

A Reflexive Approach to Israeli-Palestinian Encounter Groups:  
A new way of conducting dialogue between groups in entrenched conflict

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### Abstract

This paper looks at why Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups have not been as successful as hoped by theory. Through the categorization of themes found in the literature and through experience of the writer, the core dynamics of encounter groups are analyzed. One of the key aspects missing in encounter groups is reflexivity: being able to see how what one does and says impacts the conflict and then being able to view the conflict from both sides' perspectives. This paper lays out the design of an encounter group based on reflexivity. By learning about the dynamics that occur when Israelis and Palestinians meet in dialogue and using neutral conflict theory, temporarily removing the participants mentally from the conflict, participants can gain a better understanding of their own behaviour and the other's behaviour. It is hoped that through a reflexive approach, participants will have better long term outcomes in terms of change in attitudes.

*Keywords:* Israel, Israeli, Palestinian, Arab, Jewish, dialogue, encounter groups, peace, reflexive

“It is easier... to smash an atom than a prejudice” Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954)

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## A Reflexive Approach to Israeli-Palestinian Encounter Groups:

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### Chapter One

#### Introduction, Research Questions, Methodology, and Definitions

##### Introduction

The origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be traced back to the nineteenth century as political Zionism began and Jews from around the world began moving to Palestine in large numbers with the hope of creating a Jewish state. On the same land lived Arabs with a Palestinian cultural identity resulting in a clash of two separate groups, Jewish and Arab for control of the land (Maoz, 2002). Violence erupted between the two communities in the 1920s and has been ongoing since.

The Israeli-Arab conflict is over 100 years old and defined by periodic violence, hatred and dehumanization between the groups, “misperceptions, negative stereotyping, mutual delegitimization, and severe miscommunication” (Maoz, 2003, p. 260) which creates an atmosphere of fear, suspicion and anger. One of the outcomes of the conflict is the physical separation between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs due to frequent violent clashes. These two groups often live within a few kilometres of one another yet because of the history of the conflict are physically and psychologically separated from one another. Even within Israel, Arabs and Jews generally occupy separate spaces and contact between them is limited (Bekerman, 2009). A 2004 report by researchers at the University of Haifa concluded that

racism among both Arabs and Jews within Israel was extremely high, with powerful sentiments of hostility, irrational hatred and pejorative assumptions about the other characterizing the attitudes and convictions of both communities (Schimmel, 2008). There are no similar studies of Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza but the same can be assumed to be true. Because of years of prolonged conflict and little meaningful positive interaction, views of the other group are often negative, harsh and not suitable to co-existence. Most Israelis only know Palestinians from media reports of violence perpetrated against Israelis or encountering Palestinians as soldiers when serving in the West Bank. Most Palestinians only know Israelis as soldiers perpetrating violence against them and limiting their mobility and as sometimes violent settlers in Palestinian areas.

The dominant way of the state constructing and reifying identity to its citizens is through the educational system and media. In Israel there are separate Jewish and Arab educational systems and a third in the West Bank and Gaza for Palestinians. Each community has its own media sources. Identity construction in both Jewish and Palestinian communities has been partially based on the negation of “otherness” where both groups have built their identity and culture through a closed dialogue that negates the other’s presence and legitimacy (Bekerman & Maoz, 2005).

The more common form of contact between the groups and to be researched is what is called the encounter group setting, where Israeli Jews and Israeli Palestinians or Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza are brought together to talk or take part in a group activity. These groups have existed since the 1970s (Herzog & Hai, 2005) but the impacts of these

groups point to mixed results in terms of the stated goals of encounter groups. Various authors found that for some participants a change in perception of the other group did occur to a minor degree (Steinberg, 2004; Schimmel, 2008; Salomon, 2009) but disappeared in the long term (Kupermintz & Salomon, 2005). In general, Israelis were more open to sympathizing with the pain of the Palestinians yet not open to making structural changes in Israeli society that would impact Palestinians. Palestinians had a more difficult time sympathizing with Israelis or recognizing the Israeli viewpoints (Salomon, 2004a; Maoz & Ellis, 2006). In the long term, those participants who had changed their perceptions of the other regressed to the pre-encounter group views because of the social and political atmosphere they inhabit (Kupermintz & Salomon, 2005).

Because the conflict is still ongoing, encounter groups that have a focus on co-existence and reconciliation have not provided positive results (Steinberg, 2004; Salomon, 2004b; Salomon, 2011). Throughout the literature, the dynamics between Israeli and Palestinian participants in encounter groups are defined by competing narratives (Bekerman & Maoz, 2005; Salomon, 2009), competing victimhood (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On, & Fakhereldeen, 2002; Salomon, 2002; Steinberg, 2004), argument (Maoz, 2001; Maoz et al. 2002; Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004), and lack of listening (Maoz et al. 2002). These dynamics result in disappointment in the process (Maoz, Bekerman & Sheftel, 2007) and few positive long term results (Kupermintz & Salomon, 2005). These dynamics are consistent in the literature and have been observed by the author in various encounter group settings. Therefore new approaches to dialogue must be attempted (Salomon, 2011).

One of the key barriers to positive impacts in the opinion of the author and backed up in some of the literature (Helman, 2002), is that encounter groups to date are not structured towards reflexivity; that is, participants do not see how they contribute to the dynamics of the conflict and are rarely able to view the conflict from both sides' perspectives. Certainly, if the literature notes that encounter groups are often defined by competition, argument and lack of listening, reflexivity in this environment is not likely.

Much time and resources have been invested in Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups but with only limited positive results. The encounter group setting is one of the few places that Israelis and Palestinians meet and the only place where meaningful dialogue can occur. There are two distinct groups locked in conflict in the region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River and neither one is going anywhere. Most encounter group participants are not ongoing combatants in the conflict, however their views of one another reinforce the negative perceptions each group has of the other and help reify both groups' perceptions of the other and the conflict. If people-to-people dialogue between these two groups is to occur, it is imperative for the dynamics of the past to be well understood so they are not constantly repeated and new ways to move dialogue forward be developed.

### **Research Questions**

The goal of this paper is to examine a series of questions based on a review of the academic literature and the writer's own intimate knowledge of Israelis, Palestinians and their encounter groups. These questions are: What are the central themes and dynamics that surface within encounter groups? What are the structural reasons for encounter groups

having little long term impacts? How can reflexivity address these structural problems? How could reflexivity be achieved in an encounter group setting? How could an encounter group be organized to achieve reflexivity? This paper will attempt to address these questions through analysis and then through design of a theoretical encounter group based on reflexivity. It is beyond the scope of this paper to test this encounter group but it is hoped that the departure from the traditional encounter group methods will help others have greater long term success. It is recognized that a new method of conducting encounter groups can only have limited results. A new encounter group, even if successful will not create immediate psychological change in the participants or structural change in the environment. As the conflict is ongoing and deeply entrenched, it is the view of this author that resolution and reconciliation through encounter groups is not possible. But it is hoped that through gaining reflexivity, participants will carry these lessons with them and apply them to new situations which will affect the reification of the conflict and lead to better understanding between the two groups.

### **Outline of Chapters**

Chapter one as an introductory chapter began with an outline of the issues, followed by the research questions that this paper will look at, outline of chapters, methodology and definitions of the key terms to be used in this paper.

Chapter two goes on to attempt to define the successes and challenges of Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups through the academic literature on the subject including a historical overview of the Israeli-Palestinian encounter group experience, the different

approaches that have been attempted, and the results of impact evaluations on encounter groups through the years. Chapter two sets the building blocks to understand what has been attempted so far and the challenges that arose in the literature on Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups to date. No one source found provides a summary of the encounter group dynamics that occur. Analysis of the information found in the literature is interwoven throughout the chapter.

Chapter three will organize the information found in the literature using Grounded Theory, collecting the lessons learned in the literature on Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups and organizing them into the central themes that appear in the literature into the following categories of analysis: power asymmetry, culture and communications, and collective narratives in order to explain why encounter groups have not been as successful as hoped. Both power asymmetry between Israelis and Palestinians and the collective narratives of each group have been analyzed in the literature in connection to encounter groups but none of the literature found analyzed the two categories as how they relate to one another. The category of culture and communication and how it relates to challenges in dialogue between the two groups in conflict has not been sufficiently analyzed in the literature. Additionally, no one source found combined all these categories to provide a full explanation on why dialogue is not as successful as expected by Contact Hypothesis and how improvements can be made.

Chapter four of this paper will set out the conflict theories of Human Identity Needs and Hegemonic Structures (Redekop, 2002) and how they can help explain both the Israeli and

Palestinian perspectives on the conflict. These theories will be used for the design of a new type of encounter group based on reflexivity.

In chapter five the concept of reflexivity will be further explored. The paper will then set out a training plan for a type of encounter group not yet attempted in the literature. The encounter group will include presentations on what is known to date about the dynamics of Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups including impacts and explanations on the categories of power asymmetry, collective narratives and communications and culture. This will be followed by instruction in the conflict theories of Human Identity Needs and Hegemonic Structures followed by a series of activities where participants use these neutral conflict theories to apply them to their own lives and the other group. Participants will be asked to give examples from their personal lives on how these theories apply to them. In the next round, participants will be asked to put themselves in the shoes of the adversary and explain how the theories apply to the other group. Between each presentation, the participants have an opportunity to respond and correct misinformation. The central idea is to temporarily remove participants from the conflict structures they inhabit through the use of neutral conflict theory turning them into participant observers. The training plan will also include recommendations for evaluation of short and long term impacts to see if a reflexive approach improves long term positive impacts.

Chapter six provides a conclusion and ideas for further related research suggestions.

## **Methodology**

This paper has made use of the research method called Grounded Theory for the analysis of the literature on Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups found in chapter three. Grounded Theory is a qualitative research methodology generally used for the purpose of constructing theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). It is defined by its systematic, iterative, inductive and comparative approach where data collection and analysis occur simultaneously. Compared to other research methodologies, its goal is to explain rather than describe for the purpose of contemplation and understanding (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). This paper will use the Substantive Coding method where the data is broken down into its key components and analyzed through the creation of core categories and reinforced by indicators (examples) which are subsequently compared to one another as analysis.

Although this methodology is often used to gather primary research in the field and produce theory, this paper will make use of the inductive and observational abilities of Grounded Theory to understand the dynamics and resulting structures and make sense of why Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups have limited positive results. The author has gathered available secondary academic resources on the subject and broken down the data into categories that provide explanations for the dynamics and structures that occur in Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups. This is important as no other source found brings together, categorizes and analyzes the dynamics that occur in the encounter group setting between Israelis and Palestinians. In addition, I as the author of this paper, bring to this paper my own reflexive voice and experiences. I have lived in Israel for over eleven years and participated in Arab/Jewish encounter groups in Canada for four years and Israeli-Palestinian

encounter groups in Israel and the West Bank for a year. I include my experiential knowledge as a Jewish Canadian and Israeli citizen who observed distinct dynamics from both Israelis and Palestinians within encounter groups and outside of them that are not focussed on in the academic literature but are obvious to me as a participant observer. It was surprising to me when reviewing and analyzing the academic research related to this topic that key dynamics occurring in encounter groups are either ignored or are mentioned but not explored. This seems to be primarily due to the methodology used by the writers in the literature who were testing specific hypotheses therefore other factors that contribute to the dynamics of the encounter group were not explored. These dynamics to be discussed in this paper were apparent to me as a participant observer yet not focussed on as part of the encounter group itself. Additionally, each group was aware and frustrated by the other group's dynamics yet were unable to reflexively look at their own behaviour and beliefs. My hope is that just as I developed my reflexive muscles through observing the dynamics of Israelis and Palestinians in dialogue, so too can encounter group participants begin to view the other and themselves through a reflexive lens. I write this paper to capture these dynamics for others so hopefully they will not be repeated. It is the purpose of this paper to explore all relevant issues captured in the literature to examine why encounter groups have not been as successful as hoped and to make a plausible case for a process that would develop participants' capacity towards reflexivity. This will be accomplished through the design of a training plan for an encounter group based on the principles of reflexivity.

### **Definition of Terms**

This paper's scope is limited to Israelis and Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. For the purposes of this research, the term Israeli will be defined as a Jewish person living within the State of Israel or in the West Bank and the term Palestinian will be defined as Muslim and Christian Arabs living in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinians who are citizens of Israel, often called Israeli Arabs, will be termed Israeli Palestinians when speaking about Arab citizens of Israel separately from West Bank and Gazan Palestinians. This research does not include information on Jews, Israelis or Palestinians living outside of Israel, the West Bank or Gaza as their societies differ and therefore some dynamics may not apply. However much of what is discussed in this paper can be applied to these groups as well.

Encounter groups are defined as groups where Israelis and Palestinians come together for dialogue for a prescribed period of time in order to discuss the issues of concern to them. Encounter groups can also be referred to as dialogue groups, peace groups or peace education in the literature but this paper will refer to them as encounter groups.

Reflexivity is a concept in the academic literature generally connected to methodological approaches where the writer is expected to be aware of their own contribution to the construction of meaning when researching subject matter. However for this paper, reflexivity refers to idea of being reflective, introspective and self-aware of how one's group contributes to a particular situation. This involves a process of being conscious of one's self and how what one says and does contributes to the conflict both in the encounter group and in the

outside conflict, however minor. It also involves the idea of attempting to look at the conflict from as objective a standpoint as possible and then be able to view the situation from both sides' perspectives. It is understood that people in situations of conflict define their situation based on what they believe is true. As the Thomas Theorem states, if one defines one's situations as true, it is their truth (Merton, 1995). In situations of conflict, the result is that individuals believe that they are right and the other is wrong. This assumption then reifies beliefs in what the conflict is about and the dynamics and structures of the conflict.

Reflexivity implies a bidirectional relationship in that what one says and does has consequences and contributes to the conflict. By understanding how one's beliefs affect the conflict and how the conflict affects one's beliefs, participants will be able to apply these lessons in the long term. It is hoped that by participants having a bird's eye view of the conflict dynamics, they will carry with them this dual-perspective at all times, seeing the dynamics of the conflict from both sides' perspectives.

The term 'structural' when referring to structure of conflict within the encounter group experience or the (outside) Israeli-Palestinian conflict comes from Vern Redekop's (2002) concept of structures within conflict. These are patterns of behaviour that form a metaphorical structure. In the same way that one builds a physical structure brick by brick, each person involved in a conflict contributes to the central structure of the conflict; structures in conflict are built up over time through patterns of behaviour that reinforce one another. And just like a physical structure, these interrelated parts of the conflict form a whole that is referred to as "the conflict" (Redekop, 2002).

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Literature on Israeli-Palestinian Encounter Groups**

#### **Background on Israeli-Palestinian Encounter Groups**

Encounter groups for groups in conflict can be found in the literature dating back to the 1970s between American Whites and Blacks following the end of the Civil Rights Movement (Bekerman, 2007) and in the Northern Ireland conflict (Maoz, 2003). According to Zvi Bekerman (2007), dialogue programs in the American context were a result of the use of legal and politically initiated structural changes having served their purposes to improve intergroup structural relations (Bekerman, 2007) and by the 1970s an era of people-to-people dialogue began to occur.

Encounter groups are said to be based on two theoretical models: Gordon Allport's Contact Hypothesis and Muzafer Sherif's Robber's Cave Experiment (Maoz, 2000b). Allport stated that individuals from two different groups in conflict are able to come together to successfully discuss their differences when certain criteria are present within the group: participants from the groups are equal in status, when there is personal and sustained interactions between individuals from both groups, when there exists some form of cooperative interdependence whereby both groups work towards a common goal, and there is consensus among the relevant authorities on social norms favouring equality (Amir, 1969). Muzafer Sherif's (1954) Robber's Cave Experiment was a social psychology experiment carried out in the 1950s where two rival groups of boys at summer camp were brought together and in which purposely created feelings of hostility were replaced by

feelings of friendliness and cooperation (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1954). The experiment involved purposely creating conflict between two groups and then attempting to replace the negative feelings with a spirit of cooperation and friendliness by creating a group task for the two groups to come together. This simplistic experiment gave great hope to those working with groups in conflict that by getting groups in conflict together and working on superordinate goals, feelings of hostility could be replaced with feelings of cooperation.

These two theories have been adapted to create encounter group experiences between groups in conflict around the world with the assumption that when two mutually hostile groups were brought together to get to know one another and take part in group activities, hostile feelings would be replaced with positive ones. It should be noted that in subsequent planned encounter group activities, Sharif's and Allport's theories were never fully replicated in actual settings of political or social conflict and conflict reduction between national or ethnic groups was only partially considered successful (Maoz, 2000b). This is likely due to the assumption in both perspectives that the underlying conflict is a simple one to solve with two groups in conflict over a single dispute. The reality is that most groups in national or ethnic conflict have a long history of multiple concurrent disputes. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one such conflict made up of ethnic, national, religious, legal, historical, ethical, social, and cultural aspects.

An additional complication is that these theories suppose that there are two groups in conflict. The reality is that in complex political conflicts, groups often split into sub-groups that spin off to create multiple sub-conflicts with one another (Maoz, 2000b). Not only is

there a main conflict between the two groups, each of the groups are involved in intra and inter-group sub-conflicts that stem from the main conflict. The dynamics may include partially agreeing with the other main group on some issues but not others or forming a completely third view on some issues. This further complicates the idea of bringing the groups together to discuss the issues and come to some agreement.

Encounter groups have existed between Israeli Jews and Israeli Palestinians since the 1970s (Herzog & Hai, 2005) yet there is no exact number of either groups or participants although since the 1980s it is estimated to be hundreds of small groups each year (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On & Fakhereldeen, 2002). Herbert Kelman from Harvard University was one of the first to attempt interactive problem solving workshops between Israelis and Palestinians. These encounters brought together unofficial representatives from the two groups with a neutral third party facilitating (Maoz & Ellis, 2003). Encounter groups grew in the 1980s due to the publication of a survey by Mina Zemach (as cited in Maoz, 2000a) disclosing anti-democratic attitudes and feelings among Jewish Israeli youth towards the Israeli Palestinian minority (Helman, 2002). What was termed the “co-existence sector” focused on the development of formal and informal educational dialogue activities, geared towards the recognition of otherness and co-existence (Suleiman, 1997; Maoz, 2000b; Maoz & Ellis, 2003; Bekerman, 2007).

What is known is that historically, the majority were small groups created by concerned and well-meaning individuals or organizations, aimed at dialogue between the two peoples within Israel comprising Israeli Jewish and Israeli Palestinian participants. Generally, those

initiating, leading and directing the co-existence initiatives and encounter groups were Israeli Jews with the objective of educating Palestinians as opposed to working for structural change (Bekerman, 2007) as is the interest of Palestinian Israelis to be discussed in chapter three. The setting of the goals and purposes of encounter groups was less relevant to the circumstances and needs of the Palestinian minority (Maoz, 2000b).

With the influx of Israeli government funding for encounter groups in the 1980s (Maoz et al., 2002) and again following the 1994 signing of the Oslo Accords (Nasser-Najjab, 2005; Bekerman & Maoz, 2005), researchers were able to have access to larger and longer lasting groups than before. Due to periods of violence by extremists, Israeli government funding for encounter groups began to wane during the Oslo years but researchers' interests did not.

Almost all encounter groups referenced in the literature have been between Israeli Jewish and Israeli Palestinian citizens due primarily to the fact that Jews and Palestinians living within Israel have greater ability to meet one another than do Jewish Israelis and Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza. Within Israel, there has been a move towards peace education programming between the Israeli Jewish majority and the Israeli Palestinian minority in the form of encounter groups, after school programming, and youth group activities. These activities were aimed at Jewish and Arab children and youth within Israel to promote understanding and increase peaceful relations between the communities (Nevo & Brem, 2002). The majority of participants in encounter groups (and their parents that sent their young children) self-categorized themselves as believing in peace (Maoz, Bar-On, Bekerman & Jaber-Massarwa, 2004).

Historically, encounter groups are almost always directed at the young including children, youth and students and tend to take place over a short period of time, in small groups and are self-selecting; meaning those who are more open to encounters with the other (or their parents) are more likely to choose to take part (Schimmel, 2008). In the Israeli context this generally refers to those on the left of the political spectrum. Those who harbour the strongest prejudices of the other (right wing or conservative views), are the most resistant to encounter groups (Schimmel, 2008). Not surprisingly, most studies of dialogue encounters between groups in conflict in the region look at group encounters between children (Nevo & Brem, 2002), youth (Yablon, 2007) or university students (Bar-Tal, 1996; Bar-Tal & Rouhama, 1998; Bar-Tal, 1998; Bar-Tal, 2004; Bekerman & Maoz, 2005; Bekerman, 2007; Bekerman, 2009; Kimmerling, 1992; Maoz, 2000a; Maoz et al., 2002; Rabinowitz, 2002; Schiff, 2003; Schimmel, 2008). Additionally, some groups reviewed were specifically for adults in a particular work sector such as Israeli and Palestinian educators (Maoz, 2000b). Dialogue groups in general and those studied do not take a holistic societal perspective by trying to include all sectors of society (Schimmel, 2008).

The composition of encounter groups in the literature varies. The size of the groups varies from 14 to 38 participants with approximately equal participation from each group. Although the size of groups varies, an equal number of Israelis and Palestinians is considered crucial in all studies found. The gender composition of groups is not always equal, however all projects found in the literature stated they strove for gender equality and unequal gender participation this did not seem to impact on the relations between individuals or groups. All

participants were self-selected meaning they felt an interest in dialogue with the other group therefore participants were not representative of their communities.

