accepted beliefs (Kunda, 1990). In this motivational process, they reject information inconsistent with widely held conflict-supporting beliefs, but accept information that validates their firm convictions.

1. Still, the process of change may take place despite great difficulty, over a long period of time and in the face of many obstacles.

4.3 Emotional factor

The third factor that affects freezing is enduring negative *group-internal emotions* such as fear. These emotions function to close society members' psychological repertoires and strengthen the rigidity of their societal beliefs. The link that connects emotions with societal beliefs is the *appraisal component* of emotions. Every emotion is related to a unique configuration of comprehensive (conscious or unconscious) evaluations of the emotional stimulus (Roseman, 1984). This means that emotions are interpreted in the light of societal beliefs, and when evoked, emotions may also instigate beliefs. Consequently, over time emotions and beliefs become closely related and mutually reinforcing. In the case of the societal beliefs of cultural conflict, we find them strongly linked to widespread negative emotions such as fear, hatred and anger. They concern a particular worldview created by societal beliefs, and once established and maintained as lasting sentiments, they activate thoughts consistent with the societal beliefs favoring continued conflict. These are then used to evaluate various conflict-related situations (Halperin, Sharvit, & Gross, 2011).

In sum, freezing triggered by many different factors is the dominant reason the societal beliefs of the culture of conflict function as socio-psychological barriers. The barriers encourage selective information gathering, which means that during intractable conflicts society members tend to search for and assimilate information that validates the societal beliefs of their repertoire, while ignoring and disregarding contrary information (Kelman, 2007; Kruglanski, 2004; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Kunda, 1990). But even when ambiguous or inconsistent information is absorbed, it is encoded and cognitively processed to harmonize with the socially supported repertoire, by means of bias, addition and distortion. Recently a thought-provoking experiment by Klar and Baram clearly showed that exposure to the other side's narrative is an ego-depleting experience, because it necessitates expending energy and mental resources to cope with the resulting psychological stress. They also illustrated how rival groups process information about their competing narratives. In the study, each of the Jewish and Arab participants was presented with one of two essentially identical stories – about an actual Jewish or Palestinian leader of a paramilitary group. Then, 90 minutes later they were asked to reconstruct the story. The researchers found that Jews and Arabs, on the one hand, added positive details to stories about *their heroes* and left out negative ones about them, and, on the other hand, added negative details to stories about *rival leaders* and left out positive ones (Klar, 2011; Klar & Baram, 2011). Along these lines, other studies have even found that cognitive processes are so biased in favor of the initial narratives people possess that it is very hard for them to change these narratives even when they are discredited (Ecker, Lewandowsky, & Tang, 2010; Lewandowsky, Stritzke, Oberauer, & Morales, 2009).

Moreover, since the repertoire is inculcated in the early years of childhood via societal institutions and channels of communication, we may assume that almost all members of the younger generation will assimilate the contents of the societal beliefs of the culture of conflict. Indeed, a recent study by Ben Shabat (2010) found that by the age of 6-8, Israeli children tend to hold the societal beliefs of the ethos of conflict even when their parents support peacemaking. It seems likely that during childhood most of this generation will come to regard conflict-supporting beliefs as valid and truthful, if they have been systematically inculcated in educational institutions. It is also possible that if a peace process begins and makes progress, at least some will adopt alternative beliefs that support peace. But important recent empirical findings from Israel indicate that even when over the years society members acquire alternative beliefs and attitudes that support peacemaking, the repertoire with which they are indoctrinated at a early age persists in the form of implicit beliefs and attitudes and exerts an automatic influence on information processing in times of stress (Sharvit, 2008).

Two studies have investigated the functioning of socio-psychological barriers like those presented in this paper:

Halperin and Bar-Tal (2011) did a survey study with a large-scale correlative design, using a nationally representative sample of Israeli Jews. The survey included scales that captured a picture of the potential socio-psychological barriers described in the model. These consisted of: a) general *worldviews* (values, implicit theories about groups, authoritarianism and political orientation) and b) conflict-supporting societal beliefs, such as specific *long-term beliefs* (the self-perception of the in-group's collective victimhood and the delegitimization of the rival group), and *circumstantial beliefs* about the current situation in the conflict. The dependent variables (the effects of the independent variables, i.e., the psychological barriers) included openness to new and positive information about possibilities for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and the ways peace-supporting compromises are assessed.

