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Protected by Ethos in a Protracted Conflict? A Comparative Study among Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem

Iris Lavi[1], Daphna Canetti[1], Keren Sharvit[2], Daniel Bar-Tal[3] and Stevan E. Hobfoll[4]

Abstract

Can endorsement of the *ethos of conflict* alter psychological effects of exposure to political violence? Israelis and Palestinians have been in a state of political and military turmoil for decades. We interviewed 781 Israelis and 1,196 Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Using structural equation modeling, we found that among those with a weak adherence to ethos of conflict, exposure predicted higher levels of hatred. For Israelis with a weak adherence to ethos of conflict, exposure predicted higher psychological distress and fear. For Palestinians with weaker adherence to ethos of conflict, stronger exposure predicted stronger threat perceptions. Israelis and Palestinians with a strong adherence to the ethos showed steady and high levels of negative emotions and threat, regardless of exposure. These results indicate that ethos of conflict is a double-edged sword that

[1]School of Political Sciences, University of Haifa, Israel
[2]Program for Peace and Conflict Management Studies and the Department of Psychology, University of Haifa, Israel
[3]School of Education, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel
[4]Department of Behavioral Sciences, Rush University Medical Center, Chicago, IL, USA

Corresponding Author:
Iris Lavi, School of Political Sciences, University of Haifa, Mount Carmel, Haifa 31905, Israel.
Email: iris.lavi.01@gmail.com

both protects and protracts the conflict. Although it serves as an engine fueling the conflict, it also plays a meaningful role as an empowering force for people suffering the psychological burden of an ongoing conflict.

Keywords
ethos of conflict, political violence, terrorism, psychological distress, trauma, threat perceptions, Israeli–Palestinian conflict, protracted conflict, political ideology

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is a prototypical example of a protracted conflict. Such conflicts are widespread and result in massive human losses and suffering, based on conflicting ideological goals that are perceived by the parties involved as existential, of zero-sum nature, and irresolvable. Furthermore, they are violent, play a central role in the lives of the societies involved, demand significant material and psychological investments, and last at least a generation (Kriesberg 1993; Bar-Tal 2007b). Members of societies that are involved in such conflicts live under conditions of insecurity, uncertainty, and stress for extended periods.

Exposure to violence in the face of protracted conflict may exacerbate adverse experiences and give rise to high levels of psychological distress (de Jong et al. 2001; Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; Canetti et al. 2010). In addition, the adverse experiences associated with exposure to violence may shape the exposed individuals' perceptions of emotions toward opponents who are believed to be responsible for the violence (Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim, and Johnson 2006; Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009). These perceptions and emotions may, in turn, become barriers to peaceful resolution of the conflict (Bar-Tal and Halperin 2011).

The current study examines the effects of personal exposure to conflict-related events during the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which has been ongoing for over 100 years. This study is unique as it examines two comparable representative samples of Israelis and Palestinians residing in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Examining the two adversaries in a conflict, here the Israelis and the Palestinians, during the progression of a conflict, has a distinct advantage in the ability to compare responses to political violence of the two groups. In addition to the ability to compare the two rival groups, examining the Israeli–Palestinian conflict can shed light on other protracted intractable conflicts, such as those in Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, and Kashmir.

As in other conflicts, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is characterized by a great diversity of violent acts carried out by both groups. These events may have different consequences for the well-being of the affected persons. Posttraumatic reactions, by definition, result from exposure to events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury to oneself or to others (American Psychiatric Association 2000). In contrast, financial loss resulting from the continuing conflict may not register as a traumatic event but may demand long-term coping and could have long-lasting

effects on mental health and emotions. Indeed, financial strain leads to higher levels of depressive symptoms (Price, Choi, and Vinokur 2002). In addition, in contrast to posttraumatic reactions that are event-related, depressive symptoms may occur as a result of a cognitive vulnerability that changes the interpretation of life events or as a result of genetic moderation to the stress–depression link (Beck and Alford 2009).

