

## **Cognitive and Emotional Ingroup-identification of Youth in Israel and Palestine**

*In which ways does the pride and shame dynamics influence the self-presentation/ self-portrayal of Israeli and Palestinian youth during interaction with “the other”?*

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### *Brief theoretical outline*

In conflict resolution work, connecting people of rival groups on an individual level is a common technique. Human Rights education is seen as the basis of making this human connection. Meetings are most commonly organized, stories of one another are told. However, many of these meetings face severe obstacles in reaching the goal of creating empathy towards each others narrative, and making a true connection from human to human (Bar-Ôn, D., 2004). A study by Sagy, Adwan & Kaplan (2002) called “Interpretations of the Past and Expectations for the Future Among Israeli and Palestinian Youth” among more than 1100 Palestinian and an equal number of Israeli youth shows that emotional perspective taking was much more challenging than cognitive perspective taking. In their study the Jewish and Palestinian youth could legitimize the other’s narrative on a cognitive level but not on an emotional one. They also found that instead of empathic listening and connecting to the other’s narrative emotionally, high levels of anger and even rage arose in their participants (Sagy, Adwan & Kaplan, 2002, p.34). These findings leave us with the conclusion that emotions do influence the ability of connecting to one another to a great extent, and that in this context emotions are more powerful than cognitions or attitudes which can be changed more easily.

Departing from the feelings of anger and rage that the participants experienced in the mentioned study, reviewing literature on the subject revealed two things:

1. rage/anger typically is not the cause of violence, but rather a mask for what one might call „the underlying hurt” (Scheff, T.J. & Retzinger, S.M. ,1991, p.188.);
2. this “underlying hurt” might be the emotion of shame as Tangney & Fisher state: “Empirical evidence from diverse methods and sources suggests that shame may often result in (or at least co-occur with) feelings of anger and hostility, and a tendency to project blame outward. In contrast, guilt has been associated with a tendency to accept responsibility, and, if anything, with a somewhat decreased tendency toward interpersonal anger and hostility.” (Tangney, J.P. & Fischer K.W., 1995, p.124).

Lewis (1971) states (in the same book p.121): „In redirecting anger outside the self, shamed individuals may be attempting to regain a sense of agency and control, which is so often impaired in the shame experience“.

The social theory of shame by T.J. Scheff (in: Scheff, T.J. & Retzinger, S.M., 1991) describes the dynamics of shame and violence. The authors state that when shame stays unacknowledged, feelings of separation and hurt are experienced which make it difficult to identify with the other person (who has stimulated those feelings in us). As a consequence, we would react with withdrawal, sarcasm, blame, demeaning criticism, threat or worse reciprocating the shame experience for the other. People kill for social reasons: lost affection, lost honor, and other highly moral reasons as Lewis 1976 and Katz 1988 (as cited in Scheff, T.J. & Retzinger, S.M., 1991, p.66) have already acknowledged.

For my research the question arose to which extent and in which ways the emotions of shame or even humiliation about one's situation in the context of a political conflict (e.g. the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), and the emotion of pride regarding one's national identity influenced the way (Israeli and Palestinian) youth are presenting themselves in an internet forum while discussing a conflict-related issue. This question arose from the context that the research will be settled in: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Israeli and Palestinian youth that are going to participate in the study are active in one of 3 youth organisations in Israel and Palestine. Those organisations stress the importance of Human Rights education, and have been organizing meetings between both groups in the form of youth exchanges in Europe with other European partner organisations. Therefore, it is assumed that the youth participating in the study will not act violently even when experiencing shame or humiliation. Rather, it is assumed (and this is consistent with experiences described by Bar-Ôn, D., 2004) that youth with this background will transform their feelings of shame and humiliation into feelings of pride. If (verbally) "attacked" or when their national identity is hurt they might withdraw into their own group and try to regain a sense of pride from the identification with their own group (which might, in my example rather be a sub-(youth)-group than a national group). Social Identity Theory (Turner & Tajfel, 1986) supports such assumptions.

Yet, in the participating groups, this process might rather be subconscious and disguised. It is assumed that the youth that are active in the youth organisations participating in the study are much more moderate and much less nationalistic / patriotic than "ordinary" youth. Therefore, they will face a difficult situation when their national identity gets hurt. On the one hand, they will feel the hurt and might want to react to it. On the other hand, they might not know how to react because they do not want to seem patriotic / nationalistic since they distance themselves from being that way. Pride and shame in this context might be the main components shaping interaction. Therefore I want to explore in which ways the dynamics of pride and shame influences or shapes the self-portrayal / self-presentation of the more moderate Israeli and Palestinian youth during interaction with "the other".