An analysis of the results with Structural Equation Modeling confirmed the basic patterns predicted by the theoretical model. People with rightist political orientations, authoritarian personalities and entity theories about a group's malleability tend to express higher levels of delegitimization of the opponent and higher levels of collective victimhood attitudes. Interestingly, traditional values also predict a sense of collective victimhood, but not the delegitimization of the Arabs. Finally, circumstantial beliefs are positively associated with rightist political orientations, traditional values and entity theories regarding groups.

As was also hypothesized, the results show that support for compromise is predicted by openness to new conflict-related information. Modification indices led to the incorporation of direct paths between political orientation and compromise, as

well as between all three societal beliefs (i.e., delegitimization, victimhood and circumstantial beliefs) and support for compromise. In general, the results showed that people with a rightist political orientation, persons who tend to delegitimize Palestinians, and those who see Israel as the ultimate victim are less supportive of compromise.

Of particular importance are findings clearly showing that within the context of conflict a great variety of psychological factors increase people's closed-mindedness. As predicted, delegitimization of the opponent and collective victimhood all decrease openness to new alternative information. It is noteworthy that modification indices led to the addition of two other direct paths between individuals' values and their levels of openness. While traditional values tended to decrease openness, universalistic values led to more openness. When we combine these results with the previous findings, it becomes clear that people's general values, as well as their specific beliefs about the conflict and the opponent, influence their levels of support for compromise, both directly and through the mediation of openness to new alternative information.

More recently, Porat, Halperin, and Bar-Tal (2012) specifically investigated the effect of the ethos of conflict on information processing about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israeli Jews were the study subjects. Their level of adherence to the ethos of conflict was assessed, and they were then presented with a hypothetical peace proposal offered by the Palestinians. They were asked to decide how they thought Israel's leaders should respond to this proposal. The experimenters gave them a decision matrix containing new information relevant to the decision to be taken and told them that they could obtain additional information to help them decide. Using Decision Board software (Mintz, Geva, Redd, & Carnes, 1997), the study traced the participants' general processing tendencies (e.g., the time they spent searching for new information, the *amount* of information processed), as well as the *type* of information processed (information favoring/opposing the proposal). The results clearly showed that the ethos of conflict exerted a steering effect on the search for information and the final decision. Specifically, high levels of the ethos of conflict resulted in spending less time searching for information, examining fewer new information topics, and devoting less time and effort to considering alternative information than when there was a low level of the ethos of conflict. Ultimately, consistent with this behavior, participants with a high level of adherence to the ethos of conflict tended to reject the peace proposal.

Of special interest in this study were signs of asymmetry in the effects of different levels of adherence to the ethos of conflict. While participants high in adherence to the ethos differed from those low in adherence with regard to openness to information supporting the peace process, the former did not differ from the latter in their search for information opposing this process. In other words, individuals identified as strongly supporting the societal beliefs of the ethos of conflict were as a rule more closed to new information of any sort. Not only did they ignore information opposing their views, they also made very little effort to search for information supporting their pro-conflict views, similar to participants low in adherence to the ethos, who likewise did not look for pro-conflict information.

Focusing on information processing variables first, we see that they indicate a lack of openness to information that might provide a new understanding of the conflict situation – which could in turn increase support for the peace process. The ideological belief system that constitutes the ethos of conflict reinforces adherence to conflict goals, the delegitimization of the rival, and in general the continuation of conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007a, 2011, 2013). However, in order to resolve conflict peacefully, these beliefs must be unfrozen, for example, by information providing new (and more positive) insights on the rival, the goals, the costs of the conflict, and opportunities to initiate a peacemaking process. Such information is essential, since it may open up a new perspective on the conflict and the rival (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2009). Openness in information processing – a readiness to recognize and search for new information – is thus especially important.

In sum, the presented model and its empirical evidence highlight the powerful impact of long-term socio-psychological forces on the way people in intractable conflicts process information and form specific positions on peacemaking. Mapping the barriers should be thought of as an initial step toward discovering new ways to eliminate them. In order to overcome the socio-psychological barriers, society members and leaders alike should open themselves to new alternative information that presents possibilities for peacemaking, and then begin to entertain possibilities for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. We will now outline a number of initial ideas for breaking through socio-psychological barriers.