Furthermore, past studies have shown that not everyone responds in the same way when exposed to conflict-related violence. Psychology has long recognized that individuals' reactions to stimuli in their environment are products of an interaction between the nature of the stimuli and individual dispositions, which shape the manner in which the stimuli are encoded and interpreted (Ross and Nisbett 1991; Magnusson and Törestad 1992; Mischel and Shoda 1995). Moreover, research has shown that some individuals are not affected by adversities in general (Rutter 1985) and by exposure to political violence in particular (Galea et al. 2002). In the present research, we focus on the role of a set of ideological beliefs about the conflict, termed the *ethos of conflict* (hereafter ethos), as a potential distress buffer. We investigated the role of these ideological beliefs among nationally representative samples of Israeli Jews and Palestinians residing in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

Ideology and Coping with Adversities

Theories of distress resulting from protracted conflicts emphasize the importance for the coping process of finding meaning, establishing a coherent worldview, and adherence to a cultural worldview (Antonovski, Measri, and Blane 1978; Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 1991; Janoff-Bulman 1992; Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski 1997). Ideology constitutes a coherent worldview often prevalent in one's culture, which can provide a sense of meaning in the face of individual and collective threats. A strong ideological belief may attenuate the effect of exposure to political violence on psychological distress. For example, studies have shown that the relationship between exposure and psychological distress was weaker among individuals who were highly committed to an ideology compared to those who were less committed (Punamaki 1996; Kaplan et al. 2005; Shechner, Slone, and Bialik 2007).

It has been suggested that there are qualitative differences in the effects of various ideologies. Jost and Hunyady (2003, 2005) proposed that system-justifying ideologies that defend the social status quo are especially functional for coping with adversities. For example, threat perceptions were found to be positively related to conservatism. Thus, conservatism can be seen as a part of a coping strategy when facing high threat levels. Political extremity, either conservative or liberal, was not found to be related to perceptions of threat, a finding that stresses the possibility that not all sets of ideological belief are as functional in situations of threat (Jost et al. 2007). In the present research, we focus on a particular ideology that is prevalent among societies that are involved in intense violent conflicts: the ethos of conflict. We argue that this specific ideological system can serve as a system-justifying

ideology and thus play an important role in the effects of political violence exposure on coping with the adversity created by political conflict.

The Ethos of Conflict

The ethos of conflict is defined as a configuration of central shared societal beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society and give meaning to societal life under conditions of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal 2000, 2013). This system of beliefs provides guiding prescriptions for social action and serves as a prism through which society members evaluate their experiences and interpret new events and information (Bar-Tal et al. 2012). Furthermore, the ethos can be regarded as a kind of system-justifying conservative ideology as defined by Jost and colleagues (Jost et al. 2003; Jost and Hunyady 2005) since it justifies the maintenance of the status quo through the continuation of the conflict and portrays one's system as better than the competing system. It has been shown that the ethos is a coherent feature of Israeli society (Bar-Tal 2007a; Bar-Tal et al. 2012) and is an active part of the psychological repertoire of most Israelis (Sharvit 2008).

The beliefs that comprise the Israeli ethos of conflict and the Palestinian ethos of conflict are, to a great degree, mirror images. The ethos in each society is comprised of eight belief themes: justness of the goals, victimization, security, positive collective self-image, delegitimization of the adversary, patriotism, unity, and peace. Full descriptions of the content of these beliefs in both societies can be found elsewhere (Oren, Bar-Tal, and David 2004; Bar-Tal et al. 2009; Bar-Tal et al. 2012). As an example, the societal beliefs regarding justness of goals describe the conflict's goals, indicate their existential importance, and provide explanations and rationale for these goals. In the Israeli–Jewish case, these beliefs stem from Zionist ideology which was a major source of inspiration calling for the Jewish people's return to the Biblical land of Israel after 2000 years of exile, as well as for the aspiration to establish a Jewish state there (Avineri 1981; Vital 1982; Bar-Tal et al. 2009). The Palestinians' belief in the justness of their national goals for a Palestinan state is based on the claim that they are the indigenous people of the territory of Palestine and have lived in it for many generations. Palestinans assert that they have endured repeated foreign occupations, the latest being the formation of the Israeli state and the resulting expulsion of refugees. Palestinians assert that during those years, a Palestinian identity was created (Khalidi 1997).