*Method*

The idea is to set up a discussion forum on the internet through which about 30 youth from both nations can exchange opinions on an issue relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during a period of 2 weeks on a daily basis. The issue will be an emotional one, a core issue to the conflict which was seen as a reason for disagreement (of people from both sides) in the past<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to the forum discussion, the youth will be asked to write a diary (on a daily basis) during the time of the 2 weeks of discussion, in which they should report their inner feelings about what is going on in the discussion, how they felt about certain responses placed on the forum and political developments if they did influence the discussion or personal attitude.

After this stage, a second stage will follow, which will be personal interviews of at least some of the youth having completed the discussion session and the diary. The interviews are to clarify certain responses and to connect what was going on in the forum discussion with the personal feelings of each of the interviewed youth.

A third stage then would be to have the youth meet in national meetings: there would be three meetings: one for the Israeli-Jews, one for the Palestinians, and one the Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, in which they could discuss among themselves how it felt to be part of the research. Moreover, they could explore the variety of the responses in their own group, since the participation in the forum was anonymous (with the use of chat-names).

A common meeting of all three groups might follow if the participants feel happy to do so, and the circumstances do allow for it.

The purpose of the meetings (both in national and mixed groups) is just and only personal sharing and the chance for getting to know each other. It is not oriented towards any goal and does not focus on an act of peace or reconciliation; it is just for sharing those feelings and thoughts which were stimulated during the interaction with each other in the research. If the groups decide not to meet, this is fine and is still a result for the research that can be taken notice of. It is important to emphasize that in every stage of the research it is possible for the youth to withdraw. Withdrawal from the research at any stage will still be a result that can be analyzed. Moreover, due to the high emotional contents of the study it is extremely important that the youth feel free to withdraw at any stage. In the case of withdrawal they will be offered a personal talk about their participation and the issue discussed. Withdrawing does not have any consequences on them, and their identity will kept anonymous.

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<sup>1</sup> At the moment I am thinking about taking the “One-state-solution” as the issue of discussion because this example might stimulate feelings about one’s own belonging to a national group, and whether or not it feels “safe” to co-operate with the “others” in terms of living in one state. Moreover, this issue would be extremely interesting if a third group, the Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, would take part in the discussion since they do live in one state with the Jews (as a minority fighting for equality) and therefore might hold an opinion different from the other clear-defined groups. Furthermore, this issue is not extensively discussed at the moment since the Two-state-solution has dominated political discussions, yet since the construction of the Barrier/Wall in Palestine which cuts through Palestinian land, the ongoing (re-)occupation of cities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the growing settlements in the West Bank this solution has become much less realistic for the near future. Since the issue has not been in the focus of discussion for a while the youth might be pushed to develop their arguments in the process of the discussion rather than using set arguments.

*Analyzing the data*

I do expect to get a lot of data at the end of the research phase. I will have the postings of the forum discussion, the completed diaries, and the transcribed interviews.

Therefore, I plan to write a research report after every completed stage, to draw out the most distinctive features and findings. Furthermore, I will work out definitions of the notions of pride and shame, including verbal statements/words that are seen to describe or disguise those feelings in verbal interaction. At the moment I suppose I will do a contents analysis, looking for the notions of pride and shame in the texts (with the help of my definitions), while also paying attention to other emotional responses (like fear, guilt, hurt, frustration or rage) in the texts. Connecting the discussion texts with the personal diaries will give me more insight into how emotions *are shaped* during / *shape* the discussion. It might be assumed that the interviews will reflect this process as well. Contents-analyzing all texts (the discussion, the diary and interview) and connecting and comparing them with each other does seem a suitable way to me for data reduction and analysis.

It might be wise to connect the qualitative findings to some quantitative results: I am thinking about using a test for measuring the degree of ingroup-identification (nationalism / patriotism) in each youth and the degree of trust/distrust towards individuals of the other groups with for example the Bogardus social distance scale at the beginning of the study. However, collecting these data might prime the youth to answer / discuss in a certain way during the forum discussion since it focuses the attention on national identity and the attitude towards the “other” beforehand, so I am still doubting whether the quantitative results would be helpful and enriching.

*References*

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