5. Overcoming socio-psychological barriers – The influence of beliefs about losses

In most cases, peacemaking involves, on the one hand, bottom-up processes in which groups, grassroots activists and civil society members support the ideas of peacebuilding, and also act to disseminate them among their leaders. On the other hand, peacemaking also requires top-down processes in which emerging leaders initiate, or join in efforts to begin, peacemaking processes, which must include persuading society members of the need for a peaceful conflict settlement and for bringing about such a settlement. But in all these cases, unfreezing is the key process that leads to change in the conflict-supporting repertoire.

5.1 Unfreezing process

According to Lewin's classic conception (1947), all societal change must begin with cognitive change. For individuals and groups that means *unfreezing*. Hence, for there to be any acceptance and internalization of alternative beliefs about a conflict or peacebuilding, it must be possible to destabilize the rigid structure of the dominant socio-psychological repertoire about the conflict, as described above. This gives rise to special challenges, because in many conflict situations this process begins with a minority that must have the courage to present alternative ideas to other society members.

In the social climate of conflict, an awareness of the need to support the peace process is a prerequisite for beginning the difficult task of peacebuilding. On the *individual psychological level*, the process of unfreezing usually begins with the spread of a new idea (or ideas) inconsistent with accepted beliefs and attitudes that creates some sort of tension, dilemma or even personal psychological conflict. These may cause people to shift away from their basic position and look for alternatives (cf., e.g., Kruglanski, 1989). The new idea is called an *instigating belief*, since it motivates the society members who develop it to reevaluate the accepted societal beliefs of the culture of conflict, and in some cases, it may lead to unfreezing (see the detailed discussion in Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2009). The content of an instigating belief can originate from various different domains that pertain, e.g., to the image of the rival, the history of the conflict, social or political goals, new threats, and so on. What matters is that the content of the instigating belief challenges at least some widely held beliefs in the system. Thus it may suggest that the rival is also human and could be a partner in negotiations, or that members of the in-group have also violated ethical codes, or that the society's goals are unachievable, or that the costs of a conflict are inordinately high and are imposing extreme hardships on the society, or that in the long run society will pay an unjustifiably high price for not settling the conflict, and other similar views.

Important in this process is that the instigating belief should be of high validity and/or come from a credible source – so that it will be hard to ignore. The instigating belief must be powerful enough to elicit *cognitive dissonance*, to use Festinger's term (1954). In other words, this belief must motivate society members to pause and make an effort to harmonize their dissonant beliefs. This does not mean that every society member must reflect on the instigating belief, but it is possible that at least a few will become aware of the belief and be motivated to reflect on its implications. The belief can arise from personal experience or from an external source, but once absorbed and considered, it may eventually lead to an unfreezing process. If this happens, at least some accepted beliefs will be rejected, and a new *mediating belief* will emerge that calls for changing the context of intractable conflict. A mediating belief will be the logical outcome of cognitive dissonance, if the dissonance is resolved in the direction of accepting the instigating belief as providing valid information (see the intra-personal socio-psychological process described by Kruglanski, 1989). Mediating beliefs are usually stated in the form of persuasive arguments: "We must change our strategy, or we are going to suffer further losses." "Some kind of change is inevitable." "We have been on a self-destructive path; we must change our goals and strategies." "The proposed change is clearly in the national interest; it is necessary for national security" (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996). These persuasive arguments can open a discussion of alternatives and thereby expand the process of unfreezing begun by instigating beliefs. One key alternative may emerge in this process, which is to suggest that peaceful conflict settlement can change the direction in which a society is moving. The spread of this idea is the first step on the road to peacemaking. This description may sound simplistic, but in essence, the idea must arise and be disseminated among society members. As an example, already in the early 1980s Pieter Willem Botha, the conservative leader of the National Party of South Africa, who came to power in 1978, began to reflect on a number of unequivocal indicators. These included internal violence, deterioration of the South African economy, strong demographic growth of the Black population, South African isolation, and so on. Serving as instigating beliefs, these indicators made him realize that the country could not continue as in the past and needed to make reforms and start negotiations with the African National Congress. This logic illustrates the development of mediating beliefs (Beinart, 2001).

The process may appear rather simple in this description – but it is not. The fact is that many societies caught in intractable conflicts find it extremely hard to grasp such basic ideas. The described process begins on the individual level, often with a very small group of society members who either develop it together or unite based on their separate understandings of the situation. In some intractable conflicts, a group of society members may be present, who already at an early stage oppose the conflict and support nonviolent resolution. Nevertheless, in many intractable conflicts the existing or evolved minority must persuade other society members of the need to settle the conflict peacefully. Usually, this requires making compromises concerning the more extreme conflict goals pursued by the society. Eventually this process may lead to the evolution of a widely shared peace-supporting repertoire and even to an ethos of peace, as will be described below. Thus, a process that begins on an individual level moves up to the group level and rises further to the societal level.