Another example may be beliefs regarding victimization. The Israeli ethos presents Israelis as victims of violence perpetrated by Arabs. This view is based on Arab attempts to harm Jews physically, to stop their immigration, and to prevent their settling in this territory. The Palestinian ethos, in contrast, presents the Palestinians as victims of violence perpetrated by Jews. This view is especially based on the events of the 1948 and 1967 wars in which Palestinians were forced to leave their homes and land and hundreds of their villages were destroyed (Oren, Bar-Tal, and David 2004).

In light of the above mentioned theorizing regarding the role of ideologies in general and conservative system–justifying ideologies in particular in coping with adversities, we propose that the ethos of conflict acts as a distress buffer, with high levels of ethos related to lower levels of psychological distress, posttraumatic, and depressive symptoms, even in times of exposure to conflict.

Violence, Intergroup Perceptions, Emotions, and the Ethos of Conflict

In addition to psychological distress, exposure to conflict-related violence can also lead to increased threat perceptions and negative emotions toward opponents who are perceived as responsible for the threat. As may be the case for psychological distress, the consequences of exposure regarding threat perceptions and attitudes toward the enemy may depend on individuals' ideological beliefs. In this regard, a recent study (Sharvit et al. 2010) examined the change in Jewish Israelis' views regarding peace negotiations following terror attacks. The change in views was found to be dependent on personal political orientation and on the context of the conflict (progress toward peace in the 1990s vs. conflict escalation 2001–02). In the context of progress toward peace, hawks' opinions regarding peace became less favorable following terror, whereas doves exhibited minimal opinion change. During conflict escalation, however, the pattern was reversed, with doves' opinions regarding peace becoming less favorable following terror, and hawks' support for peace increasing, while their belief in peace did not change. Thus, within a given context, the effect of terror events depended on individuals' ideological orientation.

Ethos of conflict portrays the opponent group as illegitimate and inhumane and the in-group as well-intending victims. This leads to expected differences in reactions to personal exposure to violent events. Persons who strongly adhere to the ethos of conflict perceive of the opponents as threatening, feared, and hated regardless of personal exposure to violence. Personal exposure will not lead to elevated levels of threat perceptions, fear, or hatred, as these are already elevated for this group.

In contrast, individuals who adhere less strongly or not at all to the ethos tend to see the opponents as less threatening and to experience low fear and hatred toward them. Perhaps for them, personal exposure to violence will contradict their typical views, and this will lead to increased threat perceptions, hatred, and fear directed toward the perpetrators of the violent event.

We hypothesized that among people low on ethos adherence, the relationship between exposure and distress would be stronger than among those high on ethos adherence (Hypothesis 1); that different types of conflict-related events would be related to different types of distress: exposure to discrete harsh events would be strongly related to posttraumatic and depressive symptoms, and exposure to conflict-related financial loss would be strongly related to depression (Hypothesis 2); and that among people high on ethos adherence, the relationship between exposure and threat perceptions, fear, and hatred would be weaker than among those low on ethos adherence (Hypothesis 3).

Method

Data Collection and Sample

A total of 781 Jewish Israelis took part in this study in the age range of 17 to 93 (mean age = 45.36, *SD* = 17.25), with 51.60% women (*N* = 403). The survey was conducted from March to May 2008. A total of 1,196 Palestinians from the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem took part in this study, in the age range of 18 to 80 (*mean* age = 35.01, *SD* = 12.68), with 52.00% (*N* = 622) women. The survey was conducted in September and October 2007. Both surveys were conducted in relatively static and calm periods of the conflict, with no special events occurring.