The length of encounter group programs found in the literature varied more. Some encounter groups were one-time weekend retreats, others were weekly meetings for a few hours that lasted a year while others were weekly meeting for a few hours that went on for a few years.

Facilitation in all groups in the literature was co-facilitated by an Israeli and a Palestinian which is important for the group dynamics. Some groups employed a mixture of bi-national and uni-national forums. The two groups meet in the bi-national forum with periodic and separate meetings as a uni-national group. For some groups in the literature, this was considered crucial to allow feelings and opinions to come up with one's own group that they felt uncomfortable voicing in front of the other group (Sonnenschein, Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2010).

The stated topics on the agenda seemed to be decided by the group members themselves as they began the encounter group experience. The participants were free to move from topic to topic as they wished (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Helman, 2002; Moaz, 2001; Maoz et al., 2002). The organizers of the encounter groups comprising university students often attempted to focus the discussions around issues related to group identity (Helman, 2002; Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Salomon, 2009; Sonnenschein, Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2010) or power dynamics (Bekerman & Maoz, 2005; Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004;

Helman, 2002; Maoz, 2000a; Maoz, 2000b; Maoz et al., 2002; Maoz & Ellis, 2003; Maoz et al., 2004; Maoz, 2005; Salomon, 2009). The focus of encounter groups tend to be the intergroup dynamics and relationships between Israelis and Palestinians as two groups in conflict, the conflict itself and its meaning to the participants, and the group as a microcosm of the wider conflict and what can be learned from it (Zak, 1997).

The goals of encounter groups in the Israeli-Palestinian context found in the literature are creating a positive change in attitude, weakening of stereotypes towards the other group (Maoz, 2000b; Amir, 1969), reducing tensions, changing perceptions, attitudes, and feelings, reducing prejudices, promoting co-existence and tolerance, reducing violence, learning about one another in the hopes of finding solutions to the conflict (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 1997), increasing belief in peace, increasing the ability to see the other side's perspective, creating greater willingness for contact with the other group (Salomon, 2004a), strengthening co-existence through closeness, commonalities, and cooperation (Maoz, 2004), and correcting power imbalances between the groups (Helman, 2002).

The academic literature points to a variety of approaches that encounter groups may take. The approaches taken to dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians are important to understand as approaches form the methodological base to implement the goals of the encounter group experience.

Rabah Halabi and Nava Sonnenschein (2004) note that encounter groups are on a continuum between two opposing axes: the *Human Relations Approach* and the *Contact Hypothesis Approach* on one end and *Intergroup Approach* and *Conflict Resolution Approach* on the other (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004).

The Human Relations Approach focuses on commonalities between the two groups. Issues of conflict are sidelined and the issues around individual and group identity are overlooked (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Salomon, 2004a). The Contact Hypothesis Approach as mentioned above focuses on bringing groups in conflict together in-person for guided communications to reduce tensions and improve understanding. According to Noam Schimmel (2008) the objective of encounter groups is “to humanize the other and expand one’s tolerance and appreciation for the enemy group” (Schimmel, 2008, p. 52). The assumption is that two enemy groups simply do not have enough information about one another or the information that they do have is distorted therefore by meeting, they will gain knowledge that will help in solving the conflict. Both these approaches rely on the idea that by getting opposing groups into the same room, they will find commonality and begin to see reasons to work out their differences.

The Intergroup Approach makes the assumption that the encounter will be useful and reduce stereotypes when the collective identities of the participants are emphasized and when the interactions taking place are primarily of a collective nature (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004) leading to an approach based on conflict resolution principles. This approach stresses the development of participants’ awareness of the conflict and an

awareness of their own roles in it, and enabling them to explore their identities (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004). The Collective Identity Approach is based on discussing the intergroup conflict without developing personal relationships (Salomon, 2004a). This approach relies solely on the concept of identity as part of a collective. Both these approaches recognize that the issues that created the conflict are not the only issues rather become only a part of a set of collective differences. All differences between the two groups become exaggerated resulting in depersonalization, dehumanization, and stereotyping (Tajfel, 1981).

Ifat Maoz (2004) divides encounter groups into two different approaches: the *Co-existence Model* and the *Confrontational Model*. The Coexistence Model promotes mutual understanding and tolerance through emphasizing commonalities, feelings of togetherness and joint work toward a common goal (Maoz, 2004). The Confrontational Model emphasizes the conflict and power relations between the groups by highlighting identities, power asymmetry, and empowering members of the weaker group through direct confrontation with the powerful group (Maoz, 2004). It should be noted that the Confrontation Model seems to be unique to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is not described in the academic literature about intergroup contact and does not appear in descriptions of coexistence interventions from other parts of the world (Maoz, 2004).

Other approaches taken that differ from the standard dialogue methodology of encounter groups found in the literature include story telling as a mechanism for creating understanding

(Bar-On & Kassem, 2004), the use of film as a mechanism for dialogue (Shefrin, 2007), and joint sports activities (Salomon, 2009).

Rabah Halabi and Nava Sonnenshein (2004) argue for the need to strengthen group identity and achieve minority empowerment within encounter group experiences (Halabi & Sonnenshein, 2004), and Mohammad Abu-Nimer (1999) makes the case for the empowerment of all groups involved in the encounter so as to increase their ability to be critical of their environment and emphasizes at the same time that encounters in and of themselves are not a substitute for structural change (Abu-Nimr, 1999; Bekerman, 2007). The assumption is that encounters should be conducted in isolation, removed from external tension and therefore will have healing effects which would ultimately impact the outside conflict (Bekerman, 2007). However Maoz (2000a) has raised doubts about the benefits of this approach when there are asymmetrical relations of power within the conflict (Maoz, 2000a).

Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups in the literature tend to be based on mixed approaches where bringing the two groups together with the expectation that they will find commonalities (*Human Relations Approach, Contact Hypothesis Approach, Co-existence Model*) and contain elements that recognize the reality the participants inhabit (*Intergroup Approach, Conflict Resolution Approach, Confrontational Model*). No one approach highlighted in the literature seems to have been more successful than another from the dynamics and analysis described and very few of the encounter groups described in the literature contained information on long term impact evaluation.

### **Effectiveness**

What does the literature have to say about the effectiveness of encounter groups between Israelis and Palestinians? The academic literature on Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups contains little evaluative analysis on what works, what doesn't and how to improve the encounter group experience. Zvi Bekerman (2007) attests to the low number of existing studies on the effects of encounter groups may suggest a low level of success and/or a low level of critical interest (Bekerman, 2007). Some of the literature does include an evaluative component for particular encounter groups studied but even this is rare. Many encounter groups are organized by smaller organizations that don't have the capacity to conduct proper evaluations. According to Maoz and her team (2004), many of these smaller organizations write final reports in newsletters or web pages and often seem overly self-complimentary therefore not a good indicator of actual results (Maoz et al., 2004). Additionally these evaluations are taken from questionnaires immediately following the encounter group experience when optimism and attitudes are highest.

What is known is that encounter groups are not widely embraced or attended by the majority of Israelis and Palestinians. For the minority that do take part, the impacts on the wider conflict of reducing tensions, and promoting co-existence and tolerance between the two groups have not been obvious. A 2004 report by researchers at the University of Haifa concluded that racism amongst both Arabs and Jews within Israel was extremely high, with powerful sentiments of hostility, irrational hatred and pejorative attitudes about the other characterizing the attitudes and convictions of both communities (Raved, 2007). Although

the report found that Israelis were more accepting of the Palestinian narrative than Palestinians were of the Israeli narrative, both sides showed little empathy for the other and in fact, both sides expressed great anger at the other's narrative (Salomon, 2004a; Salomon, 2009).

Impact evaluations in the academic literature on encounter groups range from the positive to mixed results. Evaluations of encounter groups from the 1990s found that participation "...significantly improved mutual perceptions and attitudes and reduced prejudice and negative stereotyping among groups in conflict" (Maoz & Ellis, 2003, p. 261). Ifat Maoz, Shoshana Steinberg, Dan Bar-On and Mueen Fakhereldeen (2002) report that after an encounter group experience participants had a greater ability to listen to the other side and work together, greater understanding of the underlying power and identity dynamics and questioned the monolithic identity constructions that exist in Israeli society (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On, & Fakhereldeen, 2002). These early years of encounter group evaluations found in the literature paint a picture of Israelis and Palestinians having profound changes related to their view of the other group and their own society. However these evaluations were conducted for encounter groups that occurred during the late 1990s which is regarded as a time of optimism about the peace process post-Oslo Accords so participants and evaluators in the literature of this time seemed to focus on the positive aspects of encounter group experiences and tended to leave out any negative information.

Much of the later literature paints encounter groups as having mixed results. Shoshana Steinberg's (2004) analysis of two year-long encounter groups showed that dialogue from

the beginning stages of the encounters tended to be defined by ethnocentric talk (only viewing one's own narrative, believing the other's narrative are lies) and attack (name calling such as terrorist, racist, etc.) (Steinberg, 2004) but the encounter dynamics gradually moved on to include aspects of mutual understanding (Steinberg, 2004). Participants moved from viewing the others as representatives of a group to individuals who are part of a collective. However it should be noted that ethnocentric attitudes lasted throughout the year especially when outside actions such as violence and other negative occurrences reminded the participants of the outside conflict (Steinberg, 2004). Steinberg noted that each side expected the other group to be empathetic and acknowledge their pain, however this did not happen as it would require the perpetrating group to take responsibility which initially neither group was willing to do.

Shoshana Sonnenschein, Zvi Bekerman and Gabriel Horenczyk (2010) concluded that after an encounter group process lasting months, an impact evaluation was conducted two months post meeting. The results were that the Jewish Israelis had undergone a change in attitude towards Palestinians viewing them more positively, however no information is provided about the Palestinians views towards Israelis. Ifat Maoz and Donald Ellis's (2006) evaluation of the impact of an encounter group noted that both Israelis and Palestinians had mutually negative stereotypes of each other at the start of the encounter group experience. Following a two day encounter group, both groups reported more tolerance and acceptance of the other, however Palestinians still had more negative impressions of Israelis than Israelis had of Palestinians (Maoz & Ellis, 2006).

A study by Haifa University professor Gavriel Salomon (2004a) on the effects on attitudes of meeting the other group found that while both Israelis and Palestinians desired to become closer friends with one another both before and after the encounter, becoming friends did not increase the Palestinians' acceptance of the Israeli narrative but did increase the acceptance for the Palestinian narrative with Israelis (Salomon, 2004a). However it should be noted that the concept of friendship in the study is defined as youth who spent three days together at a workshop and does not necessarily mean long-term friendships. Regardless, the lesson learned is that acceptance of members of the other group as individuals is easier than acceptance of the other group's point of view on the conflict.

From many of the evaluations of encounter group participants conducted in recent years, negative impressions and ethnocentrism remain although lessen. These mixed evaluation results related to co-existence and reconciliation both within the encounter group and outside the group are consistent with feedback from facilitators. A study by Ifat Maoz, Zvi Bekerman and Mara Sheftel (2007) looked at perceptions of change in youth as reported by Jewish Israeli and Palestinian Israeli encounter group facilitators. Facilitators had mixed evaluations regarding the work they do. Success was marked when they could see that individual participants had changed after the encounter group experience, become less tolerant of racism in Israeli society or participants had gone on to form their own encounter groups. However many facilitators reported feeling disappointed that their work does not seem to have a greater impact on decision makers and the social/political situation (Maoz, Bekerman & Sheftel, 2007).

However not all the literature stresses that encounter groups can be considered successful only if they lead towards positive feelings of co-existence and reconciliation. A study by Yifat Biton and Gavriel Salomon (2006) of a year long school-based program between Israelis and Palestinians showed that at the beginning of the program Israeli students stressed the need to end violence whereas Palestinians stressed structural aspects of independence and equality. Following the program, both groups put more emphasis on cooperation and harmony which were not stressed pre-encounter. The control group's view of each other deteriorated in the same period with the control-groups (comprising both Israelis and Palestinians) believing that violence was legitimate reaction to the current situation. This belief was not shared by those who had taken part in the program (Biton & Salomon, 2006). Therefore encounter groups can be seen to act as a barrier to deterioration of negative feelings and to the promotion of cooperation.

This idea of encounter groups acting as a barrier to further deterioration is echoed in other studies. Salomon in his 2004 paper on peace education during intractable conflict summarized the results of a series of experimental studies of Israeli and Palestinian youth carried out during a period of high violence that "participation...yields positive attitudinal, perceptual, and relational changes" (Salomon, 2004a, p.257) by improving views of the idea of peace, improving the ability to see the other side's perspective, and creating greater willingness for contact with the other group (Salomon, 2004a). When asked about perceptions of peace, those having a positive view of peace was 37% for Israelis who took part in peace education but only 9.6% for Israelis who didn't take part and 26.4% for Palestinians who took part but only 5.4% for Palestinians who didn't take part in peace

education. Another question asked was the suitability of using war as a means to attain peace. For those who took part in peace education, the numbers dropped from 33.3% to 23.6% among the Palestinians but those who did not take part in encounter groups the number rose from 31.4% to 52.6% (Salomon, 2004a, p. 266). Obviously there is a link between peace education which encounter groups are part of and attitudes related to war and peace.

All evaluations above were completed immediately following the encounter group experience. But what about changes in the long term? The main study on the long term impacts of the encounter group experience are cited by Hagai Kupermintz & Gavriel Salomon (2005) of an unpublished doctoral dissertation by I. Bar-Natan (2005), a student of Salomon. Bar-Natan found a reduction in social distance (friendships) between Jewish Israelis and Palestinian Israelis following a three day intensive encounter group experience but when measured six months later, all positive changes had regressed to pre-encounter group levels. Further, Salomon (2011) summarized the results of a series of evaluated studies on Israeli-Palestinian encounter group stating that in the short term there were statistically significant positive effects, however the effects were not substantial (as cited in Schimmel, 2008) related to viewing the other group more positively. The short term positive effects deteriorated within a few months as participants returned to their communities and were exposed to negative information about the other group; views about the other group reverted to pre-encounter levels (Salomon, 2009). Salomon (2011) citing these evaluations on short and long term impacts, hypothesized that without constant reinforcement to combat the negative information about the other group, attempts at improving views of the other will fail

in the long term.

However Salomon (2009) showed that although attitudes regress, there is a lasting underlying effect that remains. Israeli and Palestinian high school students took part in a year long encounter group and both groups reported improvements in how they view the other group. Two months following, their attitudes towards the other group had already regressed to pre-encounter group levels. Three separate studies were conducted with both groups. In the first, half the participants played a role-playing exercise where they had to argue for the narrative of the other side. The two other studies were conducted by having participants of the encounter group peer-teach other students on what they gained from the experience. Three months following the exercises, the Israeli attitudes towards the Palestinians had improved but the Palestinians attitudes towards the Israelis had not improved and remained low (Salomon, 2009).

This view is shared with other regions in conflict that conduct encounter groups. A study in Northern Ireland on the effectiveness of government sponsored promotion of contact between Protestants and Catholics between 1968 and 1999 found impressions of one another had not improved in all that time, however programming did have an effect on improving optimism and keeping relations at a sustained level (Cairns & Hewstone, 2002). A study on the long term effects of encounter groups involving Greek and Turkish Cypriots found little long term positive effects (as cited in Salomon, 2011).

Some of the literature is more optimistic about the effects of the encounter group experience on participants. Ifat Maoz (2000a; 2001) and Rabah Halabi and Nava Sonnenschein (2004) see Arab empowerment as a net gain within the context of the conflict. The fact that Palestinian participants in their studies are able to compensate for the outside power asymmetry by providing a unified and knowledgeable front towards Israeli participants is a positive step in the development of the Palestinian collective identity. However these authors have not explored whether a net gain for the Palestinian participants is interpreted as a loss for Israeli participants.

So, can it be said that encounter groups are successful in situations of ongoing conflict? It depends on the goals of the encounter group. If judged by the objectives set out in the literature, then only partially. The literature shows that there are moderately positive changes related to increasing belief in peace and willingness for contact with the other group, and there are temporary positive changes in attitude and perceptions towards the other group, weakening of stereotypes, and reducing the belief that violence as a legitimate means. Although temporary, these outcomes have been demonstrated to be revived. However in terms of societal changes related to promoting co-existence, reducing prejudices, correcting power imbalances and reducing tensions, encounter groups have not reached their stated objectives.

Ultimately, under conditions of ongoing conflict both groups have differing and conflicting objectives, therefore encounter groups as a means of finding co-existence and reconciliation remain elusive. For Israelis, the goal is to end violence. For Palestinians, the

goal is to correct the wrongs they feel have been done to them and gain independence and freedom (Salomon, 2009; Salomon, 2011). These goals related to the outside conflict frame the dialogue within the encounter group and therefore the dynamics between Israeli and Palestinian participants within the group. Israelis and Palestinians have different and sometimes conflicting needs from the encounter group. Within encounter groups, Israelis seek to get along as a way to humanize one another to stop the violence while Palestinians seek structural change (Maoz 1997; Maoz 2000b). Additionally, the two groups' belief systems about the conflict are so intrinsically different that many times, positive impacts are lost. From experience, each group tends to have different views on what the conflict is all about with Israelis believing that Palestinians hate Jews because they are Jews and Palestinians believing that Israelis want to throw Palestinians off their land. If one's belief system is in opposition to what one heard in the encounter group, impact of change will be affected (Salomon, 2011). These belief systems are tied to culture, power position and group identity which will be discussed in chapter three.

This competition of goals is only periodically identified in the literature and at times encounter group approaches are modified slightly to take this into account. In those cases found in the literature, this meant modifying the structure to allow Palestinians to gain more power within the encounter group as a remedy for their powerlessness in the outside conflict and requiring the Israeli participants to undergo a change in perception of the power dynamics. Israelis were expected to recognize their position of power over Palestinians, however change in perception was not required of the Palestinians. Empowering the Palestinian participants and exposing the power asymmetry to the Israeli participants was

also attempted through an exchange of collective narratives. In all cases found in the literature that these attempts were made, it was for the benefit of compensating the power asymmetry for the benefit of the Palestinian participants. These ideas will be expanded on in subsequent chapters.

As encounter groups are designed by Western style theoretical perspectives and styles, this poses an additional challenge. Both Palestinians and Israeli Jews have cultural traits which Western style conflict resolution may not take into consideration. Additionally all encounter groups found in the literature were initiated and implemented by Israelis. As the group with greater power, Israelis might be unconsciously structuring encounter groups that benefit the more Western-oriented Israelis at the expense of Arab Palestinians whose culture differs. Since no Palestinian initiated encounter group was found in the literature, it is impossible to know. And whether this is the reason that the literature favours Israeli change and not Palestinian change is difficult to know, however Israeli writers may be focussing on the burden of change being on the Israeli participants and society consciously because they are the initiators, implementers and providing the analysis and feel the burden of change falls on them as the more powerful group.

As outlined above, the majority of encounter groups are based on the Contact Hypothesis where contact under certain conditions can reduce hostility and prejudice and create more positive attitudes between groups in conflict. The majority of research that does include an evaluative component compares the attitudes of participants before and after intergroup contact to determine if contact did indeed effectively improve relations. As seen above,

encounter groups between Israelis and Palestinians only partially fit the Contact Hypothesis model in that there is personal and sustained interaction, however there is unequal status between the groups and incompatible goals both for the outside conflict and the dialogue group. The Robber's Cave experiment model of having a superordinate goal may work at times when both groups can find a neutral goal, however, in this conflict, few areas of discussion or activity are neutral. Additionally, both the Robber's Cave experiment and the Contact Hypothesis contain within them the need for outside support. The success of the encounter group experience requires the support of the society around it from politicians, home, school, neighbourhood, and the media (Salomon, 2004b). But during active conflict such support is not available in either society leading encounter groups to be viewed by many as subversive activity (Salomon, 2004a). This becomes apparent once the participants leave the safe environment of the encounter group for a home and society which often views their actions as threatening. In both societies, there is pressure not to meet the other group. This results in many encounter group participants not talking to peers or family about what they learned. Previous beliefs about the other group quickly replace any new information that was gained.

The issue of societal support is critical when discussing encounter groups. The collective narratives of both groups are strong and are constantly being reinforced by the conflict and socio-political forces around it and events suppress the previously attained changes (Salomon, 2011). Even if within the group setting true symmetry is achieved and lessons are learned, the outside conflict is still ongoing. Once a person leaves the protection of the encounter group, they are exposed to the societal messages from home, school,

neighbourhood, and the media. This can include both violent actions from either side or threats and statements made against or about the other group. As stated above, studies show that acquisition of information can be attained from short encounters, however for information that contradicts previous ideas and conceptions, short encounters can only do so much (Salomon, 2004b). Changes in attitudes take time. The study of friendships mentioned above showed that within a few months, attitudinal change all but disappeared and this result was recreated in other studies (Kupermintz & Salomon, 2005; Salomon, 2009; Salomon, 2011).

The flip side of societal support is the ripple effect. One of the hopes imbedded within encounter groups is that there will be a ripple effect towards the surrounding societies (Salomon, 2011). The hope is that participants in the group as part of their respective communities will take the lessons learned about the other group and communicate this with their peers, families and community. It has been proven that out-group contact can influence others within the in-group. For example, a person who attended an encounter group tells those who have not participated in the encounter group which hopefully leads to more positive attitudes and reduces stress (Salomon, 2011).