From another perspective, it is possible to see the process of change as relating directly to the socio-psychological repertoire that society members share about the conflict and the rival – that is, the narrative belonging to the culture of conflict. This narrative is one-sided and simplistic, selective, biased and distorting. Of special importance in this situation is the closure, caused by socio-psychological barriers, of society members to accepting any alternative information. In this psycho-

logical state, the first step toward any positive change is to recognize that one's own narrative does not reflect the entire truth, that it is instead selective, biased and distorting. Once they reach this conclusion, society members may be able to move beyond this phase to a state of openness to alternative information that sheds new light on the conflict and the rival. Of crucial importance is the last phase, in which society members open themselves to accepting new information and altering their strongly held beliefs and attitudes. This is an essential phase for any meaningful change that can move toward a peacemaking process. Thus, the ultimate test of becoming open and overcoming socio-psychological barriers is a willingness to receive new information that suggests opportunities for peacebuilding. This is the core challenge for any societal change – to motivate society members so that they both open themselves to new information and come to accept it.

5.2 Conditions for change

Some students of conflict resolution hold that the success of peacemaking processes and conflict resolution depends on specific conditions that arise when conflicts are ripe for settlement. For example, Zartman (2000, pp. 228-229) theorized, "If the (two) parties to a conflict (a) perceive themselves to be in a hurting stalemate and (b) perceive the possibility of a negotiated solution (a way out), the conflict is ripe for resolution (i.e., for negotiations toward resolution to begin)." Pruitt (2007) offers a psychological perspective on "ripeness theory," which he uses to analyze the Northern Ireland peace process. In his view, *ripeness* mirrors each party's willingness to enter into and stay committed to peace negotiations. Antecedents of readiness include motivation to extricate oneself from the conflict situation, together with optimism about the prospect of reaching a mutually advantageous outcome. When readiness is present, a subtle conciliatory signal may be offered. If the other party reciprocates, optimism should increase on both sides. We would argue that this stage does not come about by a natural process of development, but instead results from ongoing and consistent persuasion by those who undertake to move toward peacemaking. In other words, both individuals and groups must advocate and support the peacemaking process. They become aware of new peace-supporting ideas, adopt them, and disseminate them among other society members, in an effort to mobilize them for the cause of peace.

In addition, ideas about terminating a conflict peacefully often arise and are successfully disseminated when changes are seen in the *context* of the conflict. These contextual changes relate to major events and/or information that may facilitate the process of peacemaking, and we can therefore refer to this as the "emergence of facilitating conditions." *Contextual facilitating conditions* can occur at any point in time during the peacemaking process. They can appear either at the beginning, contributing to the emergence of the first instigating beliefs, or at more advanced stages, when a substantial minority already supports the peace process. Any list of such facilitating conditions, which can include major events or information, would be open-ended, as different societies may be responsive to influence by different experiences. Also, they probably will not sway a whole society to support peacemaking, but can serve as evidence for at least some society members of the need to resolve the conflict peacefully, and thus can contribute to the unfreezing process.

We note that among the most salient facilitating conditions that can serve as a major event and/or as information are *trust-building gestures* by the rival that lead to changes in perceptions of the opponent's character, intentions and goals. Information about these gestures or even direct experience may begin to change existing images of the rival as malevolent and intransigent. One of the best examples to illustrate this process is Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem on November 20, 1977, in the midst of the intractable Israeli-Egyptian conflict, where he met with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and other leaders and elite members. He proclaimed to the Israeli Parliament (Knesset):

"I come to you today on solid ground to shape a new life and to establish peace. We all love this land, the land of God, we all, Muslims, Christians and Jews, all worship God.... I have come to you so that together we should build a durable peace based on justice to avoid the shedding of one single drop of blood by both sides. It is for this reason that I have proclaimed my readiness to go to the farthest corner of the earth... Allow me to address my call from this rostrum to the people of Israel. I pledge myself with true and sincere words to every man, woman and child in Israel. I tell them, from the Egyptian people, who bless this sacred mission of peace, I convey to you the message of peace of the Egyptian people, who do not harbor fanaticism and whose sons, Muslims, Christians and Jews, live together in a state of cordiality, love and tolerance."¹

Following this dramatic and unprecedented gesture, as a study by Oren (2005) showed, Israeli Jews substantially reduced their support for the major beliefs of the ethos of conflict. For example, prior to the visit over 70% of Israeli Jews thought the Arabs wanted to annihilate Israel, but after the visit, the percentage dropped below 50%.