Tools

Predictor Variables

Exposure in the Israeli sample. Three items measured exposure to war and terrorism-related events in the Israeli sample. (1) During the past year, have you experienced difficult events such as being witness to a terror or rocket attack, serious injury, death, or injury of a close person as a result of rockets (Qatyushas or Qasams) or terror attacks? If so, how many events have you experienced? Answers to this question ranged from 0 (= *no exposure*) to 11 (= *10 or more exposures*). (2) Have you suffered financial loss as a result of rockets or terror attacks? and (3) Have you suffered damage to property as a result of rockets or terror attacks? Possible answers to these two items were no (= 0) or yes (= 1). The three items were used as representing general exposure (item 1), financial loss (item 2), and property damage (item 3) and were entered as separate measures in the analysis. The use of a short version of the scale in the Israeli survey was necessary due to space limitations in a nationwide survey containing many other variables.[1]

Exposure in the Palestinian sample. Six items measured exposure to war and terrorism-related events in the Palestinian sample: (1) death of a close friend/relative, (2) injury to a close friend/relative as a result of attacks, (3) injury to self as a result of attacks, (4) personally witnessing an Israeli attack, (5) home demolished due to Israeli attacks, and (6) suffering financial loss due to violence. The possible answers to the first two items represented number of events experienced and for third through sixth items the answers were no (= 0) or yes (= 1). Since in the Palestinian sample the exposure items were asked separately, these items remained as separate indicators of exposure. Thus, all 6 items were entered as separate measures in the analysis, items 1 through 4 as representing general exposure, item 5 as representing property damage, and item 6 representing financial loss.

Moderator Variable

Ethos of conflict. Support of the ethos of conflict was measured using six items in the Israeli sample and five items in the Palestinian sample. In the Israeli sample, the

six items represented five major ethos beliefs: justness of goals (The exclusive right of the Jews over the Land of Israel results from its being their historic homeland.), peace (In spite of the Israeli wish for peace, the Arabs have forced Israel to fight over and over again.), security (In times of Palestinian threats to Israel it is important to take significant military action, even if it means harming innocents on the opposing side.), victimization (The Palestinian behavior toward Israel is unjust and unfair.), and delegitimization of the opponent (The Palestinian behavior during negotiations stems from bad and evil characteristics that are rooted in the Arab mentality and culture. and The real intention of the Palestinians is to harm Israel and damage it as much as possible.). The ethos score was composed by averaging responses to the raw items. Reliability of the ethos scale for the Israeli sample was .78.

In the Palestinian sample, the five items represent four major ethos beliefs: justness of goals (The Palestinians have an exclusive claim to the land of Palestine as it has been their homeland for generations.), victimization (Despite the Palestinians' desire for peace, they have been repeatedly subjected to occupation and forced exile by the Israelis. and I do not believe in the peaceful intentions of the Israelis.), security (In times of threat to the Palestinians, it is important to take significant military action, even if it means harming innocents on the opposing side.), and delegitimization of the opponent (The Israelis are unreliable.). These beliefs were found to be central in the Palestinian ethos of conflict. The ethos score was composed by averaging responses to the raw items. Reliability of the ethos scale for the Palestinian sample was .58.

Dependent Variables

Depressive symptoms. Measurement of depressive symptoms targeted the prior two weeks and utilized a nine-item scale taken from the Public Health Questionnaire (Kroenke, Spitzer, and Williams 2001). Items were answered on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*all the time*). The score was composed by averaging responses to the raw items. The current study yielded a good α Cronbach's coefficient for internal consistency, .83 for the Israeli sample and .85 for the Palestinian sample.

Posttraumatic stress symptoms (PSSs). These symptoms were measured by ten items from the Posttraumatic Symptom Scale (Foa et al. 1993), assessing feelings for at least a month related to specific exposure to a conflict-related violence. We collapsed some items to abbreviate the survey because of time demands. Hence, we could only address symptom levels and could not estimate prevalence of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnosis. The items assessed symptom criteria indicated by *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (fourth edition; American Psychiatric Association 1994) for determining PTSD. For this study, we used three reexperiencing items (cluster B), four avoidance items (cluster C), and three hyperarousal items (cluster D). These were answered on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*). The score was composed by averaging

responses to the raw items. Cronbach's α for the scale was .79 in the Israeli sample and .86 in the Palestinian sample.