The reality is somewhat different. Members of groups in an entrenched and long term conflict are often very suspicious and threatened by the idea of meeting with the enemy group. This sense of threat is communicated constantly through the culture of both groups in conflict. Meeting with the other group may be interpreted as traitorous, going against the groups' interests and those participating take the risk of social exclusion to some extent. This

impacts on how much a participant will share with others outside the group which limits the ripple effect and limits the amount of societal support can be created. Steinberg (2004) in her study of dialogue patterns found that both Israelis and Palestinians reverted to ethnocentric speech and ideas after making emotional breakthroughs in the group with one another. Her explanation was that once a member of a collective felt empathy with the other group, they quickly had to take reparative thinking to justify its group's bad deeds because once the group has ended, they return to their community and risked social ostracism if they admitted empathy for the other (Steinberg, 2004). Salomon (2011) notes that although not formally researched in situations of prolonged conflict, it can be theorized based on what is known about attitude change towards the other group that a ripple effect would only be sustainable with constant reinforcement of the positive information about the other group (Salomon, 2011).

Another important element of encounter groups that requires analysis is that they are self-selecting and tend to attract mostly those who are already open to meeting with the other group. From a review of the literature, only one study found had been conducted specific to encounter groups and participants with more conservative attitudes and positions on the conflict. Maoz (2003) conducted a study of Israeli conservatives (those with right-wing opinions) and liberals (those with left-wing opinions) to look at attitude change related to openness to meeting Palestinians in an encounter group setting and attitude change towards Palestinians after meeting with them. What she found was that as expected, Israeli conservatives were less open to meeting Palestinians than Israeli liberals, however once meeting Palestinians, Israeli conservatives had a greater change in attitude towards

Palestinians than Israeli liberals. Conservative attitudes were defined by the political party with which the participant identified. Change in attitude was defined as increased trust, willingness for more contact, and feelings of commonality. It should be noted that conservatives compared to liberals still rated lower satisfaction with the encounter and when directly asked, reported that their attitudes did not change towards Palestinians. The change in attitude occurred in the multi-focal before/after questionnaires which showed a marked improvement in overall impressions and attitude change towards Palestinians when asked if they were willing to have a Palestinian neighbour, willing to meet again with Palestinians and other social-distance attitudes (Maoz, 2003).

This study illustrates that there is a difference between one's stated impression of an encounter or of the out-group and their actual internal feelings towards the encounter or the out-group. There are many conservatives in both Israeli and Palestinian societies who outwardly disparage both the other group and the idea of encounters with them, however are at the same time very curious and internally want to take part even if to simply share their opinions- why I am right and you are wrong- and then confirm their previous impressions of the other side. There is a resistance to changing one's attitudes, especially those with conservative beliefs, however this study shows that there is still an impact at least in the short term. It is not clear if a change in prejudices and social attitudes through contact translates to a change in political beliefs. A change in attitude will not necessarily mark a change in behaviour. People know that smoking is not healthy yet many still refuse to quit. A change in attitude may be abstract to the person or group who reported attitude change (Maoz, 2005).

These findings are particularly important considering in today's political landscape in Israel, political conservative minded people occupy the majority and are the most unmotivated to speak to Palestinians. Liberal minded Israelis are known to outwardly advocate for dialogue, negotiations and problem solving with Palestinians and are oriented to make concessions and compromises whereas conservative Israelis tend to be less willing to make compromises and hold more extreme positions on Palestinians (Maoz, 2003).

In contrast, Daniel Bar Tal, Alona Raviv, and Tali Freund, (1994) studies of Israelis have suggested that those with conservative attitudes do not undergo an attitude change when faced with conflicting information; instead they rationalize or discount the new information (Bar Tal, Raviv & Freund, 1994). When conservative Israelis were presented with information that contradicted their worldview, they discredited the sources of information. This is in line with social psychologists on groups in conflict that tend to seek out information that reaffirms their beliefs about the other group and ignore information that contradicts these beliefs. However, Maoz's (2003) work shows that contact can be more effective for humanizing the out-group for those higher in pre-encounter prejudice (Maoz, 2003). It should be noted that Maoz's research was conducted in 1998 at a period of hope in the peace process before it deteriorated into violence in 2000. This period of hope may have impacted the responses. Since the deterioration of the second Intifada, Israelis have tended to become more conservative in their views of Palestinians as judged by voting patterns (Salomon, 2004b).

**Conclusion**

As illustrated through a thorough analysis of the relevant literature on Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups, these groups have not been as successful in changing attitudes in the long term as theory suggests. Participants regress to pre-encounter group views within a few months and while the benefits may be dormant and able to be revived through further meetings, the ripple effect to the wider societies does not occur. In fact, while the conflict is still ongoing, each group's community pressures participants to conform to the 'us vs. them' mentality and the conflict structures remain unchanged.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Power Asymmetry, Culture and Communications, and Collective Narratives**

Chapter two laid out the background for what the academic literature says on how Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups developed, the different approaches taken and the evaluated impacts both in the short and long term on participants and on the societies they inhabit. In chapter three, this paper analyzes the key themes or categories that appear in much of the literature.

The reasons why Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups haven't been as successful as theorized is complex and contains multiple reasons and variables. Grounded Theory as a methodology allows the data and analysis generated in the literature on encounter groups to be categorized through the process of comparison of the various analyses and their indicators. That is, the examples illustrated and their analysis in the literature can be categorized based on the emerging observations of the writer. This chapter will organize the repeating themes that emerge in the literature into a series of categories in order to gain better understanding of the dynamics that occur in encounter groups. The themes will be organized into the following interrelated and intermeshed categories that affect the outcomes of the groups: power asymmetry, culture and communication, and collective narratives.

#### **Power Asymmetry**

Power asymmetry between Israelis and Palestinians and how this affects group dynamics is a major focus in the literature. This is an outcome of the fact that most encounter groups

have been between Israeli citizens- Jewish and Palestinian. Although Jewish and Palestinian Israelis have equal rights by law, Jewish Israelis enjoy more benefits from government, non-government institutions and foreign charities. Additionally, because of the conflict with West Bank and Gazan Palestinians, Israeli Jews tend to be suspicious of Israeli Palestinians. According to Professor Sammy Smooha's 2006 Index of Arab-Jewish relations in Israel, "separation exists today between Jews and Arabs in places of residence, in schools, in institutions and in family and friendship networks" (Smooha, 2006, p. 17). Israeli Palestinians have a harder time finding jobs because of lower education levels, lack of employment opportunities where they live and discrimination by Jewish Israeli employers (Shamir, 2005). The result is that almost 50% of Palestinian Israelis live below the poverty line (National Insurance Institute Israel, 2008).

For Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, the power asymmetry is even greater and therefore also a barrier to dialogue. Israelis live at one of the highest levels in the Middle East. The GDP per capita is \$28,600 (Central Bureau of Investigations (CIA) Factbook, 2009) in Israel compared to \$2,900 (CIA Factbook, 2008) in the West Bank and Gaza. Infant mortality in Israel is 4.17 deaths/1,000 live births (CIA Factbook, 2009) compared to 15.41 deaths/1,000 live births in the West Bank and Gaza (CIA Factbook, 2008). Life expectancy for Israelis is 80.86 years (CIA Factbook, 2009) and 74.78 years for Palestinians (CIA Factbook, 2008). The unemployment rate is only 6.2% in Israel yet 26% in the West Bank and Gaza (World Data Bank, 2008). In terms of education levels as an indicator of development, both Israelis and Palestinians have high literacy rates- 95.3% for the West Bank and Gaza (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006) and 95% for Israelis (Israel

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004), however large gaps exist in highest education levels attained with 22.9% of Israelis have attained BA degrees or higher (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008) and only 5.7% of the West Bank population has a BA degree or higher (no data is available from Gaza) (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Due to the lack of employment for Palestinians and lower standard of living compared to Israelis (approximately 10% of the GDP of Israelis), it is apparent that this impacts on basic needs (food, clothing, housing) and core needs (health, education) for much of the population.

Additionally, Palestinians have been suffering from the occupation since 1967, which entails a lack of freedom and agency which impacts their daily lives. Beyond not having control of many simple day-to-day abilities such as movement in parts of the West Bank and the ability to easily leave the West Bank and Gaza, there is also the issue that they do not have an official and independent state. Currently the Palestinian Authority is an administrative body set up to govern Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and only has partial control of lands and population with Israel retaining administrative control over the majority of the West Bank land and population and the borders of both the West Bank and Gaza. Even those areas of the West Bank and Gaza that are self-governed by the Palestinian Authority and Hamas are considered rife with corruption. This inability to properly self-govern impacts the population, how they view themselves and how they view the Israelis. Although there is less academic study of encounter groups between West Bank and Gazan Palestinians and Israelis, it is recognized in the literature that the two populations (Israeli Jews and Palestinians) differ in social class, income, political power, ownership and control

of land, education quality and attainment and more generally, civil and legal rights (Salomon, 2004b).

Part of the critical assumptions of the Contact Hypothesis is that the groups involved are equal in status in terms of power. Only under conditions of symmetry is the encounter assumed to induce a positive change in attitude and weakening of stereotypes (Maoz, 2000b; Amir, 1969). In fact, contact between individuals of unequal status, where the external or historical status imbalance is maintained, can act to perpetuate existing negative stereotypes (Maoz, 2000a) and create a hostile environment. A symmetrical encounter will be responsive to the needs of the participants and more likely to stimulate interest, motivation and therefore involvement (Maoz, 2005).

The majority of the encounter group literature that focuses on power asymmetry involve Palestinian Israelis and Jewish Israelis as unequal citizens of Israel; the focus is on Israelis as a majority population and the Palestinian Israelis as a minority population living within the State of Israel. Jewish Israelis as the majority control most of the material resources and represented by a wide range of governmental and non-governmental institutions which means that the majority population controls the power within the state. As minority populations suffering from a lack of power, Palestinian Israelis are more likely to become involved in grass roots activities such as encounter groups as a substitute for true agency in Israeli society (Suleiman, 2004). From personal experience, I believe this to be true of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza as well who are the majority at inter-group peace conferences. In the absence of ways to gain agency, they partake in encounter groups as well

as other means such as political violence and involvement with Palestinian political organizations. Another reason for greater Palestinian participation than Israeli participation is that for Israelis, life is relatively normal. Israelis have freedom of movement, a vibrant economy and relative safety. For Palestinians who are often limited in movement to their geographic area (city or region) unless they receive permission from the Israeli army to enter Israeli territory and because of the widespread poverty, Palestinians come to encounter groups to escape their reality.

When the two groups meet, the dynamics are often filled with conflict. Maoz et al. (2002) conducted an encounter group comprised of university students and found that the discussions were marked by a lack of mutual listening and understanding (Maoz et al, 2002). The two groups were motivated by differing goals: the Israelis wanted to get along with the Palestinians, the Palestinians were looking for structural change and acknowledgement of their suffering from the Israelis. Each side attempted to dominate the power dynamics of the room through interruption and attempting to change topics and to be morally superior.

There is some dispute about how these power dynamics play out in the encounter group. Some studies noted that the outside power asymmetry is recreated within the encounter group where the Israelis lead the agenda and discussions and the Palestinians are silenced (Maoz et al., 2004). Others claim that there is an opposite asymmetrical power relationship but with the Palestinians controlling the room (Maoz, 2000a; Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004) through their superior knowledge of the conflict and their situation as a victimized group. Discussion of the conflict serves as a source of empowerment for the Palestinian participants

who have more knowledge of the conflict than the Israelis particularly related to their minority status and how this impacts their lives (Maoz, 2000a). Israeli participants are often aware only of what is reported in the Israeli media or what they themselves experienced with Palestinians in the army. Palestinians have more direct knowledge and exposure to the conflict and the Palestinian media reports on different issues and facts on the ground. Each side's media generally reports on the issues that pertain to and impact their readership/viewers so much information will be missing to both sides. There is no indication of the differences between the two groups studied as to how the asymmetrical relationship was created to the benefit of one group or the other, only analysis of the dynamics that lead to power asymmetry.

Encounter groups discussed in the literature are almost always initiated, lead and directed by Israelis therefore implicitly constructed by the group with greater power. Their purpose based on the Contact Hypothesis to promote tolerance, togetherness and co-existence between Israelis and Palestinians, is viewed by the Palestinian participants as serving the ideological interests of the more powerful at the cost of Palestinian interests (Maoz, 2000b). This is not to say that many Palestinians do not have an interest in tolerance, togetherness or co-existence, however at best this tactic is viewed by Palestinians as diverting their ideologies and interests and at worst, at the expense of their ideologies and interests. Although all encounter groups in the literature contained an open discussion style to allow the participants to discuss what interests them, by the Israelis setting the agenda and structure of encounter groups put the Palestinian participants in a passive position of having to either accept the agenda or work against it.

Within the literature, this is illustrated by groups often having difficulty related to the agenda and discussion topics. Because the two groups have differing and sometimes conflicting goals, a conflict over the structure of the group itself often occurs. For example, in one study, an encounter group comprising teachers were given the task of discussing issues in education that both groups have in common. The challenge became how much is the outside conflict related to the topic and how much should the outside conflict be discussed. In the study Maoz (2000a) found that the entire first five years of nine years of discussions centred primarily around the conflict itself and further along it lessened to where it only occupied a third of the discussion topics of the final two years (Maoz, 2000a). This reflects a continuous struggle between the Israeli and Palestinian participants in the project with the Israelis struggling against discussing the wider conflict and its impacts and preferring to concentrate on neutral topics and the Palestinians insisting on bringing the dynamics of the outside conflict into the room.

In many of the encounter groups studied, Israelis attempted to relate to the Palestinians as individuals while the Palestinians attempted to relate to the Israelis as representatives of their group. The Palestinians needed to first concentrate on the intergroup relations in order to move on to interpersonal relations while the Israelis required the reverse order to move forward. This is understandable as Palestinians needs are related to issues of structure, fairness and from their perspective, justice. Israelis have a need to first trust the individual as a representative of their group before moving on to the larger issues that require change. This “kabuki dance” replays itself over and over again in the literature and from experience with the two sides struggling to control whether to focus on the intergroup aspect first or the

interpersonal aspect first. Because the needs of the two groups differ so greatly, the encounter group experience is often not fully satisfactory for either side (Maoz, 2003 regarding Israeli Jewish conservatives; Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Maoz et al., 2004). The back and forth between intergroup and interpersonal means much of the time is wasted on deciding the focus of the encounter and therefore which group to satisfy.

Ifat Maoz (2000b) developed recommendations for encounter groups that are in contrast to the classic contact paradigms of Allport whose Contact Hypothesis does not take into account the surrounding socio-political environment, particularly an asymmetrical power relationship. Her perspective views the structured intergroup encounter as filled with political context which mirrors to some degree the external reality of conflict (Maoz, 2000b). To balance this, she proposes viewing encounter group experiences not simply as bringing the stakeholders to the room to lead to positive change in attitudes, rather to view the encounter as a competition in which different groups “seek to express their identities and promote different, sometimes conflicting, goals and agendas” (Maoz, 2000b, p. 138).

This recommendation is based on the lessons learned in a medium term experiment between Israelis and Palestinians. Ifat Maoz, Shoshana Steinberg, Dan Bar-On, and Mueen Fakhereldeen (2002) took the lessons learned from Sherif’s experiments of having groups in conflict work towards a superordinate goal and tried to apply it to Israelis and Palestinians. In this case, mixed groups of Jewish Israeli and Palestinian Israeli high school teachers worked together over a school year meeting once or twice a month towards the development of a study unit on Jewish and Arab affairs to be taught in their respective schools. The study

unit was to include linguistic, cultural and historical information about each group as a way to get to know one another in a non-threatening manner. The study unit was not to touch on the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians; Maoz and her team felt that there is enough cultural knowledge to share as a way for the other group (Israeli or Palestinian) to become more familiar with one another. As part of the experiment, the groups were instructed that no political discussions were allowed between the participants as a way for the two sides to get to know one another without the burden of intergroup conflicts arising. The results were that all teams ending up devoting at least two sessions directly on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict although explicitly banned from the project and less than half the groups got beyond the planning stages. The final evaluation questionnaires showed that the majority of both groups believed that they received something positive from the experience by learning about the other but low satisfaction from the joint pedagogical work (Maoz et al., 2002).

The main issue, however, was that the Palestinians and some of the Israelis wanted to discuss the surrounding political issues while the majority of the Israelis wanted to stick to the agenda of creating a joint study unit. The group that wanted to discuss the political situation eventually convinced the group that was against the idea. It is evident that for the Israeli planners of the project, Arab affairs in Israel were not directly related to the outside conflict but for Palestinian Israelis the two were intimately intertwined.

The majority did not complete the study unit. Those that did finish the study unit were the Israeli participants only as the Palestinians were not interested in collaborating on the project; they were interested in discussing the outside conflict and used this project as an

opportunity to meet with Israelis. The Palestinians, as a minority with less power, saw the notion of cooperation and joint work as advancing the interests of the Jewish majority by perpetuating and legitimizing the asymmetrical balance of power. The Palestinians reportedly saw the limitation of not discussing the outside conflict as diverting the discourse of the encounter away from the minority's group expressions of dissent, conflict, and subversive messages. By promoting a different agenda centred on political discussion of the conflict and by not taking part in the group project when their needs were not satisfied, they were able to correct the inherent bias against them and work towards their interests. Additionally, Palestinian Israelis as the minority know much about the culture, language and history of Israeli Jews while Israeli Jews do not know much about Palestinians. Therefore the objective of the study group- creating a study unit on Jewish and Arab affairs as a way to get to know one another- was for the benefit of the Jewish Israelis but little practical benefit for Palestinian Israelis. It is true that in asymmetrical power situations, the powerless always knows more about the powerful than the reverse.

In the above example, the participants on both sides could not agree on the project's agenda so the project failed. This coupled with the main political dispute between Israeli-Jews and Palestinians makes joint work even for what is perceived as a superordinate goal, very difficult. A study unit on Arab and Jewish affairs within Israel was thought of as a neutral topic only by the Jewish Israeli initiators who felt that the structural power asymmetry between Jews and Arabs within Israel and the conflict in the West Bank and Gaza can be separated from the daily lives of both peoples. The Palestinian Israelis as the group with less power in the society obviously felt that this project was not neutral and the

outside conflict had to be part of the process and final product (Maoz et al., 2002). The Palestinian participants responded to the socio-political imbalance of power with the Israeli group by stressing the issues of conflict, discrimination, and inequality in the encounter dialogue, and attempted to challenge and alter the status quo, which they regard as illegitimate and unstable (Maoz, 2000b).

In contrast, a study by Baha Zuabi (as cited in Salomon, 2009) of soccer teams made up of Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli children showed that compared to uni-national soccer teams, their impressions and attitudes towards each other's group were significantly more positive. In this case, the two groups were mixed as a result of the club's distance from their homes and not as a forced co-existence project. The teammates had a common goal that united them: it was not just a common activity that demanded cooperation. Winning a game as the common goal was more important relative to the national identity of the team mates (Salomon, 2009). Although the two studies are very different in that they are evaluating different aspects of encounter experiences, three reasons help explain why the project by Maoz et al. failed and Zuabi's was successful. 1) Maoz's project's goals were considered superordinate only by one side thereby putting the other side in the uncomfortable situation of either accepting a situation they were uncomfortable with or fighting against it. 2) The goals of Zuabi's group were not forced on them therefore both the experiences and the results were more natural and neutral. People who believe that they are being forced into a position they may not agree with, particularly in situations of conflict, often react negatively. 3) Children although aware of the outside conflict and many of the dynamics, are not

politically aware to the same extent as adults and may be more willing to set aside differences for the sake of a common goal that they believe in.

Minority populations in a position of powerlessness know more about the majority population as the powerful than vice versa, just as children know more about their parents and slaves knew more about their masters. This knowledge of the majority population is used by the Palestinians to help them compensate for the power asymmetry. In some of the literature, the Palestinian superiority of knowledge about the conflict helped the Israeli participants both understand the Palestinian side and receive something positive from the focus on the outside conflict (Maoz, 2000a). In a long term group from the 1990s, Maoz (2000a) reported that Israeli participants expressed positive attitudes of the Palestinian's participants' knowledge of the dynamics and impacts of the conflict. This happened at an advanced stage where previously the Israeli participants had been reluctant to discuss the outside conflict. However, in later literature, the trend is towards the opposite dynamics where Israeli participants felt deeply uncomfortable with Palestinian knowledge and control of the group (Maoz, 2000a). This may be explained by the time period of the encounter group itself. Before the Oslo agreement of 1993, Israelis had little knowledge of the dynamics and views in Palestinian society. By the Second Intifada of 2000, Israelis were losing belief in the ability to come to an agreement with the Palestinians. Therefore the surrounding socio-political factors will influence the perception of experience and whether positive or negative.

One of the key issues interwoven into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the idea of threat and fear. Fear to power status and collective identity are interwoven both within the conflict and within the encounter group. There is a fear that if Israelis listen to Palestinians, they will somehow lose their collective identity (Maoz et al., 2004) and their hegemony over Palestinians. Israelis fear that losing their power over Palestinians will negatively impact their security. This fear of losing hegemonic control is based on the history of the Jewish people of powerlessness to majority population's abuse. This history is long and ingrained both to the religious and cultural aspects of Judaism therefore in the psychology of the people.