Another facilitating condition pertains to major information about the state of society. The *realization of the costs that society pays* for continuing a conflict may lead to the crystallization of a belief in the need to change perceptions of the conflict and the rival, reconsider policies of intransigence and even adopt a willingness to compromise that facilitates resolving the conflict peacefully. An example of this factor can be seen in the perceptions of French President Charles de Gaulle, who came to power in 1958 intending to keep French control over Algeria. The French army achieved a series of military victories

1. http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/sadat_speech.html. – September 9, 2011.

in 1958-59 and very clearly gained the upper hand in the war in Algeria. Nevertheless, de Gaulle changed his position radically and began to speak about "self-determination" for Algeria, thus signaling a readiness to settle the conflict peacefully. He changed his position, because he realized that France was already paying an enormous price on the intra-societal level through polarization, with very high losses in human life and material destruction. On the military level, there was an over-extension of the French army, and on the international stage, France was coming under great pressure and was increasingly isolated (Horne, 2006).

Sometimes *intervention by a powerful third party* that demands the peaceful resolution of a conflict may also be a determining factor in changing conflict perceptions. In this context, a third party with major resources and high prestige may even use force to compel the party or parties to a violent conflict to agree to a peaceful settlement. An example that illustrates this context is US intervention in the Yugoslavian conflict. Between August 30 and September 20, 1995, NATO carried out airstrikes, mainly against the Serbs, to force an end to the conflict. Indeed the air campaign constituted the decisive pressure on Slobodan Milošević to change his policy and accept the November 21, 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement, which finally ended the hostilities (Holbrooke, 1999). In another example, US Senator George Mitchell, a special envoy appointed by President Clinton, played a pivotal role in persuading Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants to sign the April 10, 1998 "Good Friday Agreement" (Mitchell, 1999).

Sometimes, in contrast, *major incentives* offered by a highly respected *third party* to at least one conflict party may affect this party's views of a given intractable conflict and persuade it to take a more conciliatory position. As an example, Goren (2010) analyzed the case of Turkey, at a time when it was involved in two protracted and violent conflicts, one in Cyprus and the other with the Kurds in Eastern Turkey. EU membership was an important national goal for Turkey at that time, and consequently in 1987 it applied to join the European Union. The EU set specific conditions for admission that included changing Turkish policies toward the two conflicts. In fact, due to the EU demands, Turkey persuaded the Turkish-Cypriot leadership to accept Kofi Annan's peace proposal to resolve the Cyprus conflict. In addition, the Turkish government also approved a set of major reforms, among others, abolishing the death penalty, granting cultural rights to the Kurds and limiting Turkish military measures in the predominantly Kurdish region.

Changes in beliefs regarding a conflict may also result from *global geopolitical processes and events not directly related to the conflict* (for example, the collapse of a superpower or new geopolitical realignments). In this case, global change as a facilitating condition may influence a conflict party to adopt a more conciliatory position. An example of this sort of change was the decision by Yasser Arafat and the PLO to cooperate more extensively with Israel, which led to the 1993 Oslo Peace Agreement. This move toward reconciliation seems to have been a response to the collapse of the USSR, which in the past had strongly supported the PLO in its conflict with Israel (Tessler, 2009).

In addition, it is possible to list facilitating conditions, such as a traumatic war or a major battle, that raise the price of a conflict and induce a reassessment of the costs and benefits. Such events may suggest that the rival is so powerful that victory is unlikely. An example of this kind of event is the disastrous battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, which had a dramatic influence on the French decision to negotiate the Geneva Accord to end the conflict with the Vietnamese communists. Furthermore, major events and/or information about the *emergence of a new enemy* that seems more threatening can persuade leaders of the need to settle a long-term conflict peacefully in order to concentrate resources on fighting the new enemy. As an example, an argument commonly used in Israel is that peace with the Palestinians is necessary in order to focus more on the threat from Iran. Finally, the spread of *information about war crimes or atrocities* committed by a country may reduce its citizens' motivation to continue a conflict. As an example, the 1968 My Lai massacre by a US army unit became public knowledge in 1969 and strengthened domestic opposition to the Vietnam War.