National and personal threat perceptions. Perceptions of national and personal threat were assessed using a two-item scale. In the Israeli sample, the items were (1) "How concerned are you about the possibility that Israel will face a large-scale attack of the Palestinians, Hizbullah, or one of the Arab states this year?" and (2) "How concerned are you about the possibility that you or one of your relatives will get hurt as a result of a terror attack, a rocket attack, or a war this year?" In the Palestinian sample, the items were (1) "How concerned are you about the possibility of a large-scale military attack against the Palestinians, including aerial bombing, incursions into cities, etc.?" and (2) "How concerned are you about the possibility that you or a family member will be victims of a large-scale attack on the Palestinians (military incursions, bombing, etc.)?" These items were based on previous works regarding threats in times of war and conflict (Huddy et al. 2002; Kam and Kinder 2007) and threats in the Israeli–Palestinian context (Canetti-Nisim, Ariely, and Halperin 2008). Items were adapted to the most pertinent current and future threats to Israelis and Palestinians and were used in previous works (Canetti 2012). In the Israeli and the Palestinian samples, these items were answered on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*to a very great degree*).

Emotions toward out-group. Two emotions toward the out-group (for Israelis: the Palestinians; for the Palestinians: the Israelis) were estimated: fear and hatred. A single item measured each emotion, following previous works (Mackie, Devos, and Smith 2000). The Israelis were asked the following questions (separately for fear and for hatred): Try to think of the Palestinian behavior during the past year. Indicate to what extent this behavior makes you feel fear/hatred. The Palestinians were asked the following questions (separately for fear and for hatred): To what extent does the behavior of the Jews in Israel and their leaders make you feel the following toward them: fear/hatred. Items were answered on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*to a very great degree*).

Demographic variables. Seven demographic variables were obtained from the participants: gender (male = 0, female = 1), religiosity level (in the Israeli sample: 1 = secular, 2 = traditional, 3 = religious, 4 = ultrareligious; in the Palestinian sample: 1 = not religious, 2 = somewhat religious, 3 = religious), age group (1 = 18–22, 2 = 23–29, 3 = 30–39, 4 = 40–49, 5 = 50–59, 6 = 60, and up), income level (1 = low, 2 = medium, 3 = high), education level (1 = less than high school, 2 = high school, 3 = more than high school, 4 = college), marital status (1 = single/divorced/separated/widowed, 2 = married), and political views (in the Israeli sample: 1 = extreme right, 2 = right, 3 = right-center, 4 = center, 5 = center-left, 6 = left, 7 = extreme left; in the Palestinian sample: 0 = voting for a party other than Fatah, 1 = voting for the Fatah party). The minor differences in the operationalization of the demographic variables were due to differences between the two

populations. For instance, the measures of religiosity level were adapted to common categorizations among Jews, Muslims, and Christians.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted by two experienced survey institutes, located in Tel Aviv and in Ramallah. Oral informed consent was obtained at interview onset. A structured questionnaire was administered to participants. As interviewers were conducted in the participants' native languages of Hebrew, Russian, or Arabic, the questionnaire was translated and back-translated into these languages for prior research (Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim, and Johnson 2006). All attempts were made to keep wording as similar as possible in the different languages, while using terminology commonly found in everyday language. The institutional review boards of Kent State University and the University of Haifa approved the study.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The means and standard deviations of the study variables are displayed in Table 1. Examination of the rates of exposure to violence shows that Palestinians reported higher levels of exposure, ranging between 20 and 30 percent in most cases, while only a tenth of participating Israelis reported exposure.

No significant differences between Israelis and Palestinians were found in levels of ethos of conflict adherence. However, Palestinians showed higher levels of depression, posttraumatic symptoms, perception of personal threat, and fear and hatred toward out-group members.