The sense of threat to Jewish national and cultural hegemony can be illustrated by a study by Nava Sonnenschein, Zvi Bekerman and Gabriel Horenczyk (2010). The study described the dynamics of an Israeli-Palestinian encounter group reported that Israeli hegemony was the hardest aspect to alter because it is interwoven with the sense of existential threat. The Jewish participants felt that if the power structure was reversed and the Palestinians had the power, the Jews would face the threat of death or expulsion much as Jews had throughout European history. This sense of threat lasted through much of the encounter group. After many meetings, at the end of the encounter group experience, the Israeli participants reported having a better understanding of the power structures of the Jewish majority vs. the Palestinian minority in Israel. Most were reportedly willing to change key areas for a more equitable distribution of power in the country particularly when they were able to separate between collective identity (as Jewish Israelis) and the state's (Jewish) character (Sonnenschein, Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2010).

According to Maoz (2000a) Majority-Minority Power Relation theories states that majority populations will attempt to keep control through direct social pressure to produce compliance in the minority population (Maoz, 2000a). Minority populations tend to take an indirect, private, latent, or delayed approach to capturing power (Maoz, 2000a) to slowly convince the majority population of the justness of its position.

However the literature does not illustrate this dynamic. Although Israelis amongst themselves will be assertive and aggressive, when they argue with Palestinians in an encounter group they are often hesitant, qualifying their arguments, backtracking, and providing context to their statements (Maoz, 2003). This could be because they are put on the defensive by Palestinian participants who claim that Israelis have suffered less yet are the more powerful group (economically and militarily), therefore the expectation for change is on the Israelis.

Because of the nature of the outside conflict with Israelis controlling and the Palestinians suffering greater damage to their society, often the power is shifted to the Palestinian participants through use of emotionalism. Israelis participants generally sympathize to a degree with the suffering of the Palestinians and often this can create feelings of empowerment for the Palestinian participants through sympathy. This dynamic is apparent both in the literature and from encounter group experiences.

In encounter group meetings where the focus is on a more neutral topic, Israelis tend to control the power dynamics within the encounter groups though speaking more often and for

longer, taking control of the agenda and other leadership roles, taking more active stands on issues and an overall greater impact on the wider group (Maoz, 2000a; Maoz, 2000b).

In encounter group meetings that focused on the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians where the outside conflict was discussed, Palestinians tended to attend more often and in larger numbers. Additionally, Palestinians and not Israelis tended to have control of the room: Palestinians talked more and for longer than the Israeli participants and Palestinians tended to initiate more topics and make assertions that needed to be defended by the Israelis (Maoz, 2000a). The power asymmetry reverses with Palestinians having a greater power at the micro level of the encounter group. The Palestinians are empowered by this context while the Israelis were left being defensive and had difficulty defending their views (Maoz & Ellis, 2003).

Encounter groups can be seen partially as an aid to correcting the power imbalance by pointing out to the participants that Palestinians are largely powerless dealing with internalized oppression and Israelis are largely powerful (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004). Although in many ways this is apparent, this fact may not be fully understood by many of the Israelis who participate. Part of the goal of an encounter group, as outlined in chapter two, is to aid in correcting this power imbalance by allowing the Palestinian participants to voice their frustrations about their situation. In fact, Sara Helman (2002) believes that dialogue encounters are premised on the idea that the conflict between the two groups is based on a power asymmetry and the purpose of the encounter is the undoing of this asymmetry within the confines of the group (Helman, 2002). According to Helman, this is

accomplished through designing the group dynamics towards reflexivity- that is that the participants gain knowledge of the structural power imbalance that exists, acknowledge it and work towards its change. In her opinion, the Israeli participants are to listen and internalize these ideas. However, none of the groups where the focus was on power asymmetry attempted first to point out to the participants the dynamics that are occurring; that is, the facilitators relied on the Palestinian participants explaining how they are powerless and expected the Israeli participants to internalize this idea. In the literature, this seemed to produce defensive posturing by the Israeli participants who at times internalized this lesson but others did not.

In some senses, the concept of power symmetry is implicit in the structure of encounter groups. All encounter groups in the literature had equal participation of both Israelis and Palestinians, both groups came from similar socio-economic or educational backgrounds, and strove to have a gender balance when possible. Additionally, all encounter groups had both a Palestinian and an Israeli facilitator to co-facilitate and generally, attempts were made for the groups to be conducted in both Arabic and Hebrew which will be discussed below. However, as discussed above, the fact that almost all encounter groups are initiated and managed by Israelis, creates a structural asymmetry from the beginning.

In the encounter groups in the literature from the 1990s and before, the asymmetrical dynamics between Israelis and Palestinians were more apparent within the group dynamics with Israelis speaking more, being more assertive and Palestinians not voicing their opinions strongly. Additionally, Palestinian participants were known not to show up, arrive late and

come unprepared to encounter groups (Maoz, 1997; Maoz, 2000a; Maoz, 2000b). The passivity of the Palestinian participants in the earlier groups can also be seen as a way to compensate for the power asymmetry of both the group and the outside conflict by punishing the Israeli participants (Maoz, 2000a). If one feels there is no way to win, why play at all. This form of passivity changed when specifically discussing political issues related to Palestinians as a minority in Israel and their identity began to be discussed. It is also reported that in the past, Palestinians allowed Israelis to control the discussion by limiting them to an inter-personal nature at what was termed as the initial “good intentions” stage of the discussions (Suleiman, 2004). At this stage, both groups would talk about what united them as opposed to what divided them. However, the Palestinians would later move the conversation to the inter-group level which focused on the divisions between the groups (Suleiman, 2004). These dynamics are quite reversed in the later literature where Palestinians tended to open with their concerns and not backseat their concerns for the good of the group process.

Maoz et al. (2004) believes that underneath the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians in the encounter group are a set of essential questions the answers to which the two groups are trying to establish through dominance: “Who defines the relationship?, Should it be co-existence or conflict?, Who is more moral?, Who is suffering more?, Who is to blame?, What is the right solution...?, How close can or should Jews and Palestinians get while the situation remains as it is?” (Maoz et al., 2004, p. 1081). Since structured encounters between groups in conflict reflect and are influenced by the social–political state of conflict in which

the encounter is embedded, it is natural for these questions to arise, however it is not necessarily apparent to those involved.

Because of the nature of encounter groups involving groups in conflict and the resulting questions that arise, groups tend to have a split personality. Israelis and Palestinians at times come together to talk or take part in a joint activity, they argue and disagree but at the same time, they may find commonalities and positive elements to share. The goal of the encounter group is to create an equal relationship between the participants so they feel free to explore their feelings and experiences. This is an artificial arena created in spite of the conflict going on outside and in spite of the asymmetrical power that Israel has over the outside conflict. This dichotomy is especially true in those encounter groups that have at its core goal as co-existence which involves closeness, commonalities, and cooperation (Maoz, 2004).

This goal of closeness and cooperation creates interesting dynamics particularly from the side of Israeli participants towards Palestinians. In some encounter groups, Israelis have adopted the Palestinian narrative and fight on their behalf. This adopting of the other's narrative has a paternalistic side where the Israelis doing so generally marginalizes the Palestinians in the encounter group who are not given room to speak in their own names (Maoz et al., 2004). In other instances, Israelis have taken the responsibility for the conflict and work to change the Israeli mindset but do not criticize the Palestinian mindset (Maoz, Bekerman, & Sheftel, 2007). This may be a way to move the dialogue forward where the Israelis feel that if they take responsibility for their own actions, the Palestinians will do the same and the dialogue can move on to solution based thinking. However, in the literature,

this does not happen. The Israelis at times take some responsibility for the conflict, the Palestinians do not. This creates some frustrations with the Israeli participants and at times, the Israelis empathize with the Palestinians to the point where they are not expected to take responsibility as they are the greater victim.

This aspect is further enforced by the fact that the authors and researchers of the information are mostly Israeli Jews and sometimes Israeli Palestinians. All seem to give a lot of detail to analyzing and deconstructing the Israelis and none of the Palestinians. This may be because of the asymmetrical relationship where Palestinians are perceived to be suffering more than Israelis. Analysis of encounter groups is often viewed from the perspective of Israeli participants attempting to hold on to their advantage as the powerful without analyzing that perhaps some of what the Israelis feel or say is legitimate and not entirely related to power. For example, in Maoz et al. 2004, one of the Israeli participants wants to start a clean slate for the two groups and struggles against discussing issues related to collective identity and history because he feels it is a dead end to finding solutions. He is future oriented and the rest of the group, both Palestinians and Israelis, is past oriented. But the dynamics of the encounter are analyzed by the authors from the perspective of the individual losing his power advantage in Israeli society. Although this may be partially correct, this idea is not entertained by the group or the analysis.

Because of this power asymmetry in the outside conflict, each side will change in different ways: the Israelis tend to confront the nature of their position as members of the group that has power. In encounter group settings, the Israeli participants desire to be liberal,

egalitarian, and humane; however this clashes with their position of control over another people (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004). This position gives rise to feelings of superiority and to patronizing attitudes towards the Palestinians (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004). The Palestinians when meeting Israelis in the encounter group begin to realize the degree to which they have internalized their oppression. Their goal becomes a struggle for empowerment and liberation from their own oppression (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004).

Repeating the power asymmetry in the encounter group arena can have negative impacts on relations between the two groups by reinforcing the already pre-existing feelings of Israeli domination (Maoz, 2004). Maoz (2004) believes that there must be power symmetry between participants and in facilitation and that means that corrective power may be applied where Palestinians are allowed to dominate the group as a remedy to the outside conflict (Maoz, 2004). However any form of power asymmetry even corrective, can prove problematic.

Symmetrical power dynamics are equally important with regards to facilitation. In a well facilitated encounter group, participants of both sides should actively participate in discussions and activities equally (Maoz, 2004; Maoz, 2005), have equal speaking time (Maoz, 2005), equal representation in terms of numbers (Maoz, 2004) and the encounter should be conducive to feeling free to voice feelings. As was the case in all encounter groups found in the literature, the facilitators should be from both groups meaning one Israeli and one Palestinian and facilitating should be equally shared between them (Maoz, 2004). However it should be noted that having a facilitator from each group is not enough.

Facilitators should be equal in terms of amount of facilitation experience (Maoz, 2005) and in terms of how outspoken they are. Having one facilitator who speaks more often or is more commanding than the other can impact on the group power dynamics.

According to Ramzi Suleiman (2004), facilitators tend to stress commonalities between participants and avoid issues that may fracture group relations. This is done to humanize one another as this is often the first opportunity that either group has to get to know the other (Suleiman, 2004). Much of the literature illustrates that facilitators often take the *Human Relations Approach*, however it tends to allow issues that may need to arise to stay hidden under the surface. Use of language as a function of power asymmetry is a good example. Most groups documented have been between Israeli Jewish and Arab citizens. Palestinian Israelis learn Hebrew in school and use it almost on a day-to-day basis. Israeli Jews rarely learn Arabic in school and it is almost never used. Because Israeli Jews control power within the country, the Arabic language (and therefore Palestinian identity) is imbued with low symbolic power (Bekerman & Maoz, 2005). In encounter groups in the literature, Hebrew was used more often since both groups speak the language. Even in encounter groups that had a translator for each language, Palestinian participants wanting to react quickly would switch to Hebrew and the group would revert to speaking Hebrew.

The use of Hebrew as the language of the encounter group seems to allow the Israeli participants to have the balance of power at least at the beginning of encounter groups. This is because the encounter group is imbedded in a socio-political reality where a power asymmetry outside the group exists and this inevitably becomes reflected within the group

dynamics as well. This use of Hebrew as the common language perpetuates the asymmetry as it is the language of the dominant culture (Maoz et al., 2004). At times the power asymmetry is replicated with the Israelis being stronger than the Palestinians (Moaz et al., 2004; Steinberg, 2004), however other instances the situation is reversed where the Palestinians form a stronger group than the Israelis (Maoz, 2000b) as a means to correct for the outside situation. The use of Hebrew is a problematic. It is the primary language of the Israelis in the group but not the Palestinians. Additionally, Palestinians come from a culture that does not encourage debate and argument (Zupnik, 2000) and debate in a foreign language puts the Palestinians at a disadvantage. This is very much reflected in the transcripts of encounter group dialogue. The Palestinian responses often do not match the question that was asked of them by the Israelis and many of the Palestinian responses do not make sense or come off as overly emotional compared to the Israeli responses as discussed above. Language, culture and communication become intermeshed.

### **Culture and Communications**

As illustrated, when Israelis and Palestinians meet, they attempt to find ways to interact with one another. As the literature shows, this is done through argument, acts of domination and subordination, and emotional manipulation (Maoz, 2001; Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On, & Fakhereldeen, 2002). The dominant communication style used by both Israelis and Palestinians in encounter group situations is argument (Hubbard, 1997).

Argument is a central component to any encounter group situation with groups in conflict. Eventually, the core issues that are causing the conflict will be raised in some way

within the group. Argument plays a central role in the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians (Maoz, 2001). Participants create arguments with rhetorical goals in mind and design their arguments to position themselves as reasonable and right. Those involved in the argument will choose their rhetorical device to illicit a specific response, narrate a particular version of reality or diffuse blame away from the speaker (Maoz, 2001). Maoz (2001) views argument as an interaction process where Israelis and Palestinians co-construct their reality; each group actively building a version of the group members' own reality (Maoz, 2001). This is accomplished through the use of specific framing to make sense of their situation. Through the use of argument, groups in conflict are able to make their case and claim legitimacy to claims (Maoz, 2001) which frames the situation in a particular way to create a collective narrative. The use of collective narrative will be discussed below.

According to Maoz (2001), Israelis and Palestinians have a particular way of arguing. Both groups use various discourse-argument mechanisms to construct a version of social reality that supports member goals of that group. Meaning is negotiated between the groups by attempting to reason with the other and move their argument and the other group along a pathway of concepts and ideas that influence decisions. Both sides reason from fixed ideological positions "mired in routines of previously existing interpretive repertoires" (Maoz, 2001, p. 407).

The mechanisms used include question-asking, collaborative arguments, a strategy to limit topic space, deconstructing the other's logic and rhetorically designed unexpressed assumptions (Maoz, 2001). Generally, argument starts in the literature with questions or

requests for information. This can range from genuine curiosity to taking an aggressive stand in the form of a question. This is done to keep the core values of each group intact (Maoz, 2001). So for example, Israelis want to view themselves as liberal and not racist (Maoz, 2001), Palestinians work for inter-group face saving. Tactics are used to mask some of the uglier emotions that the individuals in the group feel are off limits yet still are fuelling the argument. The resulting dialogue amounts to blame allocation where participants find ways to attack the other group without outwardly blaming. This can be accomplished, for example, by giving prominence to significant historical occurrences that have little chance of resolution or consensus.

The challenge with question-asking is often there are questions that cannot be answered or that are meant rhetorically to win the balance of power. Each group tries to restrict the voice of the other or lead the other to a speaker-desired response (Maoz, 2001). The result is that the argument stage does not move beyond initial confrontation. Additionally, both Israelis and Palestinians tend to speak as if every issue is of paramount importance and as if each issue is zero-sum.

Power dynamics within encounter groups can be judged by how much talking participants of each group do. Those who talk more or take more turns tend to control the group (Maoz, 2000b). This can be accomplished through the amount of assertions that are made, offering opinions, making suggestions, initiating speaking, addressing the group as a whole rather than as individuals, proposing the agenda for the meeting, and issuing directives (Maoz, 2000b). Asymmetrical power dynamics are marked by one person or one group speaking

much more often, making long speeches and monologues, interrupting others, using confrontational statements (Maoz et al., 2004).

Much of the literature highlights the power dynamics related to speech. Shoshana Steinberg (2004) noted in a study of two encounter groups that Israeli and Palestinian participants tended to make long monologues. The two groups used monologues to get their point across but the ideas never found common ground (Steinberg, 2004). Maoz (2001) conducted a study of an encounter group to judge if the power dynamics were symmetrical between the two groups by choosing two indicators: the amount each group speaks and the use of challenging or examination questions. Based on Paradigms of Interaction Analysis, the amount of speaking each group does can be said to be an indicator of control; the more one speaks, the more one controls the content and direction of the discussion. The use of questions as an indicator is based on the idea that asking questions focuses the topic to the choosing of the person asking and not to the respondent. By questioning, one holds the respondent responsible for the answer. Maoz found that over the entire encounter group, the Israeli participants had a higher rate of speaking than Palestinians (64% vs. 36%) (Maoz, 2001, p. 197), however by the end of the project the asymmetry in amount of speaking had disappeared. Israelis asked Palestinians challenging questions much more often (59% vs. 36%) (Maoz, 2001, p. 197). There were also challenging questions between Israeli to Israeli participants but none between Palestinian to Palestinian participants (Maoz, 2001). The author views the levelling off of the power asymmetry as each group learning from the other's tactics.

One of the goals of argument is for one party to convince the other party by grounding arguments in what are assumed to be mutually acceptable assumptions and issues (Maoz, 2001). Claims are made followed by evidence or proof. Proof for the arguments is often exaggerated and unsubstantiated but serve the speaker's goal, which is to cast the other as the antagonist (Maoz, 2001). A tactic to do this is to project one's group as rational and the other as an irrational antagonist. Each side believes that its disagreements flow from legitimate empirical differences; each side easily naturalizes the rationality of their own positions and view their positions as realistic, objective, and rational, while viewing the positions of the other side as irrational and biased (Maoz, 2001). This is often accomplished by using universally recognized and accepted symbols to prove their argument such as International Law, historical knowledge, the Bible, the Koran, etc.

Maoz's (2001) analysis of arguments of an encounter group showed the Israeli participants attempted to be viewed as liberal yet preserve their power advantage. Maoz claims Israelis do this through the unspoken racism that they harbour for the Palestinians. It should be noted that Maoz does not look at the Palestinian views as anything but legitimate as the powerless group which is an unfair and unhelpful characterization common in the literature. The mostly Israeli Jewish authors and a handful of Palestinian Israeli authors view the Israeli Jewish side as having the burden of change and no analysis or criticism of the Palestinian side was found.

What is apparent in the literature that illustrates the argument patterns in encounter groups is that the Palestinians as a weaker minority group use the tactic of being unified in

their rhetoric and use this strategy to delegitimize the position of the dominant powerful group. This is often done by a speaker stating a position and participants supply support. This tactic is a reflection how subordinate groups operate within the constraints imposed on them by majority populations in order to be heard (Maoz, 2001).

In argument, winning is about consistency of argument and presentation, actively engaging in critical argument, proper framing of arguments, challenging and objecting to statements that one doesn't agree with (Meyers, Brashers & Hanner, 2000). In the literature, the Palestinians attempt to deconstruct the structure of Israeli society while the Israelis are attempting to preserve the structure of their society as they see the attempt to deconstruct or even criticize as an existential threat. From experience, Palestinian participants are more likely to use universally recognized and accepted symbols to give evidence of their assertions while Israelis are more likely to use future oriented logic to substantiate their claims. For example, on the issue of Palestinian refugees' desire to return to what is today Israel, Palestinians will often quote international law and United Nations resolutions that support this idea. Israelis tend to ignore these assertions and attempt to refocus the argument on whether it is logical for millions of refugees to become citizens. In the end, the argument is not won or lost. Rather it reaches a point in the logic string where nothing further can be said about the topic (Maoz, 2001); each side presents its entrenched arguments rather than creating understanding (Salomon, 2002).

Culture is an important concept to discuss in conflict and dialogue although there is little written on the subject of Israeli and Palestinian culture and how culture impacts dialogue

between these two groups. Culture can dictate how the group members speak to one another, what areas of discussion are of importance, and how groups interpret the information they receive. For example, there are cultures that have a difficult time with argument and conflict and there are cultures that seem to thrive on it. Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs are two groups who live side by side yet have very different cultural backgrounds. Israeli Jews today, regardless of their ethnic background, tend to have a Western orientation and Palestinians tend to have an Eastern Arab orientation. Orientation in this case refers to mental awareness of where one sees themselves connected. Palestinians view themselves connected to the wider Arab world linguistically, culturally and sympathetically. Israelis orient themselves towards the areas of the world that give the country the most political support: North America and Western Europe. These are the spheres of influence for these groups. It is crucial for facilitators and participants to have an understanding of the cultural concepts of both Israelis and Palestinians.

It is important to note that setting out cultural concepts of Israelis and Palestinians as with any culture, risks essentialization. Cultural traits, that are foreign to the observer, often seem to dominate as they tend to stand out to those who are not used to such traits. It is important to recognize that to both Israelis and Palestinians, certain cultural traits will stand out as they are new to the other group. Cultural traits such as those described below, are important to understand as their novelty to the other group can create tensions though misinterpreting the intentions. At the same time, it must be recognized that cultural generalizations can be limiting as well. In no way are the cultural traits outlined in this paper meant to act as sweeping generalizations of either group rather they are simply observations found both in

the literature and in the author's experiences that readers and practitioners should be aware of.

Palestinians as part of the wider Arab world are dominated by key cultural concepts that dictate communication patterns between members of that group. These include *Musayra* (accommodation), repetition, emotionalism, respect for the honour of the speaker, and the concept of saving face.