The descriptions offered here of various conditions are neither complete nor mutually exclusive. Each of them alone, as well as various combinations, may give rise to new needs and goals that are more important than the ones that originally led to the conflict. As a result, a set of beliefs may emerge that can help to unfreeze the repertoires that support continued conflict. As noted, different beliefs can lead to unfreezing, but perhaps one of the most influential is the recognition that *the costs of continuing a conflict will exceed those that must be paid, if a specific peaceful solution is accepted* (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2009). This recognition is a powerful idea that may guide the peacemaking process to a successful conclusion. In essence, it focuses on the losses a society may incur if it does not resolve its conflict peacefully under the existing conditions.

5.3 Effects of information about losses as a facilitating condition

Our theorizing about the importance of losses is based partly on Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) *prospect theory*, which has been adapted to apply to conflict situations (e.g., Boettcher, 2004; Levy, 1996; Geva & Mintz, 1997). According to prospect theory, people are more strongly motivated to conserve what they already possess than they are to strive for what they still lack (Tversky & Kahneman, 1986). In the language of *prospect theory*, the value function is steeper on the loss

side than on the gain side. The theory's insight about the greater impact of anticipated losses than of anticipated gains has also been included in other theories. One example is the *conservation of resources theory* (Hobfoll, 1989), which asserts that losing resources through a traumatic event causes greater distress than an equivalent failure to acquire new resources. A similar *negativity bias* has been found in the literature on persuasion. Negative events and information tend to be more closely watched and better remembered, and are thus more likely to cause attitude change than positive events and information (see Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994 for a review).

One way to emphasize the potential losses associated with continuing a conflict and to reduce the focus on losses associated with a peaceful settlement is to reframe the *reference point*. *Prospect theory* holds that people react more strongly to changes in assets than to net asset levels; that is, they react to *gains* and *losses* from a reference point, rather than responding to the *absolute values* of the gains or losses (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Tversky & Kahneman, 1986). In most cases, the reference point is the status quo, but sometimes it can be an "aspiration level" (Payne, Laughhunn, & Crum, 1981) or a desired goal (Heath, Larrick, & Wu, 1999). Very often, members of societies involved in conflict are socialized to believe in the feasibility of future gains from the conflict or even in the ultimate victory of their side over their rival (Bar-Tal, 2007a). The alternative possibility of paying a high price for continuing a conflict or being defeated is often discounted or trivialized. As a result, when the compromises required to reach a peaceful conflict settlement are compared with society's ambitions, or even with the *status quo* (usually for the stronger group), people perceive peace as unacceptably costly. In other words, the motivation to reevaluate firmly held beliefs and consider alternatives depends on a prior realization that continuing the conflict will not lead to a better or desired future, but may instead drastically reduce the chances of achieving one (Bartunek, 1993). Moreover, as noted, continuing a conflict could in fact result in losses far greater than the ones that would have to be accepted to arrange a peaceful resolution of the conflict via negotiation and compromise.

Two notable examples of changes that were driven, at least to some extent, by the described processes are the peacemaking processes in Northern Ireland and South Africa. With regard to Northern Ireland, MacGinty and Darby (2002) recently argued that in the early 90s the Unionists began to realize that future change was inevitable and that such change might cause a variety of major losses for the Unionist side in the conflict. This was one of the central motivations for reconsidering their position and finally entering into negotiations in order to be able to influence a possible agreement. These authors quote a statement by a senior Orangeman that they believe reflected a common view shared by the Unionists: "*Every time something comes along it is worse than what came before*" (MacGinty & Darby, 2002, p. 23). In the context of the South African conflict, Mufson (1991) has offered a similar image of the unfreezing process. When de Klerk and his supporters finally realized that "*White South Africans' bargaining position would only grow weaker with time*" (p. 124), they agreed to negotiations and made every effort to move as quickly as possible towards a viable settlement.

Working with colleagues (Gayer, Landman, Halperin, & Bar-Tal, 2009), we have tested the suggested process with a group of Israeli Jews. Our main assumption was that instigating beliefs, including information about potential future losses in various life domains (e.g., economic and demographic situations, as well as potential negotiations with the Palestinians), can unfreeze Israelis' predispositions toward the peace process with the Palestinians.