Data were analyzed by structural equation modeling (SEM), using AMOS 19 (Arbuckle 2003). SEM enables simultaneous estimation of the relative effects among variable within a given model (Kline 2005). The quality of the model is examined using the fit indices, which represent the correspondence of the hypothesized model to the actual one. Correlation tables are presented in the replication data, available at http://jcr.sagepub.com/. The structural models were examined by three steps. Table 2 shows fit indices of the models in each step as well as comparison of the steps. In the first step, the hypothesized model was estimated. The first model was comprised of the following exogenous variables: exposure variables (three variables in the Israeli model and six in the Palestinian), ethos of conflict adherence, and interactions between exposure and ethos (three interaction terms in the Israeli model and six in the Palestinian model). Six endogenous variables were entered: depression, posttraumatic symptoms, national threat, personal threat, fear, and hatred. Seven control variables were entered as well and included gender, religiosity level, age group, income level, education level, marital status, and political left.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables and Comparison between Israeli and Palestinian Samples.

	Frequency	*M*	*SD*
Exposure in Israeli sample			
General exposure	91 (11.65%)	.44	1.75
Financial loss	67 (8.60%)	.09	.28
Property damage	23 (2.90%)	.03	.17
Exposure in Palestinian sample			
Death of a close friend/relative	399 (33.33%)	.84	2.12
Injury to close friend/relative	312 (20.07%)	.44	.85
Injury to self	62 (5.20%)	.05	.22
Witnessing attack	388 (32.40%)	.32	.47
Home demolished	125 (10.51%)	.11	.31
Financial loss	387 (32.63%)	.33	.47

	M	*SD*	*t* (*df*)	*Sig.*
Moderator and dependent variables in the Israeli and Palestinian samples				
Ethos of conflict				
Israeli sample	4.91	.97	1.20 (1267.90)	.23
Palestinian sample	4.86	.74		
Depression				
Israeli sample	.39	.49	−29.29 (1934.44)	<.001
Palestinian sample	1.16	.67		
Posttraumatic symptoms				
Israeli sample	.47	.49	−33.77 (1779.54)	<.001
Palestinian sample	1.27	.55		
Perception of national threat				
Israeli sample	3.00	.97	−1.32 (1719.90)	.19
Palestinian sample	3.06	1.02		
Perception of personal threat				
Israeli sample	2.57	1.49	−6.10 (1279.97)	<.001
Palestinian sample	2.94	1.05		
Fear				
Israeli sample	3.02	1.82	−6.25 (1963.00)	<.001
Palestinian sample	3.54	1.79		
Hatred				
Israeli sample	3.23	1.98	−24.60 (1209.77)	<.001
Palestinian sample	5.22	1.32		

Correlations were estimated between the exogenous variables and between error terms of the endogenous variables.

In the second step, nonsignificant correlations and paths were trimmed from the initial model, resulting in the second model. Main effects that are part of significant interactions were not trimmed to enable correct estimation of the interactions. As apparent from Table 2, this did not result in a significance change to the fit of the

Table 2. Comparison of Chi-Square Levels in Structural Models, above Figure Represents Israeli Model Results, Lower Figure Represents Palestinian Model Results.

	Initial model—All relations estimated		Second model—nonsignificant correlations and paths trimmed		Third model—ethos variables excluded	
Models	IL	PA	IL	PA	IL	PA
χ^2	89.99	426.15	159.2	51.43	236.11	658.99
df	55	137	121	227	128	236
χ^2/df	1.64	3.11	1.32	2.25	1.85	2.79
Sig.	<.01	<.0001	.01	<.0001	<.01	<.0001
CFI	.98	.92	.98	.92	.95	.88
NFI	.96	.89	.93	.87	.89	.83
IFI	.98	.92	.98	.92	.95	.92
RMSEA	.03	.04	.02	.03	.03	.04
	Second (trimmed) – Initial (all estimated)		Third (ethos excluded) – Initial (all estimated)		Third (ethos excluded) – Second (trimmed)	
Comparison	IL	PA	IL	PA	IL	PA
Delta χ^2	69.21	84.29	146.21	232.85	76.92	148.56
Delta *df*	66	9	73	99	7	9
Sig. of difference	.37	.65	<.01	<.0001	<.01	<.0001

Note. IL = Israeli sample; PA = Palestinian sample; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; NFI = Normed Fit Index; IFI = Incremental Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

models. The third step included an examination of the relative contribution of ethos variables to the model, by excluding these variables and comparing the fit of the second and third models. This resulted in a significant worsening of the model, implying that model 2, which included the ethos variables, is better fitted to the data.