*Musayara* is an Arab communication pattern meaning 'to accommodate' or 'to go along with' and comes from the core values of Arab culture: honour, hospitality, and collectivism (Maoz & Ellis, 2003; Patai, 2002). It orients the speaker towards harmonious social relations, indirection and concern for face saving of the addressee (Maoz & Ellis, 2003). There are four communication features to *Musayra*: repetition, indirectness, elaboration, and affectiveness (Maoz & Ellis, 2003). Repetition of beliefs and important statements are common in the Arab world particularly when giving compliments and in areas of hospitality. The concept of complimenting and praising others occurs mostly in situations when the addressee is of a different social status as the speaker; to show respect for a higher social status or to make a person of lower social status feel comfortable and accepted (Patai, 2002; Zupnik, 2000). Repetition in argument makes the statement more believable to the listener; the more a statement is repeated, the more believable it is (Patai, 2002). This argument style is in contrast to Western style logic where what is stated is generally what is meant and there is no need for repetition. Indirect speech is consistent with collectivist societies. It is a strategy to be interpersonally cautious and responsive to the context by facilitating politeness

and face saving (Maoz & Ellis, 2003). Elaboration is used to further express the idea and at the same time helps affirm the social positions of the speakers. Affectiveness is the use of emotionalism to help identify with the speaker on a personal level and maintain a positive public face.

Repetition and face saving are not tied directly to *Musayra* and are often employed irrespective of how polite a speaker is attempting to seem. Arabs tend to use repetition to stress the importance of what is being said (Patai, 2002). As explained above, repetition is a common trait used to communicate how important an idea is. The more the idea is repeated, the more serious it is taken by the speaker and the listener (Maoz & Ellis, 2003; Patai, 2002). Various studies point out that Palestinians employed tag-team arguing with Israelis to get their point across more successfully and gave an impression of being united to raise their status within the group (Maoz & Ellis, 2003; Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004). This involved a participant making an assertion and other participants repetitively elaborating to give the impression of unity. In the literature when an Israeli participant agreed with Palestinians against fellow Israelis, it seemed to be ignored by Palestinians; the importance was not winning the argument but showing a unified stand against the Israelis. It has been noted that Arab argument patterns tend to advocate for a given stance and make no direct concessions to an adversary (Hattim, 1990).

Emotionalism is another common trait. Emotionalism is a core component of deep rooted conflicts (Redekop, 2002). The stresses, anger and frustrations that naturally accompany violent conflicts interfere with rational perceptions (Salomon, 2004a). Salomon (2004a)

describes an experiment in mutual understanding involving a small group of Israelis and Palestinians. Each side was instructed to write the way the other side views specific historical events, past and present that each group views differently and receive feedback from members of the other side. For example, the Jews described the way Palestinians view the 1948 *Naqbah* (catastrophe) and the Palestinians described the way Jews see the 1948 War of Independence. The experiment was based in part on Dissonance Theory whereby describing an opponent's perspective makes one disagree with it a bit less and on the idea that such an activity brings to the surface new information. The exercise was a failure. The participants could not detach themselves from their respective collective perspectives (Salomon 2004a).

The exchanges took place during the peak of the Israeli military suppression of the Intifadah, making Palestinian teachers particularly agitated, angry, and frustrated, saying quite explicitly that they could not possibly step into the shoes of the oppressors of their brethren (Salomon 2004a, p. 260).

Emotionalism dominates the encounter experience for both Israelis and Palestinians. Outward emotionalism is more common in Arab culture than Israeli Jewish culture which has developed on more Western lines to shun emotionalism to some extent. Israelis tend to value Western logic in arguments (Maoz & Ellis, 2003; Zupnik. 2000) although high emotions are felt directly underneath and form the direction of the logic. Palestinians tend to argue through a lens of emotion that often seems disjointed and illogical to Westerners. An example from a dialogue session (Maoz et al., 2004):

Sami: No, no, no, no, I want something, wait...  
Uri: Why? Why don't you have quiet?  
Sami: Because my children...  
Uri: Yes.

Sami: Either they...they are murdered in Lebanon. I do not get my quiet... Your quiet- now you can get it in Tel Aviv. Somebody who lives in Tel Aviv wants quiet, sure he wants quiet.

Uri: Unless he catches a bus that explodes, I can say exactly the same.

Sami: Yes, you act upon your own interests, but don't be surprised that I also act upon my interests, like all that happened...

Uri: What I say is common interest. We both want quiet. If we do it together, we have more of it (Moaz et al., 2004, p.1089).

This following example (Steinberg, 2004) is typical of many not very successful encounters between Israelis and Palestinians showing the chaotic and non-linear dialogue lead by emotions:

Anat (Jewish female): This is a Jewish country, but other nationalities have the right to live here as well. You are citizens and you have equal rights. It's true that in reality you have many problems ...we have to resolve them ... you and we ... you want the refugees of '48 and '67 to return, right? But you also want us to have jobs.

Fatma (Palestinian female): You don't want co-existence ...

Guy (Jewish male): You are saying: if we do not get all we want, both a Palestinian State and also a bi-national state ...

Nasser (Palestinian male): OK, there was a war and you won ...you took most of the land, so you have to pay by having here a million Arabs who are here not by chance

...

Guy: I don't understand why from your point of view it is nothing ...We do agree to a Palestinian State.

Nasser: You don't want peace. You don't want to compromise, to give anything up ... [Noise in the room]

Edo (Jewish male): You came here with some kind of perception and you are not ready to change it; it does not matter what will be said here .

Fatma: I don't want a Palestinian State in my village, because I take into consideration the reality ... for our big compromise, the giving up of our dream to be a part of the Palestinian State ...

Guy: We want to be capable of depending on ourselves ...A Jewish state means the ability to depend on ourselves, because we learned that if you don't, nobody can take care of you ...

Anat: If we will lose the State of Israel ... there is a good chance that what will happen to us is annihilation.

Nasser: We were killed in Jordan; we were killed in different places, and it happened in Arab countries where they speak Arabic (Steinberg, 2004, p. 480-481).

Another aspect of Arab argument tactics is that Arab culture has a different approach to argument than Western argument approaches. Western approaches work on the basis of explaining one's argument in order to prove a point. Arab argument is based on the concept of *illa* (explanation) where arguments are conducted by proving that the other's argument is invalid in order to prove that one's point is valid (Hattim, 1990). *Illa* is used to deconstruct the others argument as a means of winning the argument; deconstructing the other's argument and proving it wrong implies for the Arab speaker that if the other's argument is illogical and false, their argument is therefore logical and true (Hattim, 1990).

Arab cultural norms of speaking also tend to show reverence for the speaker (Patai, 2002). Speakers are expected to make long speeches where repetition of ideas is the norm. Listeners of the speaker hang on to every word and interrupting the speaker is frowned upon. This use of 'rhetoricism' as Raphael Patai (2002) calls it, in the Arabic language is tied to the concepts of manhood and pride (Patai, 2002). However in the literature, the use of monologue and long speeches often only occurs at the beginning when Palestinians start off a discussion but because of Israeli cultural traits including interruption and *Dugri* speech (discussed below), Palestinians seem to adapt to the Israeli communication style.

Another dynamic that repeats itself in dialogue in the literature and from experience is the issue of saving face and the Western concept of taking responsibility. In Arab culture, the idea of "losing face" has particularly high cultural importance and is linked to public knowledge of wrong doing (Patai, 2002). Feeling guilt for actions taken by one's group means shame upon not only the individual but in a collective culture, like the Palestinians,

the group and the individuals that comprise the group. Shame for the collective is an emotion that Arabs will avoid at all costs (Patai, 2002). The literature and personal experience highlights the dynamic of Palestinians explaining to Israelis how Palestinians have suffered. The Israeli reaction is often denial mixed with rationalizing of events. However after some time passed within the encounter group, the Israeli participants generally take some responsibility through apologies or acknowledgement of the extent of Palestinian suffering. When the Israelis point out how they have suffered, there is no example found of a similar Palestinian acceptance of responsibility.

Israeli cultural norms are a mix of various Jewish Diaspora cultures and local experiences with a focus on Western pragmatism to create a unique culture of Israeli Jews. This includes the use of interruption, emotionalism and the concepts of *Dugri* (directness) and *Frier* (sucker).

Studies of Israeli Jewish conversations marked rapid turn taking, frequent interrupting of one another, fast rate of speech, and conversational overlaps (Zupnik, 2000) as was demonstrated in the examples above. According to Yael-Janette Zupnik (2000), the source of this is from religious institutions of learning in Central and Eastern Europe where this type of banter was considered productive to learning *Torah*. Deborah Schiffrin (1984) illustrates how American Jews use argument as a form of semi-confrontational sociability meaning that in Jewish culture, not all argument is conflictual (Schiffrin, 1984). Although this was a study of American Jews, the author gives the source of argumentative sociability as stemming from rabbinical traditions encoded in the Talmud (Schiffrin, 1984) which have come to

ritualize the collective identity of Jewish communities therefore can help partially explain Israeli argument styles (Zupnik, 2000).

*Dugri* is an Israeli cultural trait meaning ‘straight talk’ (Maoz & Ellis, 2003), ‘straight forwardness’ or ‘directness’ (Zupnik, 2000). It is marked by direct, clear, pragmatic and assertive stances in conversation therefore it is in direct contrast to the Arab *Musayra*. *Dugri* speech is simple and to the point with ideas with logic foregrounded and emotionalism backgrounded (Maoz & Ellis, 2003), at least on the surface. It is a form of speech commonly used within Israeli society and at times, in intercultural forums (Maoz & Ellis, 2003). Its success of use is judged by the forcefulness and integrity of the arguer and less reliant on the integrity of the facts stated; therefore emotionalism is a component in terms of aggressivity of the speaker (Maoz & Ellis, 2003) but it is hidden under the guise of rationalism and logic. This form of speech is understood by Israelis to be aggressive and many Israeli will say before an aggressive remark that they are about to be *Dugri* (Maoz & Ellis, 2003) to prepare the listener.

As discussed above, Israeli culture tends to favour logic and background emotionalism, however emotionalism is not deeply buried under the surface; emotionalism is covered by a shell of Western-style pragmatism. This is in contrast with the emotionalism that Palestinians show which is often exposed and on the surface. At times, Palestinians will hide emotions but for reasons of face saving and pride. Israelis will often feel great emotion when discussing the conflict but because of a need to seem rational and logical, it will form the tactics they take without allowing the emotions to rise to the surface. This can take the form

of questions or statements designed to allocate blame towards Palestinians yet appear liberal, logical and rational.

The concept of *Frier* (sucker) is Israeli slang which refers to a situation where someone takes advantage of another and is unique to Israeli Jews in comparison to Diaspora Jews. The person who is taken advantage of is considered a *Frier* in that they were not wise enough to avoid being fooled. To be a *Frier* is one of the worst positions to be in (Bloch & Lemish, 2008) and a derogatory and demeaning term in contemporary Israeli culture (Aronoff, 2009). It is based on the idea that in life there can only be winners and losers (Bloch & Lemish, 2008) and in order to not be publicly humiliated, one must be a winner in all situations. Although Israel is an individualistic culture in the Western sense, the concept of *Frier* is one of the many collective aspects in the culture. It is an individualistic concept in that one only thinks of themselves and their public standing but collective in terms of not losing face in the public sphere. In discussions, negotiations, and arguments, most Israelis will attempt to gain as much as possible as not to end with a feeling that the other person has gained more than they whether what the individual attempts to gain is needed or not. This mentality of constantly fearing seeming weak in front of the other is a strong motivator when Israelis and Palestinians discuss the conflict. Israelis don't want to lose their standing of power and any loss to their standing will result in a loss of public face. Therefore, although there is no literature on the subject of *Frier* and the conflict, it can be expected that Israelis will be hesitant to give or change if they feel they are not receiving something in return.

Cultural aspects impact on the dialogue process and how the two groups communicate with one another. Both groups use rationalization to explain how their group is justified in their actions; we are only reacting to their actions. In addition, as the two examples above illustrate, communication is dominated by interruption, fast rate of speech, and conversational overlaps. This is the communication style brought in by Israeli participants and the Palestinians adapt; however, they do not seem to adapt well. The Palestinian speaker Sami in the first example does not complete sentences or thoughts and does not seem to respond to what is being said. His statements are disjointed and emotional. In contrast, the Israeli speaker, Uri, completes his thoughts and sentences. Western style logic as argument does not typically convince Palestinians (Maoz, 2003) and Eastern style emotionalism and deconstruction of Israeli symbols of meaning put off Israelis.

In both examples, emotionalism is apparent, subjects overlap, speakers do not seem to listen to the other but responds based on a where he wants the dialogue to go as is apparent in the second example. Dialogue between the two conflicting groups quickly turns into a conflict about who will win the argument as if by winning the current argument, one side will win over the other in the outside conflict.

Only a few studies found in the literature look at cultural communication patterns and Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups. One study by Ifat Maoz and Donald Ellis (2002) attempted to see if the cultural communication patterns of *Musayra* and *Dugri* came into conflict within the dialogue. As stated above, *Musayra* is concerned with concern for the listener and politeness while *Dugri* is much more direct and unconcerned with how the

listener will interpret what is said. The results of the study were that both groups only partially followed culturally predicted communication styles but did not follow them completely. Israelis did make use of the *Dugri* style but Palestinians took a more assertive style than expected; they spoke more and used more reasoning, elaboration and challenges and less emotional arguments than expected from *Musayra* (Maoz & Ellis, 2003). This study was conducted between Jewish and Palestinian Israeli citizens therefore the Palestinian participants are well aware of Israeli cultural traits.

These results were reaffirmed by Maoz and Ellis (2007) when they took a similar approach to predicting argument patterns between Israelis and Palestinians over the internet. Cultural Communication theory (sometimes also called Cultural Code theory) predicts that people will argue according to their cultural norms; in this case the Israeli Jewish concept of *Dugri* and the Arab concept of *Musayra*. The researchers used Majority/Minority Power Relations to predict that the more powerful group (Israelis) will be accommodating and the minority (Palestinians) assertive in accordance with this theory where majority members are especially influenced by interaction with minorities (Maoz & Ellis, 2007). In the 2003 study of in-person meetings, Majority/Minority Power Relations Theory was a better predictor of argument patterns between Israeli Jews and Israeli Palestinians (Maoz & Ellis, 2003). The study involved two mediated encounters involving Israeli Jewish and West Bank Palestinian high school students over a period of three weeks. The language of interaction used was English which is a second language to both groups. The study found that there was a slight shift of communication patterns in an online environment compared to an in-person environment: Palestinians in encounter groups tended to be more assertive but less assertive

in the online environment. Israelis seemed more comfortable in an online environment than Palestinians so could be more assertive and direct. Another finding was that online arguments do not follow the typical argument structures of “assertions, elaborations, and agreement” (Maoz & Ellis, 2007, p.300) but rather arguments on both sides tended to be met with counter assertions that led nowhere. Maoz and Ellis report that arguments were more intense and emotional than in-person encounters therefore argument in this case could not lead to any form of resolution. “Ideas float around, but they do not circulate in an active conversation in which well-developed argument structures emerge” (Maoz & Ellis, 2007, p.301). This seems to be due to the online communications where social nuances are lost (Maoz & Ellis, 2007, p.303).

The studies above illustrate that each group has unique cultural traits that related to communication, however individuals in these groups understand when to use their culturally-based form of communication, in what contexts to use them, and when to use other ways of communicating. Cultural codes of argument develop in relation to one another. Preferred cultural styles of communication are modified and used when needed per the social situation. When Israelis speak to Israelis and when Palestinians speak to Palestinians, they use these cultural styles of communication (Zupnik, 2000). However when dealing with one another, they know that these styles do not necessarily work in their interests. As Maoz and Ellis (2003; 2007) found, neither culture fully used their cultural speech patterns with the other in the encounter group and each group seems to borrow aspects from the other with Palestinians acting more aggressive and Israelis acting more passive (Maoz & Ellis, 2003).

### **Collective Identity**

Encounter groups as a form of peace education deal with relations between groups in conflict. As illustrated above with Israeli and Palestinian culture, each group has its own unique collective identity (Salomon, 2002). In many ways, the collective identities of each of the groups in conflict will act to exacerbate the outside conflict further regardless of the roots of the conflict; differences tend to divide and not bring groups together. This is also true of the dynamics within the encounter group.

In order to understand how collective identities divide groups in conflict, this paper will first outline identity from a theoretical perspective and how identity is defined for the purposes of this paper followed by how collective identities are used both inside and outside the encounter groups and how they affect the dialogue process.

Much has been written on the concepts of human identity. Margaret Somers sees identity as historically relational embeddedness through common narrative to construct social life and social analysis. Her focus is on the way in which narratives make up “social actors and the social world in which they act” (as cited in Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 12). Charles Tilly similarly relates to the concept of narrative but through the “actor’s experience of a category, tie, role, network, group or organization coupled with the public representation of that experience” (as cited in Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p.12). In Somers’ view, personal identity is formed through the shared stories over time, and Tilly sees identity creation as the experiential and the resulting narrative it creates.

Henri Tajfel and John Turner (2004) believed that individuals have an inbuilt tendency to structure themselves into groups which he called “in-groups” where individuals become a part of a social group with common interests and shared attitudes partially defined in relation to other groups which he terms out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Tajfel theorized that this is accomplished through a three level process: categorizing (oneself and others), identification where we associate with specific groups, and comparison where we create a favourable bias toward the group to which we belong (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Through this process, the creation of identity tells us who we are, who we are not, and contributes to group and individual self-esteem.

The line delineating between personal and collective identity can be blurry. As highlighted by the theorists cited above, personal identity formation also impacts on collective identity formation and vice versa. A common narrative, a common experience will link individuals to the in-group and the group will help form the personal identity of the individual. Additionally, collective identity is constituted in social interactions and social practices and therefore refers to alignment between people who express themselves as members of a group (Wittborn, 2007)

Individuals can have multiple identities, multiple identifications, and multiple identity streams (Schiff, 2003). Muhammad Amara and Izhak Schnell (2004) on analyzing collective identity of ethnic Palestinians in Israel, terms this phenomenon a “repertoire of identities to choose from each to be used when needed depending on the particular social context” (Amara & Schnell, 2004, p. 175). As both individuals and members of a group, we have a

set of identities to choose from that help guide us and can be used as needed. This view is reinforced by Saskia Witteborn (2007) in her study of Arab American identity: “collective identity expression is situated and can depend on the audience and the setting” (Witteborn, 2007, p. 572).

For the purpose of the paper, identity is defined as “a strongly bounded sense of groupness” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 20) developed through common narrative and resting “on categorical commonality and an associated feeling of belonging together” (Brubaker & Cooper 2000, p. 20). This can be further defined by imposed events or decisions from an outside source or event that then causes a reaction in identity gained through the narrativization within groups’ social relationships (Schiff, 2003).

Collective identity is primarily wrapped in group or collective narratives. Collective narratives are the comprehensive collection of stories, beliefs, aspirations, and histories that a group holds about itself and about the current situation it finds itself in (Salomon, 2004b).

Collective narratives are social constructions that coherently interrelate a sequence of historical and current events; they are accounts of a community’s collective experiences, embodied in its belief system and represent the collective’s symbolically constructed shared identity (as cited in Salomon, 2004b).

Collective narratives help define identity in which the individuals and their actions are regarded not as autonomous but as members with particular roles within their group. Therefore, as Tajfel and Turner said “collective narratives are prime devices for providing the backbone of a group’s sense of shared identity, and therefore, to an individual’s sense of social identity” (as cited in Salomon, 2004b, p. 275). Collective narratives come out of the

way the group constructs and construes its history where collective narrative and collective historical memories are inseparable (Salomon, 2004b). Members of the group interpret current social and political events as an extension of their collective historical memory and form the meaning based on past events (Steinberg, 2004). The relationship is reciprocal with historical facts providing the roots for a group's collective narrative and the narrative framing the way the historical facts are told and whether information is added or excluded to fit the narrative.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is steeped in issues related to collective narratives. As a reflection, encounter groups include dynamics of “collectively held, national, ethnic, tribal or religious narratives describing (the good) us vs. (the bad) them. These narratives contain collectively held memories of past atrocities and present day victimhood, one's own moral superiority vs. that of the other” (Salomon, 2002, p. 5). Salomon (2002) goes on to note that “...collective, historical memories and narratives affect the views that the individual member of that collective is likely to hold; they affect the way the individual interprets the actions of the other, and the way that the individual relates to the other.” (Salomon, 2002, p. 8)

Bekerman and Maoz (2005) study of bi-national schools in Israel, analyzed the complexities of dealing with ethnic, cultural, and national identities in bi-national environment within the context of intractable conflict. A bi-national school is a school that teaches Israeli Jewish and Israeli Palestinian children in both Hebrew and Arabic with a curriculum that supports both groups' history, culture and religions. This is in contrast with the normative public school system in Israel that mostly separates Jews and Arabs into separate schools and teaches a curriculum which mostly ignores the Palestinian narrative.

Their analysis was conducted from an identity perspective because in their view competing identities tend to inflame conflict. The authors analyzed the issues of bi-national education between Jews and Arabs as "... cultural and identity borders and ... historical discourse and interpretations" (Bekerman & Maoz, 2005, p.344).

The authors' interviews with school staff, parents and other stakeholders found how central the concept of identity was to each group. Although all parents sent their children to a bi-national school willingly with the intent to understand and relate to the other group, all interviewed expected the school to "strengthen each group's national religious identity while furthering tolerance and understanding toward the other group." (Bekerman & Maoz, 2005, p.346) The study found that any attempt at blurring the borders related to collective identity was considered anathema to the national identity of each group (Bekerman & Maoz, 2005); while acceptance and understanding of the other were voiced as important, failing to strengthen national identity or worse, diminishing national identity was considered by all stakeholders as threatening. The study points to an important aspect of the conflict between two national groups: the willingness by many to understand and relate to the other group, however meeting the other cannot challenge or threaten the identity of the group.