Based on this assumption, we made a correlational study (Study 1) using a representative nationwide sample of Israeli Jews. We found that Israeli Jews who believe that time is *not* on their side, i.e., that the continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would bring unacceptable losses to Israeli Jewish society, were more inclined to look for alternative information about the conflict. In addition, people who held these beliefs regarding future losses also showed greater willingness to make compromises for the sake of peaceful conflict resolution.

In our second and third studies, we used already available information to evoke certain perceptions of future losses among Jews in Israel and examined the effects on the levels of openness to new information and support for compromise. The results of Study 2 showed that information about possible future losses caused by the implementation of a one-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict led to attitudinal unfreezing and to higher levels of support for compromise among members of all political groups. It also led to behavioral unfreezing among centrists (persons at the center of the Israeli political spectrum). These findings suggest that new information about losses could not only stimulate Israelis to question the alleged advantages of continuing the conflict, but also persuade them to consider alternative solutions (i.e., a compromise-oriented repertoire) for the conflict.

Furthermore, in accord with the original assumptions of prospect theory, the third study showed: The effects that instigating beliefs about future losses had on cognitive unfreezing and support for compromise were significantly greater than the effects of instigating beliefs regarding future gains, using the same information (for a detailed description of the studies, see Gayer et al., 2009). In other words, the same information framed as a possible loss led to more unfreezing and support for compromise than occurred when the information was framed in terms of possible gains.

These results are highly applicable to the case of the Israeli Jewish society, which accepts in principle a two-state solution, mainly because of the 'demographic threat'. This suggests that the much higher population growth rates of Palestinian com-

munities in Israel and the West Bank will soon upset the population balance between the two largest ethno-religious communities in the region. It is foreseeable that current demographic trends will lead to a Palestinian majority within the next few decades.

Accepting this conclusion encourages unfreezing. The ultimate outcomes of unfreezing include changes in the repertoire that supports continuing the conflict, greater readiness to reassess the conflict, and willingness to entertain alternative beliefs (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2009). The goal is to encourage alternative societal beliefs that support peaceful conflict settlement (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). The examples offered here illustrate more than just unfreezing. In all the examples, the leaders went to the point of being able to formulate a coherent set of compromise-facilitating beliefs that supported or served as a comprehensive plan acceptable to the opposing party. Indeed, the ultimate objective is to start from a plan that peacefully settles the conflict and continue on to evolving, accepting and internalizing a new *ethos of peace*. This ethos must serve, in terms of content and structure, as the reverse image of the repertoire of conflict, in such a way that it will adequately meet the needs and aspirations of in-group members. However, unless there is peace and reconciliation, the attempt to form a new socio-psychological repertoire that will fulfill these needs and aspirations appears to be a great challenge for every society striving to end conflict peacefully. Meeting these needs in the two clear-cut situations – intractable violent conflict and viable peace – seems to be much easier than doing so in the “transitional” period between violent conflict and peace, which is burdened by uncertainty and often marked by continuing violence and disruptions by opposition groups.

In summarizing this section, we would like to conclude that the process of unfreezing and the formation of a new system of beliefs that can facilitate the peaceful repositioning of conflict might potentially stem from two by no means mutually exclusive observations: a. Peaceful resolution of a conflict will prevent harm to the in-group and/or even benefit it. b. Peaceful resolution will stop the harm done to the rival and/or do justice to its claims. The first observation is based on utilitarian considerations, while the second relates at least partly to moral considerations. Our studies of inter-group conflicts have convinced us that the former consideration guides most leaders and society members who support peacemaking and conflict resolution.

6. Conclusions

Real disagreements over tangible and intangible goods motivate people to enter into violent, destructive conflicts that disrupt the lives of society members and cause continuing suffering and hardship, as well as great losses of human life. Conflicts burden the affected societies and the international community with serious problems and challenges. Settling these conflicts requires not only addressing the issues at the heart of the disagreement, but also necessitates surmounting the underlying socio-psychological barriers. Moreover, in protracted conflicts these barriers often become the major obstacles to finding solutions. They close the minds of society members and block information processing that can reveal alternative knowledge needed to facilitate peacemaking. Such information is essential for embarking on the path to peace, as it may unfreeze conflict-supporting societal beliefs.