Results of the final structural models (models 2) of the Israeli and the Palestinian data are presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively. All significant paths are presented in this model, except for paths with control variables. Examining the figures reveals that eight interactions were significant. These interactions were probed using simple slope analysis, as customary when analyzing interactions in regression (Aiken and West 1991). Slopes were examined to determine whether significantly different from 0 as suggested by Preacher and colleagues (Preacher, Curran, and Bauer 2006).

The Relations between Exposure, Ethos, and Psychological Distress

In the Israeli sample, general exposure and financial loss were related to posttraumatic symptoms. Financial loss was related to posttraumatic symptoms and to depression. Levels of ethos of conflict adherence (hereafter levels of ethos) were not directly related

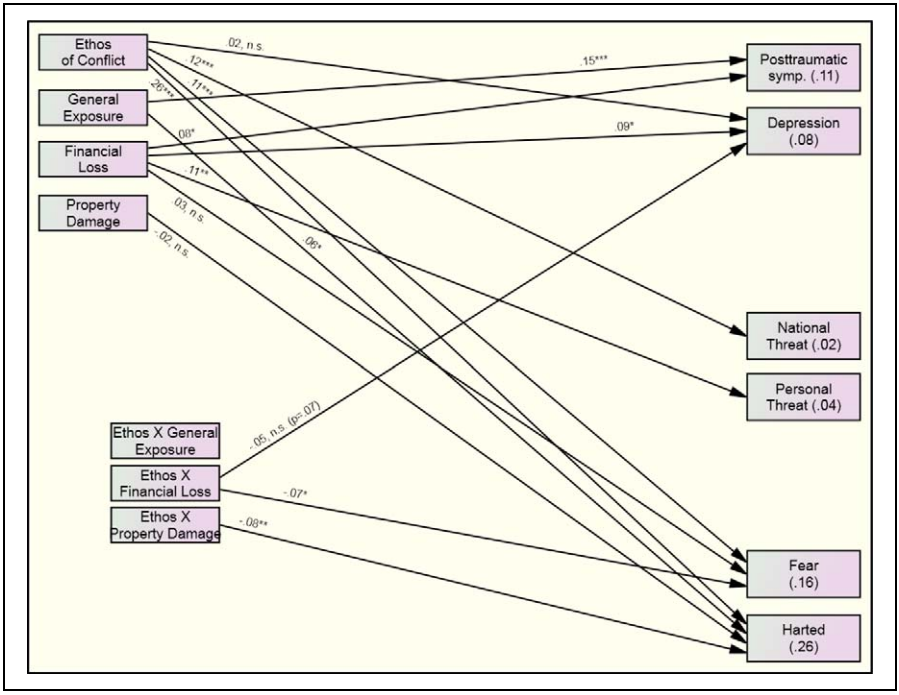

Figure 1. Results of Israeli final model, examining the relations between exposure to conflict-related events, ethos, psychological distress, threat perceptions, and negative emotions. Fit indicts: $\chi^2(121, N = 772) = 159.20$, $\chi^2/df = 1.32$, $p = .01$; NFI = .93; IFI = .98; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .02; ECVI = .49. Explained variances of criteria variables in parentheses.

to psychological distress, yet ethos was a marginally significant moderating factor in the relation between financial loss and depression, as is shown in Figure 1, in the path linking the interaction between ethos and financial loss on one hand and depression on the other.

This interaction indicates that the relationship between financial loss and depressive symptoms is different for participants indicating low ethos and for participants indicating high ethos.[2] Slope analysis indicates that this relationship is positive in both groups (low ethos: $b = .07$, $SE < .01$, $p < .001$; high ethos: $b = .02$, $SE < .01$, $p < .001$). The interaction pattern is displayed in Figure 3. These results concur with Hypothesis 1, showing that for Israelis, higher ethos is protective.