The use of narrative gives meaning to experience (Polkinghorne, 1988). This is particularly true when individuals and groups are under severe stress such as in situations of entrenched conflict. The collective narrative serves as a filter through which the individual, as part of a group, sees reality and assigns meaning (Steinberg, 2004).

A monolithic sense of identity based on a sense of victimization is a key element of this conflict (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On, & Fakhereldeen, 2002; Salomon, 2002; Steinberg, 2004). It involves seeing one's group as only a victim and rarely or never a perpetrator. Both groups are self-absorbed and only concentrate on their own pain and suffering. When both groups view themselves as the sole victims, reconciliation becomes extremely difficult (Steinberg, 2004) as a competition arises of who is the greater victim, with neither group being able to empathize with the pain of the other.

Collective narratives with their underlying belief systems and their roots in collective historical memories play a crucial role in fuelling and sustaining a conflict (Salomon, 2004b). Collective narratives tend to have a long life. They are handed down from generation to generation, through educational institutions, and through culture; narratives of the past are often responsible for fuelling current conflicts. The outbreak of violence in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s is said to be partially based on a speech marking the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo where Serbs were conquered by Muslims. This collective wound resounded with the Serbs for 600 years and contributed to the resulting war against non-Serbs (Kupermintz & Salomon, 2005). The Troubles in Northern Ireland ending in 1998 can be traced back to 1608. These examples illustrate how the collective narrative of being a victim lies just underneath the surface in entrenched conflicts.

Collective identities of groups in conflict mirror one another. It can be said that the collective identities of both Israelis and Palestinians have long been constructed around the Israeli-Arab conflict (Maoz et al., 2002). As stated above, one aspect of an identity

embedded in an ongoing conflict is the competition between the groups for who is the true or greater victim. Both groups claim that they are the victim as the other started the conflict and they are only reacting to the others' actions. Each selectively views the threats and violence perpetrated against them and do not acknowledge their group's use of threats and violence.

The collective narratives of groups in conflict contradict each other by providing interpretations of events that negate those of the other side and are mutually exclusive (Salomon, 2004b) in that they are not inclusive of the other group other than in the role as the out-group. Although Israelis tend to be more accepting of the Palestinian narrative than Palestinians of the Israeli narrative (Salomon, 2004a; Salomon, 2004b) both sides tend to react with anger and denial at the other's narrative (Salomon, 2004b; Salomon, 2009). In the end, each group is certain that their own narrative is legitimate and their facts are real, the other's are lies and invented (Steinberg, 2004).

Many of the encounter groups found in the literature were conducted on the basis of a dialogue between identity groups (Helman, 2002; Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Salomon, 2009; Sonnenschein, Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2010) as opposed to an interpersonal dialogue between individuals who are members of groups. In fact, to some groups, one of the goals of the encounter group was to legitimize each side's identity perspective, its collective narrative, fears, dreams, and experiences (Salomon, 2004a). But even with an inter-group focus, both Israelis and Palestinians in encounter groups swing back and forth between personal level of individual identity aspects and the collective level of collective identity aspects as required to suit the situation. As illustrated above with the use of argument in

encounter groups, the choice of whether to use group or individual identity is generally meant to win the argument where individuals will take on their collective identity as a reaction of challenge to the group (Maoz et al., 2002).

Much like the issue of whether interpersonal or intergroup issues will be discussed first with each side requiring one in order to move on to the other (as outlined above), the two collective identities are intertwined and use each other to define themselves. The in-group definition is partially defined by the out-group. This is part of Tajfel's categorization and comparison levels in collective identity formation. Each group categorizes and compares itself by using the other group as the out-group to define what we are not. We are peace loving, they are violent. We are good, they are bad.

Collective narratives have a coping mechanism component (Salomon, 2004b). At difficult times individuals tend to regress to their more conservative opinions and this is often done through reminding the individuals of their collective narratives. Before and during the Oslo years (until 2000), Israelis tended to vote more left wing and many voices in the media wrote Post-Zionist opinions (Salomon, 2004b). With the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada in 2000 and its resulting increase in violence, Israeli voters swung quickly to the right. Right wing politicians used the opportunity to remind Israelis of their collective roots and that only the right wing parties can show strength and protect the Jews harkening back to the public's traumas. This coping mechanism of the masses served to "protect its members from the devastating impact of conflict, disaster, or collective trauma and offers the means to assist the process of healing" (Salomon, 2004b, p. 204).

Sonnenschein, Bekerman and Horenczyk (2010) conducted an analysis of an encounter group in which they identified four different and interrelated components of threat as perceived by the Israelis participating in the dialogue: a permanent existential threat related to historical persecution of Jews demonstrated primarily by the Holocaust, the realistic threat from Palestinians based on Palestinian and Arab threats and violence, the threat to Jewish hegemony in the State of Israel, and the threat to the moral worth of the Jews' national identity (Sonnenschein, Bekerman, & Horenczyk, 2010).

The Jewish participants tended to integrate different experiences and periods of time into one. The fate of the Jewish people was seen as determined: "The times are different, the enemy is not the same enemy, but the sense of being in danger of extinction, this time from the Arab enemy, is alive and well." (Sonnenschein, Bekerman, & Horenczyk, 2010, p. 51) The Jewish participants' preconceived ideas of Palestinians ready to join terrorist organizations fuelled this sense. By the end of the process, the authors reported that the Israeli participants still blurred the distinctions between past and present dangers although the sense of existential threat of the Nazis was replaced by the Palestinians (Sonnenschein, Bekerman, & Horenczyk, 2010). Based on past experiences, the physical threats of today are amplified and differentiating between a real threat and an imagined threat are difficult if not impossible.

At the end of the encounter group experience, the Israeli participants reported still feeling an existential threat from Palestinians, however they reported having a deeper understanding

of the reasons for Palestinian violence and a better understanding and comfort with Arab culture in general.

The fourth type of threat Sonnenschein, Bekerman and Horenczyk (2010) identified was the threat to the moral worth of Israeli Jewish identity. The authors illustrate how the conflict between the two groups impacts a group's sense of inner identity related to moral worth: Israeli Jews feel threats to their identity marked by patterns of denial, defensiveness and face-saving. The Israeli participants did not view themselves as individuals rather as part of the collective Israeli society so any attack on Israel was perceived as a personal attack. For example when Palestinian Israelis criticized the Israeli police, Jewish Israelis saw this as a reflection on the entire Jewish society and therefore had to defend the honour of all Jewish Israelis (Sonnenschein, Bekerman, & Horenczyk, 2010). The result was a strengthening by defensiveness of the Israeli collective identity where they viewed themselves as a weak minority in the wider Arab Middle East.

The threats as outlined above have become a part of the Israeli Jewish identity to the point where they cannot be separated from other aspects of identity. As the authors said,

without the threat, there was a vacuum in the national identity... As they freed themselves somewhat from the sense of threat and recognized their own power, the Jewish participants felt a kind of emptiness in their national identity, a vacuum that had to be filled with new content. The participants then engaged in a search for a new and positive description of Jewish-Israeli identity that did not rely on superiority or racism. (Sonnenschein, Bekerman, & Horenczyk, 2010, pp. 57-59)

It can be assumed that Palestinian identity would feel similarly threatened, however no studies mention the effect on Palestinian collective identity.

As illustrated above, collective narratives are at the core of the conflict. When the two groups get together there is a clash between the two contradictory and generally mutually exclusive collective narratives (Salomon, 2004a). These narratives are the deeply rooted stories that relate to a group's collective identity. They define who started, who did what to whom, and who is good and who is bad. The narratives are based on history but which aspects of history are chosen and even the order that it happened may not match the other group's view of history (Redekop, 2002; Salomon, 2004a). This narrative is transmitted through family and friends, the educational system and the media. These narratives are so deep rooted that a few weekends spent with the other group at an encounter group is unlikely to undo a lifetime of acquired knowledge and experiences (Salomon, 2004a).

In the theoretical literature such as the Contact Hypothesis, encounter groups are assumed to bring about changes in identity of its participants by encountering the identity of the other group. The change is thought to occur when encountering the monolithic features of collective identity of the other and one's own (Maoz et al., 2002) and therefore includes a reflexive component. Questioning of the collective narratives starts with anger and defensiveness but according to Salomon (2004b), can evolve into better communication and understanding; the monolithic grip of the collective narrative weakens and an examination of each side's actions can take place (Salomon, 2004b). Within the encounter group context, it is assumed that this evolution will occur on its own as participants begin to see how their narratives interact with the other's narrative. However this dynamic is generally not the outcome and within the dynamics highlighted in the literature, a participant's identity is strengthened in a zero-sum way as a result of the encounter; the stronger one's own identity

is, the perception that the weaker the other's identity becomes. This echoes two separate studies by Zvi Bekerman and Sara Helman (Bekerman 2002; Helman 2007) who found that that encounter groups reproduced and solidified monological discourses on identity and culture, thereby further legitimizing power differentials and structural inequalities (Bekerman 2002; Helman 2007) . That is, by engaging in dialogue with the other side, a group tends to solidify collective and, as a result, individual identity, to reify one's perceptions of self and other. In conflict situations where there is an asymmetrical power relationship, this reifying of identity also preserves and legitimizes the powerful over the less powerful.

The concept of identity in Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups has been a central aspect since the first groups were formed. Herbert Kelman (2001) who conducted workshops for Israeli and Palestinian academics in the United States in the 1980s, observed that the threat to collective identity is the central subject in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. It is not only the acts of the other group, but the very identity and existence of the other are perceived as threatening to the identity of each of the groups (Kelman, 2001) . Collective identity is seen as a zero sum competition.

The assumption in encounter groups as per the Contact Hypothesis is that by sharing oneself and therefore one's collective and individual identity, allows for a sharing of information that helps create positive change in attitude and a weakening of stereotypes which are one of the goals of encounter groups. However, Israelis and Palestinians sense of

identity seems to become more rigid and monolithic when meeting the identity of the other; participant's opinions and stereotypes of the other tend to be reinforced.

One way outlined in the literature to deal with the monolithic sense of victimization and identity is the Reflection and Trust Approach developed by Dan Bar-On (as cited in Salomon, 2004a). This approach takes a middle ground between the Human Relations Approach which relies on getting to know the individual and not discussing the conflict and the Collective Identity Approach in which the conflict is centre stage through the lens of the collective identities involved. The Reflection and Trust Approach encourages participants to tell their stories from both their individual and group perspectives. This approach was used in encounter groups between Holocaust survivors and the offspring of Nazi perpetrators. Such discussions allowed for an open and honest discussion that helped each party understand and legitimize the collective identity and perspective (Salomon, 2004a).

However in a protracted conflict with ongoing mutual violence, this approach is less likely to be successful (Salomon 2004a). Salomon (2004a) conducted a study on whether the collective identity experience of suffering makes individuals more sympathetic to others' suffering. The study on participants of the March of the Living, which brings Jewish youth to Poland to see the concentration camps, studied the peace oriented beliefs and sympathy towards Palestinians of 309 Israeli youth. Over 6 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust between 1939 and 1945. Jews today view this period of history as what Vamik Volkan (1998) would call a chosen trauma; Jews generations removed from the genocide and Jews who have no direct connection in their family to the Holocaust view it as a defining period in

their sense of collective identity. The results found that those Israelis who had peace oriented beliefs before, identified more with Palestinian suffering but those Israelis with more conservative views identified less with Palestinian suffering than before the trip (Salomon, 2004a). That is, one's political views are often strengthened by exploring one's sense of victimhood. Those with peace oriented ideologies tended to take more universal lessons from the experience, those with more conservative views tended to strengthen their sense of nationalism. It should also be noted that in many studies, Palestinians could not view the Israeli narrative as legitimate even after hearing Israelis tell their stories (Salomon, 2004a; Salomon, 2004b; Salomon, 2009).

In another study, Bekerman (2007) conducted an encounter group taking a post-national approach (putting aside the division into national groups that is the reality of Israelis and Palestinians) and instead focusing on deconstructing national identities. The study had mixed results. The Jewish participants had an easier time taking themselves out of their viewpoints and imagining a world with no nations. The Palestinians on the other hand were left silenced by discomfort and at the time, had no desire to take the exercise further (Bekerman, 2007). Bekerman did not offer reasons for the different reactions of the two groups but one possible reason is that Israelis have had a state for over 60 years are at a level of comfort with national identity that they can move beyond it whereas the Palestinians have still not realized their nationalist identity at least at the formalized and accepted state level.

As stated above, one of the goals of encounter groups is to attempt to change the participant's perception of the other's collective narrative (Salomon, 2002) and at the same

time, have a clearer perception of one's own narrative and how it affects the other. A common dynamic from experience and in the literature between participants in encounter groups was that if participants can explain their side to the other, the expectation is that the other's behaviour will change and therefore their reality will change. Each side believes that their version of history is truth and the other's therefore must be fabricated. If they point out the flaws in the other's logic or facts, the situation will change and their own goals will be realized. However in most of the literature, the dynamics were that neither side was entirely convinced and their views remained static. Encounter groups often ended in a stalemate of neither side acquiescing to the other or in some examples, the Israelis as the powerful group had an easier time understanding and accepting the Palestinian narrative (Salomon, 2004b) yet not at the expense of changing their own narrative. The Palestinians as a group lacking in power, did not change their perceptions of the Israeli group narrative even if they changed their opinions of the Israelis themselves (Salomon, 2004a). Bekerman (2007) echoes these findings noting that in encounter groups, Israelis favoured connecting to Palestinians on an interpersonal level while Palestinians attempted to move away from the interpersonal towards intergroup issues and both groups gave importance to different issues. Israelis tended not to be homogenous in their opinions and perceptions whereas Palestinians tended to be more homogeneous. Bekerman reported that any attempt at hybrid identity options were not allowed by the groups and hegemonic fixed identity categories were constantly reinforced by both groups. Much like the issue of struggling for power within the group to correct or maintain the power asymmetry outside the group, collective narratives were similarly frozen.

Is it possible for the weaker side to both understand and accept the narrative of the more powerful? Salomon believes it is not possible while conflict is ongoing (Salomon, 2004b). Salomon believes that a group who feels powerless cannot publicly acknowledge the narrative of the powerful group. Additionally, Arab culture is a collectivist, honour based society (Patai, 2002). Palestinian society suffered a trauma in 1948 when Israel was declared a state and won the resulting War of Independence. A group feels collective shame when events attributed to it threaten its collective self-image. When this results in the collective sense of identity being threatened and group members feel that the injustice was perpetrated intentionally, there is a resulting sense of collective guilt (Sonnenschein, Bekerman, & Horenczyk, 2010). When a group sense of identity is threatened and group members feel that the actions were justified, little sense of group guilt or shame is produced. The collective self image of the Arab world at the time was that the Arabs would defeat the Jews. When this did not happen, Arab and particularly Palestinian culture became obsessed with correcting the wrongs done to them and restoring honour to their society. If Palestinians were to acknowledge the Israeli collective narrative, this would work against their own collective narrative. For most Palestinians, collective narratives are zero-sum; the more the Israeli narrative is acknowledged, the less the Palestinian narrative can be truthful. Israelis do not have the same level of collectivist and honour bound society so the collective narrative of the Palestinians, while threatening, can sit side by side and therefore not necessarily viewed as zero sum.

**Conclusion**

In chapter three, the central themes that appear in the academic literature and from the author's experiences were categorized, described and analyzed. Power asymmetry between Israelis and Palestinians, communication patterns based on cultural differences and the collective narratives that are foundational to both groups are intermeshed during the dialogue process. This combination of themes helps explain why encounter group experiences between Israelis and Palestinians have not been as successful as theory suggests.

## Chapter Four

### Theoretical Instruments: Human Identity Needs and Hegemonic Structures

In the previous two chapters, the themes that appear in the academic literature and from the author's experiences were categorized, described and analyzed. The successes, challenges and dynamics of encounter groups were discussed. In chapter five, this paper will design a new way of conducting encounter groups with the hopes of moving encounter groups between Israelis and Palestinians forward. It will be based on the concept of reflexivity and informed by what the literature and experience have shown to be the dynamics common within Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups. Taking a reflexive approach to encounter groups involves removing the participants mentally from the conflict in order to impart objectivity. Objectivity has been accomplished in the past by taking people in conflict to a neutral place such as a peace camp or peace workshop in a neutral country. This can also be accomplished by taking the participants mentally out of the conflict situation temporarily through the use of conflict theory. Conflict theory can be used as a non-judgemental tool to help explain the dynamics that people in conflict experience. Since conflict is often about emotions (Redekop, 2002), removing the emotional component from the conflict, even temporarily, through neutral theoretical constructs can help create reflexivity.

In chapter four, this paper provides a brief overview of two conflict theories by Vern Neufeld Redekop which provides the instrument used to demonstrate in chapter five how conflict theory can help develop reflexivity. The two theories to be used are Human Identity Needs and Hegemonic Structures as outlined in Redekop's book *From Violence to Blessing*

(Redekop, 2002). These theories were chosen because they help explain, give depth and frame the dynamics of these two groups in conflict well, particularly in context of the three categories discussed in chapter three (power asymmetry, communication and culture, and collective narratives). Other theories could be used; however, Redekop's theories are easy for participants with no conflict theory background to relate to and apply to their own situations. I have included a brief background in italics to the reader on how the theories may apply to Israelis and Palestinians. These explanations are based on personal experiences being a participant observer in encounter groups and are not the only dynamics that may occur or what Israelis and Palestinians may point out for themselves. However they do help illustrate how conflict theory helps frame dynamics in the conflict and provide the reader with some additional information about these two groups in conflict.

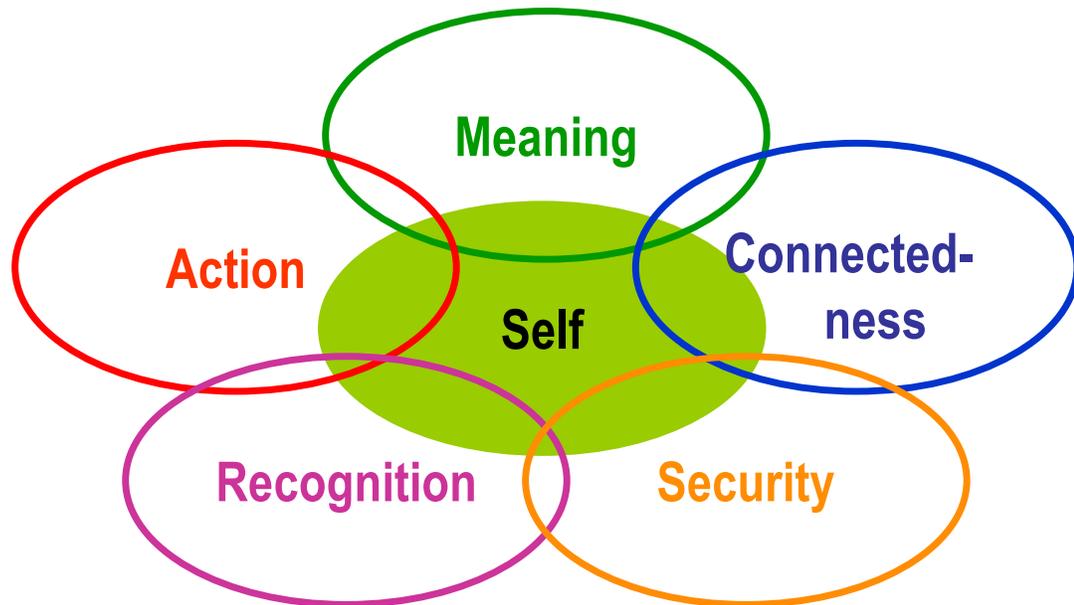
### **Human Identity Needs**

Within a conflict there are generally two aspects: the tangible issue the groups are fighting over and the deeper meanings, often with an emotional connection that are implicated in the conflict. Conflict generally involves a tangible, real and concrete goal being fought over such as land, resources, power, etc. Additionally, often imbedded within the conflict is an emotional aspect as well. As time passes and the conflict deepens, what may have begun with a single issue quickly becomes compounded over time with other aspects, tangible and emotional, adding to the conflict structure. Eventually, like a physical building, a conflict structure becomes the sum of its parts and the parts that built the conflict are not always easy to define or solve. As in all processes involving individuals and groups,

what started out as a simple issue quickly becomes entangled in other issues. These issues form a deep emotional context to the conflict.

One way of framing a conflict situation is to look at what can be defined as the dominant needs of the individuals or groups involved in the conflict that can be based on both the tangible and the emotional. Needs are those things that if one receives, it satisfies an aspect related to the conflict and therefore helps promote solutions. Redekop, building on the work of other conflict theorists including the work of John W. Burton who drew the connection between human needs and conflict, posited that people in conflict have specific needs that when threatened, require fulfilling in order to find solutions. He grouped these needs into a new synthesis, the Human Needs Framework (see diagram below). Human Needs Theory gives a structure to understanding why people and groups in conflict act the way they do and therefore what may satisfy them to move towards finding solutions. The theory says that human beings have needs in order to attain an “integrated sense of Self” (Redekop, 2002, p. 33) therefore these needs are intimately connected to our sense of identity. These needs can be summarized using five categories which are universal and will apply to all (Redekop, 2002). The five Human Identity Needs Satisfiers are meaning, connectedness, security, action and recognition. Individuals and groups have within them all five of these needs but different individuals and groups will give more importance to some needs over others depending on culture, values, experiences and what is most threatened.