We should not underestimate the fact that the foundation of these barriers consists in *ideological beliefs supporting the conflict* that were formed in society and inculcated in society members via societal institutions and communication channels. These ideological beliefs play a major role in sustaining conflict, fanning its flames and obstructing peaceful resolution. The internal socio-psychological barriers and the mechanisms that society employs are formidable brakes on the peace process. Only a determined minority and its involvement and activism in advocating innovative ideas can overcome the human tendency to cling to habitual patterns of thought and action, and start to overcome the inherent threat and danger in order to build a better world, free of violence, suffering and destruction. Breaking down these barriers is a major challenge for every society that wants to settle severe, violent conflicts and take the road to peace.

The Middle East conflict shows us that this process is difficult and stubbornly resisted by various groups with a vested interest in continued conflict. We do not deal with the economic-military-political interests that play a role in hardening the will to continue the struggle. Rather, we focus only on the ideological investments, as from an early age the respective society members have been inculcated with well established, coherent, systematic and interconnected ideas about why to adhere to extreme national goals and to disregard the needs and goals of the other party. They learn why they should distrust, dehumanize and hate the rival; and view their own group in highly idealized terms as the eternal and sole victim of the conflict. They learn to ignore, deny and repress the suffering of the other group, while focusing solely on their own hardships and excluding from the repertoire any empathetic moral considerations that could challenge the accepted image of the conflict. This ideology is supported throughout each citizen's life by various communication channels and societal institutions that make all educational policies seem valid and beneficial. They indoctrinate people to believe that all those who propose alternative views, either from inside or outside a society, have malevolent intentions, are untrustworthy, and want to harm the common interest.

The present paper suggests that overcoming socio-psychological barriers is not impossible, but requires intensive persuasion by society members themselves. In other words, society members and their leaders must employ the process of mobilization for peacemaking in much the same way that citizens were originally mobilized to support and participate in the conflict. Unfortunately, this is not so simple. With appeals to patriotism, society members can often be rapidly mobilized to take part in a conflict, but a very long time is usually required to mobilize them to leave the path of conflict for the new path of peacemaking. We know that the ideas of society members matter in both cases. Society members themselves have embraced the idea of engaging in conflict, and they can find new ideas to support the call for peacemaking. In both cases, they must persuade their fellow citizens of the "justness" of the path to peace.

We can learn from these observations that any analysis of intractable conflicts requires a socio-psychological perspective, in addition to other perspectives. People perceive, evaluate, infer and act – they are active participants in the events going on around them. These psychological processes are integral parts of conflict interactions, since human beings are the only real actors on the conflict stage. People make decisions regarding the dissemination of information about the necessity of conflict, the mobilization of society members to continue fighting, the socialization of their children to persist in conflicts and conduct them violently or reject peaceful resolution. In essence, people are the decision-makers, and therefore we must address the psychological tendencies inherent in human nature if we want to change human behavior. Later, if they begin to view the conflict situation differently, they may decide to disseminate the idea of the necessity of peacemaking and begin to mobilize society members for this goal. We hope that addressing the socio-psychological repertoire will create various socialization and mobilization mechanisms for peacemaking and peacebuilding. It is thus essential to offer knowledge that sheds light on the conditions, contents, and processes that can not only persuade society members to embark on the peacebuilding process in times of conflict, but also socialize them to avoid violent, destructive conflicts and costly hate-cycles.

We conclude this paper with two quotations by political leaders who had the courage to break down barriers, and unfortunately later paid the ultimate price for their courage.

When he arrived to make peace with Israel, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat declared in a speech before the Israeli Knesset on November 20, 1977:

„As we really and truly seek peace, we really and truly welcome you to live among us in peace and security. There was a huge wall between us which you tried to build up over a quarter of a century, but it was destroyed in 1973.... Yet, there remained another wall. This wall constitutes a psychological barrier between us. A barrier of suspicion. A barrier of rejection. A barrier of fear of deception. A barrier of hallucinations around any action, deed or decision. A barrier of cautious and erroneous interpretations of all and every event or statement. It is this psychological barrier which I described in official statements as representing 70 percent of the whole problem.“

Seventeen years later, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the architect of the Oslo peace process, received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo on December 10, 1994. At that time, he declared:

„We will pursue the course of peace with determination and fortitude.
We will not let up.
We will not give in.
Peace will triumph over all our enemies, because the alternative is grim for us all.
And we will prevail.
We will prevail because we regard the building of peace as a great blessing for us, and for our children after us.“

These messages should be taken to heart and put into practice by everyone who wants to overcome the socio-psychological barriers to peacemaking.

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