## Identity Needs Implicated In Deep-Rooted Conflict



Vern Neufeld Redekop

### **Meaning**

Individuals and groups have a need to find meaning in their lives (Redekop, 2002).

Meaning can refer to a religion, a belief system, or a set of values. In meaning one finds insight, root metaphors, justice, and paradigms (Redekop, 2002); in short, our belief systems. In situations of protracted conflict, people need to make sense of the situation they find themselves in and what to do about it. For people in conflict, systems of belief can be very important as they help guide individuals and groups towards creating understanding of their world and how to act within that world (Redekop, 2002).

As Redekop (2002) states, worlds of meaning are so foundational that deep-rooted conflicts stemming from a clash between completely different ways of perceiving reality are particularly difficult to control. Conflicts imply alternative, competing ways of meeting the needs for meaning and therefore may be perceived as putting in danger one's own way of forming meaning (Redekop, 2002). One's sense of meaning is intrinsically tied to one's sense of identity, both individual and collective. Conflicts over meaning are particularly emotional and therefore less open to rational bargaining and compromise than conflicts over scarce material goods (Redekop, 2002).

Because individuals and groups have had different experiences, their worlds of meaning will differ as well (Redekop, 2002). Worlds of meaning imply that each person will interpret the same facts differently and therefore react differently. Often in conflict dialogue, two people will be using the same words and phrases but their meaning differs slightly based on their experiences with the concepts which create misinformation and mistaken interpretations of one another. Additionally, how one sees the world and one's sense of meaning can limit what one perceives (Redekop, 2002). For example, Redekop (2002) tells the story of an experiment involving cards in which the six of hearts was painted black. The card was shown to people who were asked to identify different cards. That card was identified as either a six of spades (picking up on the colour) or a six of hearts with no comment that it was black. No one had a category for a black six of hearts so no one saw it (Redekop, 2002).

Rarely do individuals and groups question their worlds of meaning. Rather it is through their worlds of meaning that they interpret their experiences of reality (Redekop, 2002). Meaning is tied to one's identity therefore if the paradigms of one's world of meaning prove to be wrong, inadequate or internally contradictory, the result would be an identity crisis (Redekop, 2002). To avoid an identity crisis, a threat to one's sense of meaning will result in individuals and groups becoming angry. This anger may be directed inwards (imploding) or outwards (exploding).

*Israelis need satisfiers for meaning include a link to the land of their ancestral heritage, a direct link back almost 4000 years to the place where the Jews became a people. This can take the form of religious beliefs tied to the holiness of the land and/or more secular romantic beliefs in the ancient link of the land as the homeland of the Jewish nation. It was on this land that Jacob had his dream that one day his offspring would become a mighty people, where David slew Goliath and where the majority of Jewish holidays were created based on events that impacted the Jewish people. Jews believe that they were expelled from their land 2000 years ago and dreamed of the return. Zionism is the nationalist extension of this belief that the Jewish people, like any other nation, have the right to self-determination on their land and so Jews returned out of both religious and nationalistic beliefs.*

*Palestinians also have a similar sense of meaning in relation to the land of Palestine, which to them encompasses today's Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinians view the land as belonging to them and Israelis are simply another colonial experiment that will soon be over. As Palestinians are more recent refugees from the land compared to Jews, they also*

*have a sense of meaning about the individual houses that their relatives owned. For Jews, the sense of meaning is for the land as a whole. For Palestinians, there is a dual meaning for the land: it links back both to ownership of the land as a whole and to the individual villages and houses of their relatives who left or were forced out. To this day, many Palestinians still have the keys to doors or houses that no longer exist as a symbol of their eventual return. Overall, there is a sense with Palestinians that a sin occurred in 1948 when Israel was declared a state and it is the goal of Palestinians to return to a pre-1948 reality where they have the control (Teveth, 1989).*

*However, it must be noted that meaning for Israelis and Palestinians does not necessarily have to be tied to Judaism and Zionism for Israelis and Palestine for Palestinians. Meaning for some may be tied to religion, culture, values, principles, or lifestyle.*

### **Connectedness**

Connectedness includes the ideas of belonging, community, language, culture, tribe, and land; a feeling of being attached to a place, person, group or belief system (Redekop, 2002). Connectedness is how we pass on culture and the stories of who we are as individuals and collective groups (Redekop, 2002). Through connectedness we learn about shared goals, values, meaning, traditions, and ideas, which extends across the generations. Connecting implies feelings of being understood and safe (Redekop, 2002). There is profound personal connection establishing a connection with another person. Alternatively, prolonged lack of connection can result in feelings of alienation. When fundamental needs are threatened as is often the case in situations of prolonged conflict, individuals turn to the groups most likely

to preserve them. This can occur when a traumatic event occurs such as a death of a loved one which results in sadness and grief. An individual's or group's connections to others are the coping mechanism to deal with traumatic events.

*Both Israelis and Palestinians have a devout sense of connectedness to their own people. Both peoples will generally prefer to live amongst, befriend and do business with their own. Each speaks a different language, has different (although similar) social customs, and has different religious beliefs, cultures and mentalities. Each inhabits a sphere of influence, an orientation toward their own people especially in times of stress. For example, during the Second Lebanese War, Palestinian Israeli towns were being bombed by fellow Arabs from Lebanon with resulting deaths and injuries; however publicly, many Israeli Palestinians denounced the Israeli side for having started the war and would not publicly blame fellow Arabs.*

### **Security**

A sense of fear heightens the need for security. This fear may stem from a physical or psychological threat to an individual and their group. Security includes human welfare needs, human rights, physical, emotional, spiritual and economic well being. Security does not only refer to the fear of threat to one's physical being. It can include the sense of security of the individual's or collective's identity, in the present and in the future. The degree of security one needs is a result of fear which is a function of past experiences including traumatic events in an individual's or group's past. If an individual or a group feels fear whether because of a physical, mental, or existential stress, they will find it difficult to trust

again (Redekop, 2002). The feelings of fear and the resulting needs for security can be communicated through generations and within a collective and even transferred from a real threat or past traumatic experience to another perceived threat. Security needs can even be contradictory. For example, a group may have to trade one type of security such as economic security to guarantee another type of security such as physical.

*Both Israelis and Palestinians have very similar security needs with Jews having suffered collective threats in the past and Palestinian security currently being threatened. For Palestinians, the trauma of the 1948 Nakba (catastrophe) still impacts their collective consciousness (Bekerman & Sonnenschein, 2010). The majority of Palestinians became displaced refugees at this time which still has not been solved. This collective trauma still impacts their culture today with the majority of the descendants of these Palestinians still trying to return to what is today Israel. When Israeli settlers take over a house in East Jerusalem, Palestinians view the act as colonialist expansion to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from their native land and a threat to their security.*

*Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza have been under conditions of active violent conflict at various periods since 1967 with Israeli soldiers conducting raids in populated Palestinian areas searching for combatants. These include house searches where soldiers destroy personal property, shooting at civilians and civilian homes, injuries and deaths of combatants and civilians when the army targets combatants, as well as humiliating treatment at the hands of soldiers (Giacaman, Abu-Rmeileh, Husseini, Saab, & Boyce, 2007).*

*Israeli Jews and Jews around the world have a collective consciousness related to anti-Jewish violence particularly in Europe. For 2000 years, European Jews at various periods were unable to work in specific professions or live in specific areas, they paid higher taxes, and were attacked, killed, accused of crimes they didn't commit, culminating in the Holocaust where six million Jews were killed. Jews from around the world carry these traumas with them and view all new potential threats through this lens even if their descendants did not experience these traumas. When a Palestinian kills an Israeli, Israelis view Palestinians as the new anti-Semites who are killing Jews simply for being Jews (Massad, 2000).*

*While both groups surprisingly share a need for security, the Israeli need is much more acknowledged and evinced by both Israelis and internationally, possibly because of the longer historical need for Israeli security and that Palestinians seem to concentrate on other need satisfiers.*

### **Action**

Individuals and groups have an identity need to take meaningful, significant action (Redekop, 2002). That is, to react to a situation as they perceive it to be. Since action is a matter of free will, it implies control over the immediate social and physical environment. In situations of powerlessness, individuals and groups will want to take action to correct and empower (Redekop, 2002). If one loses the freedom to act, they can experience strong emotions and a sustained threat to action can lead to depression. Alternatively, depression can create the need for action (Redekop, 2002).

As often is the case in protracted conflicts, actions are not thought out and only acted upon. As action implies a conscious display of a sense of self-worth, taking action to regain self-esteem increases one's capacity to become a meaningful actor. Alternatively, a diminished capacity for acting diminishes self-esteem (Redekop, 2002).

*Both Israelis and Palestinians have a need for action generally tied to violence towards the other group as a form of revenge for past violence perpetrated against their group. Palestinians will avenge the killing of one of their leaders or civilians by attempting to kill Israeli soldiers or civilians. Israeli soldiers will violently handle Palestinians who they believe are guilty of a major or minor crime. Both collective groups when hearing about the suffering of the other, feel a sense that justice has been delivered through the actions of the army or combatants.*

*However the goal of actions is not always towards violence. There are both Israelis and Palestinians who attempt to reach out to the other group and feel a need for positive action related to the conflict. This tends to occur openly more often with Israelis than Palestinians as Palestinians who have little power in the conflict feel that positive actions that impact Israelis are taboo; however, there are many Palestinians who do overcome this societal taboo.*

### **Recognition**

Recognition includes acknowledgement, appreciation, significance, dignity of self-worth, and regaining face (Redekop, 2002). Negative recognition leads to shame. Shame creates the

need for positive recognition. Recognition is the mirror image of meaning (Redekop, 2002). It is meaning being appreciated and acknowledged by others.

Recognition gives voice. The desire is that the other will recognize us according to our own estimate of our worth (Redekop, 2002). The need for recognition begins with the Self but can be extended to those with whom one identifies or to those perceived as unjustly devaluing them. In the situation of supporting the under-valued, the need for recognition results in a passion for justice (Redekop, 2002).

*Palestinians have a strong need for recognition of the pain and suffering they have endured at the hands of Israelis, the emotional and physical costs of being refugees and under siege for so many years. Being recognized as a victim is a common request when meeting Palestinians (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On, & Fakhereldeen, 2002; Salomon, 2002; Steinberg, 2004). Palestinians generally look towards the international community with the hope that the outside world will step in to correct the wrongs done to Palestinians by Israelis. When Palestinians meet Israelis, the need for recognition is the most common need desired to be met. As illustrated in chapter three, Palestinians in encounter groups often need to first concentrate on the intergroup relations in order to move on to interpersonal relations as a way of recognizing their pain.*

*Israelis too have a need for recognition as being a victim of hatred of Jews for so many years. This is partly a need satisfier of the collective and partly in competition with Palestinians' need for recognition as a victimized group and vice versa. When Israelis meet*

*Palestinians, they are often left shocked by how Palestinians refuse to recognize the violence their people have committed or how it is rationalized. This creates a dynamic where Israelis recognize Palestinian suffering although initially with difficulty but Palestinians have a much harder time recognizing Israeli suffering whether past or present (Salomon, 2004a; Maoz & Ellis, 2006; Sonnenschein, Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2010).*

### **Pride**

I believe it is important to add pride as a meta-need that applies particularly to Palestinians that is linked to their concept of Self as individuals and a collective. Although the emotion of pride can easily fit into the other five needs satisfiers, it is such an important cultural component in the Arab world (Patai, 2002) that it requires discussion when Palestinians are involved in encounter groups. As outlined in chapter three, pride is often connected to a sense of manhood and the fear of losing face which is an emotion that will be avoided at all costs (Patai, 2002). Individual and collective pride can be connected to meaning, connectedness, security, action and recognition. The literature includes studies looking at the effect of humiliation as trauma on health outcomes in West Bank Palestinian society (Giacaman, Abu-Rmeileh, Hussein, Saab, & Boyce, 2007). It is common to hear Palestinians describe feeling humiliation at checkpoints, during Israeli imposed curfews (Salomon, 2006) or when Israeli soldiers check them for weapons. The humiliation impacts their sense of collective identity, meaning, connectedness to the land, and security. Suicide bombers and other violent combatants often speak of having to regain collective Palestinian pride through violent actions against Israelis (Shefrin, 2007). When Palestinians use the Arab concept of *illa* (explanation) to deconstruct the Israeli narrative as outlined in chapter

three, the process of having the adversary's argument disintegrate provides pride (Bekerman and Moaz, 2005). When Palestinians meet with Israelis, they show great pride in demonstrating their culture through music, dance, food, and art (Suleiman, 2004). Pride is woven throughout Palestinian culture and impacts in all areas. Of course, Israelis like all cultures, see pride as important and humiliation as negative. However, Arab culture has a particularly important connection to the ideas of pride, saving face and avoiding humiliation that Israelis in a similar situation, may connect to another identity need.

### **Hegemonic Structures**

Human Identity Needs theory is an excellent tool for analyzing individual and group needs related to the categories of collective narratives and communications and culture. However, for the issue of power asymmetry, Hegemonic Structures is more useful to understand the position of powerless and powerful. Hegemony of course refers to the powerful or dominant group over the powerless, the less dominant group. The dominant group controls through political, physical, economic, discursive (identity and language) and pneumatic (of the spirit) authority over the subjected group (Redekop, 2002). Hegemonic Structures therefore refer to patterns of behaviour of groups in conflict and how they metaphorically trap both the strong side and the weak side in the conflict dynamics.

In these relationships, neither the subjected group nor the dominant group question the structures because the structures seem natural to those who are involved. These structures limit actions and create boundaries for both groups but with the subjected group having limited power and the dominant group having the ability to make changes to the structure.

The structure is controlled by the dominant group who enjoys its position of power and the subordinate group which accepts its position. These structures are internalized and deeply believed by both groups. In theory, the dominant group sets the rules and differentiates the subjected group into a lower status. The subjected group internalizes their powerlessness and internalizes this as a sense of inferiority.

*The reality for Palestinians is more complex. There are differences between Israeli Palestinians and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in terms of power dynamics with Israeli Jews. Israelis have power over and dominate the Palestinians physically, economically, and even emotionally and arguably, politically however not spiritually, culturally or socially. That is, Israelis control the borders, the land, the resources and therefore the Palestinian's sense of being able to take action, and feelings related to pride which frustrates Palestinians. Economically, Israelis are both more powerful than Palestinians and Israeli products have infiltrated the Palestinian market but not vice versa. Even politically, the Israeli government and army have more control over the lives of Palestinians in many ways than do their own governments. However, Palestinians including Israeli Palestinians have a vibrant Arab culture and society that orients itself towards the Arab world and for the most part, not towards Israel or the Western world. Palestinians also take great pride in their Muslim and Christian faiths. Therefore, Israel dominates over Palestinians, however as Palestinian and Israeli Jewish society are so separated, it is not total.*

*There is also a difference in the level of hegemonic structure between Palestinians as citizens of Israel who have full rights and West Bank and Gazan Palestinians which do not. On the one hand, those in the West Bank and Gaza suffer from a greater gap between them and Israelis, economically and physically. However, these areas are culturally independent and Israelis only minimally impact the social and cultural lives of West Bank and Gazan Palestinians. Israeli Palestinians on the other hand are often socially and economically discriminated against yet, and in contrast to West Bank and Gazans, have undergone a process of Israelization (Bligh, 2003) where Israeli Palestinians have become and want to become more integrated into the country.*

*The hegemonic structure is obvious in the physical aspect with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza having limitations on movement into Israel and abroad. Checkpoints designed to check Palestinians for weapons exist at the entrance to Israel where Palestinians require prior permission to cross into Israel. Any Palestinian who committed a security offence or has someone in their family who committed an offence will not receive permission to enter Israel. Checkpoints also exist within the West Bank itself to aid the Israeli Defence Forces to protect Israeli settlers. At checkpoints, Palestinians go through humiliating experiences of being checked for weapons and often are openly abused by soldiers. In times of violence, the Israeli Defence Forces may call for a closure on a specific area of city meaning that people are not permitted to enter or exit and may have to be confined to their homes. Additionally, West Bank Palestinians are not free to establish new communities or enlarge existing communities without permission from Israel.*

*Within Israel, Palestinian Israelis enjoy full freedom of movement and express themselves politically however Arab communities, compared to Jewish communities, have not been developed to the same extent partially due to racism. Palestinian Israeli communities' land is often expropriated by the state for public lands and their communities land base has not been allowed to grow since 1948 and no new Palestinian Israeli communities have been established until recently. In comparison to Jewish Israeli localities, Palestinian Israelis localities are crowded, lacking in infrastructure and neglected.*

*Although Palestinian Israelis have full political rights including the right to vote, the right to form parties and the right to protest, Palestinian Israeli political groups are marginalized in the Israeli political arena as they are not Zionist parties. West Bank and Gazan Palestinians have only recently gained some political power with the first fully democratic elections in the Arab world in 2006; however, with Hamas winning the majority of the Palestinian parliament and the lack of international support for the results as Hamas is considered a terrorist organization, there has been a diminishing of political power from the Palestinian electorate. The Fatah movement which currently governs the West Bank has limited political power as Israel still controls borders, infrastructure and security outside of major cities and towns. In Gaza, Hamas has full control of all internal matter,s however Israel controls the borders and who and what come in and out of Gaza including building supplies, food, etc.*

*Israeli Jews control the majority of the economy both for Israeli Palestinians and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Israeli Palestinians have higher rates of poverty*

*than Jewish Israelis (National Insurance Institute Israel 2008). As of 2010, no Arab town in Israel has an industrial area while most Jewish towns and cities have industrial areas, meaning Israeli Palestinians must work in Jewish areas. Israeli Palestinians have a harder time finding work because of social and institutionalized racism with some companies that have connections to the army having rules not to employ Palestinian Israelis as they are considered a security risk. Israeli Palestinians often do not serve in the Israeli Defence Forces which provides ex-soldiers with monetary and mortgage benefits.*

*In the West Bank and Gaza, unemployment is rampant and almost 123,000 Palestinians live off United Nations relief aid (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 2010) primarily in Gaza. As stated in chapter three, the GDP per capita is \$28,600 (CIA, 2009) in Israel compared to \$2,900 (CIA, 2008) in the West Bank and Gaza.*

*Within Israel, both Israeli Jews and Israeli Palestinians believe that their own culture is superior. However, because Jews control the economic means, Israeli Jewish culture permeates the Arab communities but Palestinian Arab culture rarely permeates the Jewish culture. This creates a feeling within Jews and Arabs in Israel that Israeli Jewish culture is superior to Palestinian Arab culture. In Israeli Jewish slang, something “Arab” is looked on as the opposite of Jewish- second class, barbaric, primitive (Triger, 2008; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). The one exception is food. Ashkenazi Israeli Jews romanticize Palestinian foods such as hummus, falafel, shawarma and others. These foods are also part of the Mizrahi Jewish culture as they too have an Arab culture but Ashkenazi Jews connect it to*

*Palestinian culture. Israeli Palestinians have undergone what has been termed an Israelization process which is an integration process into Israeli Jewish society (Bligh, 2003) includes knowing Hebrew and the Israeli Jewish culture (Khoury & Stern, Haaretz) and involves a Westernization of Palestinian culture. In today's Israel, the majority of Israeli Palestinians speak Hebrew but the majority of Israeli Jews do not speak Arabic.*

*The results of the power asymmetry and the hegemonic structures it creates are a conflict between Israelis wishing to keep its position of power and Palestinians who wish to change the hegemonic structure. How each side works towards its goals is based on the individuals experiences, values and culture.*

## **Conclusion**

In chapter four, the theories of Human Identity Needs and Hegemonic Structures were described and the author provided examples of how these theories are applicable to Israelis and Palestinians based on the literature and the dynamics the author has experienced as a participant observer. In the following chapter, this paper will utilize these theories as part of an encounter group proposal that will help participants exercise their reflexive muscles.

## Chapter Five

### A Reflexive Approach to Encounter Groups

In Chapter two, the impacts of Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups were laid out with the following key point: encounter groups have not been as successful in its goals as expected from theory in that encounter groups have a positive impact towards attitudes about the other group in the short term but little impact in the long term with post-encounter viewpoints regressing to pre-encounter levels. In chapter three, the emerging themes found in the literature on the dynamics related to these encounters were categorized into power asymmetry, culture and communication and collective narratives.

Part of the reason encounter groups have not had successful long term impacts is that participants return to a reality steeped in collective narratives, power asymmetries and cultures of conflict (Steinberg, 2004, Salomon, 2004a) as the outside conflict is still ongoing. What participants learned hearing the other dissipates to pre-encounter group levels (Kupermintz & Salomon, 2005) because new information about the outside conflict is constant and negative. New information framed as 'us vs. them' replaces what was learned in the encounter group experience. This way of thinking is part of conflict structures, thinking in the 'us vs. them' paradigm is safer psychologically than viewing the adversary sympathetically. One way to combat this instinct, is to exercise the reflexive muscles. The categories of power asymmetry, communications and culture and collective narratives laid out in chapter three are such fundamental dynamics for Israelis and Palestinians that only by temporarily removing participants mentally from the conflict can participants be reflexive

towards their own situation and be able to see the other group's perspective. This can be accomplished by adding to the encounter group experience the elements of learning about the dynamics inherent in Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups known from the literature and conflict theories to make participants into participant observers within their own encounter group. The conflict theories of Human Identity Needs and Hegemonic Structures outlined in chapter four will be utilized as means of objectively analyzing the dynamics to help participants gain reflexivity and therefore better long term successful outcomes. In this chapter, I will now expand on the idea of reflexivity and then move forward with the design of an encounter group experience.

### **Reflexivity**

As defined in chapter one, reflexivity refers to the idea of encounter group participants being conscious of how what one says and does contributes to the conflict both in the encounter group and in the outside conflict. Reflexivity implies ideas of being reflective, introspective and self-aware of how one's group contributes to a particular situation. It also involves the idea of attempting to look at the conflict from as an objective a standpoint as possible to gain understanding and then be able to view the situation from both sides' perspectives.

According to Yaacov Yablon and Yaacov Katz (2001), the majority of Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups are based on what they call the Peace Pedagogy that emphasizes personal responsibility in dialogue and actions (Yablon & Katz, 2001); that is that there is a reflexive component involved for all participants. Encounter groups have at their core the unspoken

expectation that participants will be reflexive and will see how they as individuals and as a group have contributed to the conflict. Encounter groups can provide participants with tools that help them analyze the reality in which they are living (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004). As Sara Helman (2002) states, it is hoped that reflexivity would bring about a transformation of viewpoints and opinions that would lead to acknowledgement of partiality from each side (Helman, 2002). Gavriel Salomon (2002) gives further support to this by stating that critical examination of one's group's actions toward the other group is required in an encounter group dialogue. Critical examination implies that actions that have caused pain to the other side must be acknowledged even on behalf of the collective as it is recognized that participants in encounter groups are rarely the same individuals who committed violence against the other. The author states that without this acknowledgement, it would be exceedingly difficult to construct a shared reality and establish common ground (Salomon, 2002).

However, as illustrated in chapters two and three, the dynamics of participants do not confirm Yablon and Katz's claim; most participants seem to expend great efforts to avoid personal and collective responsibility and allocate blame to the other group. Helman (2002) notes of Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups that one of the key barriers to long term success in change in perceptions of the adversarial group is that the reflexive component of encounter groups does not occur (Helman, 2002). Zvi Bekerman (2007) points out that reflexivity can only occur under conditions of equality and cooperative interdependence which allow both for sustained interaction between participants and allow for the potential forming of friendships (Bekerman, 2007). As illustrated in chapter three, because of the

power asymmetry inherent in the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians, reflexivity in Bekerman's view is not possible under normal circumstances.

Many in the academic literature take a perspective that because of the asymmetrical relationship between Israelis and Palestinians, the ultimate goal of encounter experiences is for Israelis to take responsibility for their actions against the Palestinians (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Sonnenschein, Bekerman, & Horenczyk, 2010). This includes internalizing the sins of the past and the actions of the present and actualizing these feelings into societal change. They contend that Israeli Jewish society is based on a false sense of liberalism where national identity is interwoven with the idea of Jewish hegemony and that the only way to move forward is for Israelis to admit that the Palestinians have endured a historical injustice at the hands of Zionism. Although this may be true, particularly from the Palestinian perspective, in conflict situations where both sides have committed violence against the other, both must take responsibility for their actions. And for both groups in this conflict whose self-definition is premised on the idea that 'we are good , they are bad', acknowledgment of blame is unlikely to happen and in fact, it could cause an identity crisis. Additionally, as in most situations of conflict, those with hegemonic control rarely acknowledge this fact because individuals and groups do not want to give up power and in fact, those with power rarely acknowledge to themselves or feel that they are powerful. For example, in Sonnenschein, Bekerman, & Horenczyk's (2010) study of a long term Jewish-Palestinian encounter group, seven of the nine Jewish participants were completely unaware of the issues Palestinians had related to being powerless in Israeli society (Sonnenschein, Bekerman, & Horenczyk, 2010).

As reflexivity does not occur to a great extent in encounter groups, the resulting dynamics are that both groups look to the other to make the first move, to be the first to capitulate to the other. Only then are they willing to compromise and move forward. The reason for such little reflexivity is complex. First, as in all conflicts, each group is convinced that its side is right and the other is wrong. From the perspective of each group, this is their truth as this has always been their experience. If one's group is right and the other is wrong, it is therefore the responsibility of the other group to take responsibility. As illustrated in chapter three, much of the dialogue between the two groups comprises this aspect: using leading questions and statements to have the other side take responsibility for its actions. The second reason is cultural. Both groups value pride and have a difficult time admitting wrong doing. As noted in previous chapters, Jewish Israeli participants claim that Palestinian reflexivity is not reciprocated and Palestinians refuse self-criticism (Helman, 2002). The literature illustrates that Palestinians are less willing to admit this possibly because of Arab cultural mores that changing your view of your enemy will be regarded as weakness and showing weakness is not permitted (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004).

The Jewish participants were very frustrated because the Palestinian participants did not see their humanity; the Palestinians treated them as part of the oppressive Jewish majority, and this they found even more frustrating after they had changed in the encounter and taken steps to identify with the Palestinian side. (Sonnenschein, Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2010, p. 56).

It is the position of this paper that the seeds of reflexivity can be planted in the participants by encouraging them to exercise their reflexive muscles; something that rarely occurs in the dynamics of this conflict. The literature illustrates that encounter groups have allowed participants to discuss the issues they feel are of importance with minimum

guidance from facilitators (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Helman, 2002; Moaz, 2001; Maoz et al., 2002). This has resulted in the dynamics laid out in chapters two and three of argument, lack of listening, and competition between the two groups with mixed results. Encouraging reflexivity is not only possible, in the single study where it was encouraged with Israeli Jewish participants, it was successful. I. Lustig (2002, unpublished thesis as cited in Kupermintz & Salomon, 2005) conducted a study of Israelis where they learned about the conflict in Northern Ireland. There was no mention of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however following the workshop on the conflict in Northern Ireland, participants who were asked to describe the local conflict from the point of view of the Palestinians, that is, from a Palestinian sympathetic perspective, were able to. A control group who had not taken part in the study were not able to write sympathetically from the Palestinian perspective (Kupermintz & Salomon, 2005). Salomon (2011) hypothesises that when learning in an emotionally neutral context, understanding of an emotional subject is greater. In the case of Lustig's study, emotions were temporarily removed by highlighting another conflict, neutral to the participants, which allowed the adversaries perspective to be understood. In Lustig's study, the conflict in Northern Ireland was used to take participants mentally out of their situation to see a different, less emotional perspective, which allowed them to view their own situation more objectively. It is the position of this paper that conflict theory can be used in a similar way to mentally remove participants from the emotions of their own conflict.

In situations of violent conflict, individuals believe that they are right and the other is wrong. This assumption then reifies beliefs in what the conflict is about and the dynamics

and structures of the conflict. Reflexivity implies a bidirectional relationship in that what one says and does has consequences and contributes to the conflict. To create reflexivity involves a process of being conscious of one's self and how what one says and does contributes to the conflict both in the encounter group and in the outside conflict. By understanding how one's beliefs affect the conflict and how the conflict affects one's beliefs, participants will be able to apply these lessons in the long term. It is hoped that by participants having a bird's eye view of the conflict dynamics, they will carry with them this dual-perspective at all times, seeing the dynamics of the conflict from both sides' perspectives.

### **Design of Encounter Group with a Reflexive Approach**

The following is a recommended design of an encounter group to encourage participants in gaining reflexivity.

#### **Goals:**

To provide participants with tools towards self-reflection to encourage understanding of how and what they and others say and do impacts the conflict and are therefore able to view the conflict from multiple perspectives. This reflexive approach will help move participants from 'us vs. them' dynamics towards finding win-win solutions for all.

**Length**

The process is estimated to take place over a period of two to three days but can be shortened or extended depending on the need. However, all three phases should be completed.

**Process:**

*Phase 1:* An introduction to the goals of the reflective approach are presented followed by a workshop on what is known about Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups to date (chapters two and three). This includes a brief history of Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups, outlining the common dynamics that occur and highlighting and explaining the three categories that appear in the literature: power asymmetry, communications and culture, and collective narratives, followed by an overview of impact evaluations and the reasons why encounter groups are not as successful as hoped.

*Phase 2:* Workshop sessions are conducted on the theory of Human Identity Needs and Hegemonic Structures, briefly outlining the theories and asking participants for examples within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

*Activity 1:* Participants are split up into small bi-national groups (for example, 2 Israelis and 2 Palestinians) to discuss the following question: 'how do Human Identity Needs apply to your own life?'. Participants will be instructed to try to keep the examples to a personal level. For example, 'I relate to security because I feel fear when I go through a checkpoint'.

The breakout groups come together to present their responses. Each has time to speak without interruption.

Following each person's response, the other participants have the opportunity to respond and ask questions. This gives an opportunity for mistaken assumptions to be corrected and ideas explained. Speaking is open at this stage to allow for participants to speak freely and not be encumbered by rigid rules. However if facilitators need to, they should step in to ensure that each group is speaking equally and no one person or group is imposing itself on others.

The next person takes a turn presenting, etc. Facilitators summarize the responses on boards/paper displayed for everyone to see and refer to.

*Activity 2:* Uni-national breakout groups (Israelis with Israelis and Palestinians with Palestinians) meet in small groups to answer the following question: 'what Human Identity Needs do you think are important to the other group and why?'. Responses are discussed and then presented to the wider group in the following way: the uni-national group presents without interruption. The other group then has an opportunity to respond or ask questions to correct misconceptions or clarify ideas. Depending on the dynamics of the group, it may work better to allow free speaking or to enforce turn taking. Once the discussion of that response has been sufficiently discussed, the next group presents their response, etc. Facilitators summarize the main points on boards/paper for all to see.

*Activity 3:* Participants spilt up into small bi-national groups (for example, 2 Israelis and 2 Palestinians) to discuss the following question: ‘how do Hegemonic Structures apply to your own life?’. Participants will be instructed to try to keep the examples to a personal level. As in activity 1, the breakout groups come together to present their responses, following each person’s response, the other participants have the opportunity to respond and ask questions, etc.

*Activity 4:* Uni-national breakout groups meet to answer the following question: ‘how do Hegemonic Structures impact the other group and why?’. As in activity 2, responses are discussed and then presented to the wider group, other group has an opportunity to respond or ask questions to correct misconceptions or clarify ideas.

*Phase 3:*

The facilitators summarize the main thoughts based on what was written during the four activities by giving a summary of areas where there are commonalities and still remain differences. The participants are brought together for a talking circle where the facilitators will present the commonalities and differences. Participants will then each speak on a future oriented topic that the facilitators can choose based on the dynamics of the encounter group. Topics could be ‘we know the commonalities and the differences between you, what can you do in your own life to further narrow the differences?’, ‘which difference would you most like to be able to solve’, etc.

### **Design Elements to Consider**

Much of the design of the encounter group is up to the facilitator's discretion, however there are some key points to consider based on the literature:

#### **Language:**

The encounter group can either be conducted in English as neutral language or in Hebrew and Arabic with simultaneous translation.

#### **Participants:**

Having an equal numbers of Israeli and Palestinian participants is essential (Maoz, 2005). If possible, there should be an effort made to find participants with a range of views.

#### **Facilitation:**

- It is essential to have both a Palestinian and an Israeli facilitator. The facilitators should have equal amounts of facilitation experience and comparable facilitating styles (Maoz, 2005). Facilitators should take a tough approach to facilitating: not allowing for interruptions when there are too many, and asking people to stick to one topic at a time, not go from topic to topic without allowing a response. This is crucial for good dialogue to occur and understanding to be generated.
- Throughout the process, the dynamics discussed and analyzed in chapter two and three will come up as part of the natural dynamics of the encounter group.

Facilitators should use those opportunities to point out the dynamics to the group as a

whole and remind them that these dynamics are expected, understandable and are explainable. For example, if particular cultural tactics or types of speech are being used or collective narrative speak is being used, the facilitators role is to make this apparent to the speaker and the listeners. The idea is not to shame participants into a particular behaviour or change the speaker's way of speaking or ideas, it is to show how these dynamics are real and that the listener may not understand their intentions correctly. Facilitation involves problem solving on the fly. In order to break an argument cycle, facilitators may need to remind the participants that these dynamics occur and do not need to be repeated.

- Equal participation and division of power are crucial for a successful encounter group (Maoz, 2005). Everyone should feel that they are being heard and that the amount of speaking is equal between Israelis and Palestinians. Facilitators must take a harder line when a power asymmetry exists in the encounter pointing out the dynamics and how it affects the participants. Traditional encounter groups tend to reinforce the power differences inherent between Israelis and Palestinians (Bekerman, 2007; as cited in Halabi & Sonnenshein, 2000). Some words, phrases and concepts may be upsetting to the other group (Maoz, 2003). It is the facilitator's role to point this out and have the group come to decisions on what terms can be used. The facilitator's role is to explain the "norm of equality" and how it will be reinforced. Participants generally agree and follow the rules set out from the beginning (Moaz, 2005).

- It should be understood that change takes time and participants need time to work through their emotions. Participants have a history with the other group and must relearn what they know about each other and themselves (Maoz & Ellis, 2006).

### *Evaluation*

The majority of encounter groups found in the literature had an evaluation immediately following the encounter group experience. Others took a before-after approach to attempt to measure the degree of change in attitude of participants before and after the encounter group experience. This paper suggests that to know the effects of an encounter group, evaluations have to be given before, after and 6-12 months post-encounter group.

### **Expected Dynamics and Challenges to a Reflexive Approach**

A reflexive approach will both have its benefits and challenges related to Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups. Encounter groups in general and even those that work towards reflexivity are limited by the fact that human beings in situations of conflict carry in them deep emotions that are often difficult to overcome (Redekop, 2002). Critical thinking, empathy, and reflexivity all require a setting aside of emotions that is difficult for most even under stable conditions. In situations of entrenched long term conflict, overcoming emotions is particularly difficult. Events outside of the encounter group will impact on the dynamics and dialogue. As noted in the literature, many encounter groups fell apart at times of violence (Salomon, 2009).

A reflexive approach will not be able to solve the challenges inherent to the Contact Hypothesis. The Contact Hypothesis states that bringing two groups in conflict together to discuss their differences will be successful when participants are equal in status, there are personal and sustained interactions, both groups work towards a common goal, and there is consensus among the authorities favouring equality (Amir, 1969). Other than personal and sustained interactions which a reflexive approach may encourage, it is beyond the mandate of any encounter group to change the structures of Israeli and Palestinian societies that lead to correcting power asymmetry and encouraging social support while the conflict is ongoing.

However in terms of the stated goals of Israeli-Palestinian encounter group in the literature- creating a positive change in attitude, weakening of stereotypes towards the other group, reducing tensions, changing perceptions, attitudes, and feelings, reducing prejudices, promoting co-existence and tolerance, reducing violence, learning about one another in the hopes of finding solutions to the conflict, increasing belief in peace, increasing the ability to see the other side's perspective, creating greater willingness for contact with the other group, and strengthening co-existence through closeness, commonalities, and cooperation- all these are potential effects of a reflexive approach to dialogue as reflexivity will help participants listen, hear and learn from one another.

The strengths of a reflexive approach to encounter groups are in its approach to the dynamics. By focusing on neutral conflict theory and putting the participant in the position of participant observer, issues that come up in the literature in other encounter groups such as argument, lack of listening, and blame allocation may be avoided.

Negative arguments, debate and blame allocation are more difficult when discussing one's situation through the lens of theory. The neutral aspect of conflict theory helps diffuse tensions and allows participants to be more reflective about their own situation and other other's. Relating personal stories makes it harder for the other side to deconstruct or take issue with facts or interpretations and therefore helps diffuse the argument style that is the norm in encounter groups. A reflexive approach allows each person to tell their version of reality based on a personal story, grounded in neutral conflict theory to help ease its emotional impact. Additionally, a reflexive approach helps participants learn about one's own and the other's collective identity without the threat of competition between the two.

As illustrated in the literature, Israelis have a need to get along with Palestinians, Palestinians want to be heard and get recognition of their suffering in the hopes of bringing about structural change. A reflexive approach allows both groups to get what they want: trust can be built, recognition can be given. The surrounding political issues are not discussed but the results of these issues- the impacts on people- are discussed so this should satisfy both sides. Through reflexivity, competition can be limited as both are heard and hopefully understood.

This approach does not purposely strengthen the empowerment of one group over another. Rather the focus is on the empowerment of both groups to better understand the dynamics of the conflict and the roles they play in the conflict. In a situation where one side is empowered because of the outside power asymmetry, even if required, it may impact the other group negatively. In this sense, the reflexive approach is closest to the Intergroup Approach as it recognizes collective identities through principles of conflict resolution and

developing awareness of conflict and one's role in it (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004).

However a reflexive approach is not designed for conflict resolution of a particular issue or reconciliation between the groups and will not produce structural change. It is designed to plant a seed of thoughtfulness and reflection in the participant. It is hoped that this seed will develop and be spread. In terms of the ripple effect, it may be easier for participants to use the lessons learned through conflict theory. In normal encounter groups, telling what one learned about the adversarial group invited derision and scepticism (Salomon, 2009). With the use of neutral conflict theories, suspicion and scepticism may be suspended in others as well.

In terms of the differences in cultural approaches to dialogue, a reflexive approach to encounter groups allows participants to both gain cultural understanding of themselves and the other group and act as participant observers to the cultural dynamics that occur during dialogue. Previous encounter groups were marked by competition for whose narrative is correct, who suffers more and therefore is the greater victim, and which group needs to change first. These dynamics are expected to be less likely to occur within a reflexive approach as emotions fuel this competition. By participant mentally removing themselves from the emotions of the conflict, competition is less likely to occur. If competition is less likely to occur, understanding is more likely to occur.

**Possible Further Steps**

If a reflexive approach is proven successful in that participants feel that they learned from the experience and positive views and attitudes remained months later, other more advanced tactics could be attempted. Here are a few examples to consider:

- films made by participants of their reality or films made by others could be analyzed using the reflexive approach with participants,
- participants may try explaining the other's narrative to the mixed group using the cultural communication patterns of their own group and then again through the culture communication patters of the other group to illustrate the cultural differences,
- as the two groups are cut off from one another and have difficulty meeting, Internet-based communication such as a forum or wiki can be used to house information gained at the encounter group, to share with others and to further communicate ideas that were raised during the encounter,
- in phase three where future oriented discussions are conducted, brainstorming may occur towards future projects that can be done together.

As demonstrated above, with the use of a reflexive approach towards dialogue, encounter groups can develop in directions that suit the participants involved.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the dynamics and structural challenges found in the literature on Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups, an alternative approach to dialogue was described. A reflexive approach to encounter groups which uses the conflict theories of Human Identity Needs and Hegemonic Structures has illustrated how it can help move the outcomes forward from simply acting as a barrier to furthering deteriorating in relations towards creating greater understanding between the two peoples. It is hoped that the dynamics illustrated will help to move dialogue forward for Israelis and Palestinians towards more positive results.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Conclusion**

A review of the literature found that Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups have some success in changing participant's views toward the other in the short term but not in the long term. Views regress to pre-encounter group levels as participants go back to their communities and receive negative information about the other group that replaces any positive information that was gained. This paper set out to answer the following research questions: What are the central themes and dynamics that surface within encounter groups? What are the structural reasons for encounter groups having little long term impacts? How can reflexivity address these structural problems? How could reflexivity be achieved in an encounter group setting? How could an encounter group be organized to achieve reflexivity? The central themes and dynamics between participants that lead to disappointing outcomes were categorized into power asymmetry, culture and communications and collective narratives. These interrelated categories illustrate how difficult it is for Israelis and Palestinians to find common ground and view one another positively as the conflict combines ethnic, national, religious, legal, historical, ethical, social, and cultural aspects and is still ongoing and violent. In order to move from outcomes of encounter group as barrier to further deterioration towards better understanding of one another, this paper poses making participants aware of the dynamics of past encounter groups as categorized in this paper and then using the conflict theories of Human Identity Needs and Hegemonic Structures to encourage reflexivity through a series of activities that help exercise participants' reflexive muscles. From a review of the literature, no encounter groups reviewed the lessons learned

from previous dialogue attempts in order not to repeat negative dynamics and no encounter groups utilized conflict theory as a means of objectively analyzing the dynamics to help participants gain reflexivity therefore the analysis provided in this paper is a unique contribution. It is hoped that once participants begin to view the conflict dynamics from both side's perspective, better long term outcomes will be possible.

The research style outlined in this paper could be used for other entrenched conflicts around the world. Each conflict has its own unique dynamics that those involved are aware of but do not always verbalize. A similar methodology could be used to categorize and analyze other conflicts from a participant observer perspective and conflict theories such as Human Identity Needs and Hegemonic Structures could easily be used to help analyze the group dynamics within other encounter group settings and other conflicts.

The research outlined in this paper purposely brought together the dynamics that are common in Israeli-Palestinian encounter groups so these dynamics could be understood by a new generation of encounter group designers and facilitators. Through the understanding of these dynamics and how the dynamics contribute to one another to keep the structures of conflict alive, it is hoped that dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians can move forward. There are two nations on the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, finding ways to learn and understand one another is of primary importance. If implemented, the reflexive approach to encounter groups will require evaluations to show if there are significant long term impacts. If successful, further research should be done to know if

having an understanding of the past dynamic of encounter groups and conflict theory help move participants forward and whether this approach has a ripple effect.

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