In the Palestinian sample, death of a relative or a close friend was related to higher levels of posttraumatic symptoms, as indicated in Figure 2 in the significant path between these variables. Levels of ethos were not directly related to psychological distress, yet ethos was a moderating factor in the relation between exposure to conflict-related violence and psychological distress, as indicated in two significant paths in Figure 2: first, the ethos was a significant moderator in the relation between

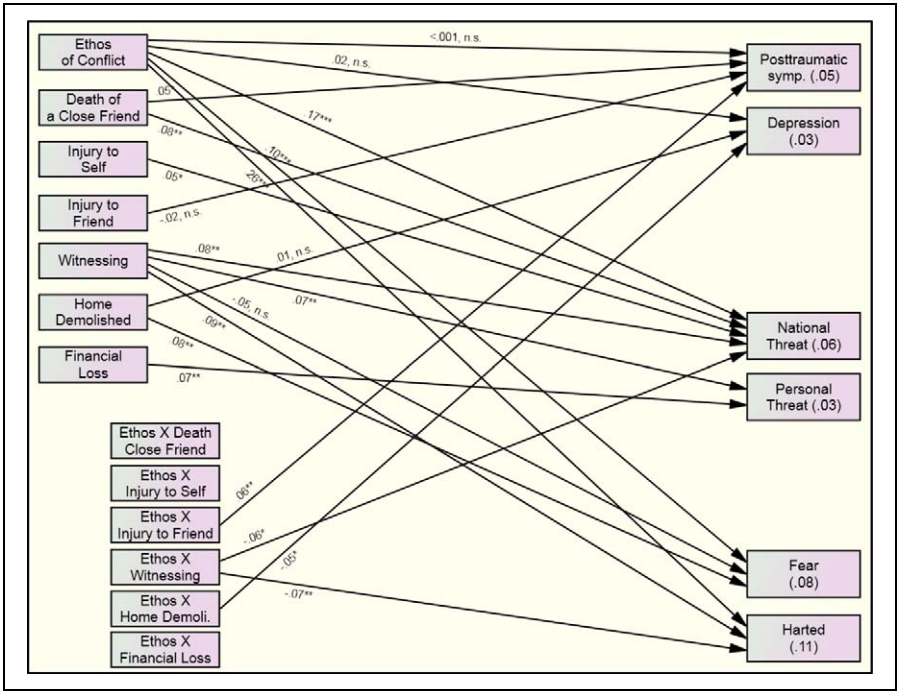

Figure 2. Results of Palestinian final model, examining the relations between exposure to conflict-related events, ethos, psychological distress, threat perceptions and negative emotions. Fit indicts: $\chi^2(153, N = 1{,}190) = 283.45$, $\chi^2/df = 1.85$, $p < .001$; NFI = .92; IFI = .96; CFI = .96; RMSEA = .03; ECVI = .41. Explained variances of criteria variables in parentheses. The relation between exposure and ethos on psychological distress (depression and posttraumatic symptoms).

home demolition and depression; second, the ethos was a moderator in the relation between injury of a friend and posttraumatic symptoms.

The interaction between home demolition and ethos on depression is presented in Figure 3. This interaction reveals a significant difference between low and high ethos participants in the relation between home demolition and depression. Slope analysis indicates that the relation between home demolition and depression was negative for high ethos participants ($b = -.03$, $SE < .001$, $p < .001$) and positive for low ethos participants ($b = .03$, $SE < .001$, $p < .001$). This result partly supports Hypothesis 1, as the pattern displayed by low ethos participants was expected.

The interaction between injury of a relative and ethos on posttraumatic symptoms shows an opposite pattern to the one hypothesized in Hypothesis 1 and to the results of the Israeli sample, and is presented in Figure 3. This interaction represents a significant difference between low and high ethos participants in the relation between

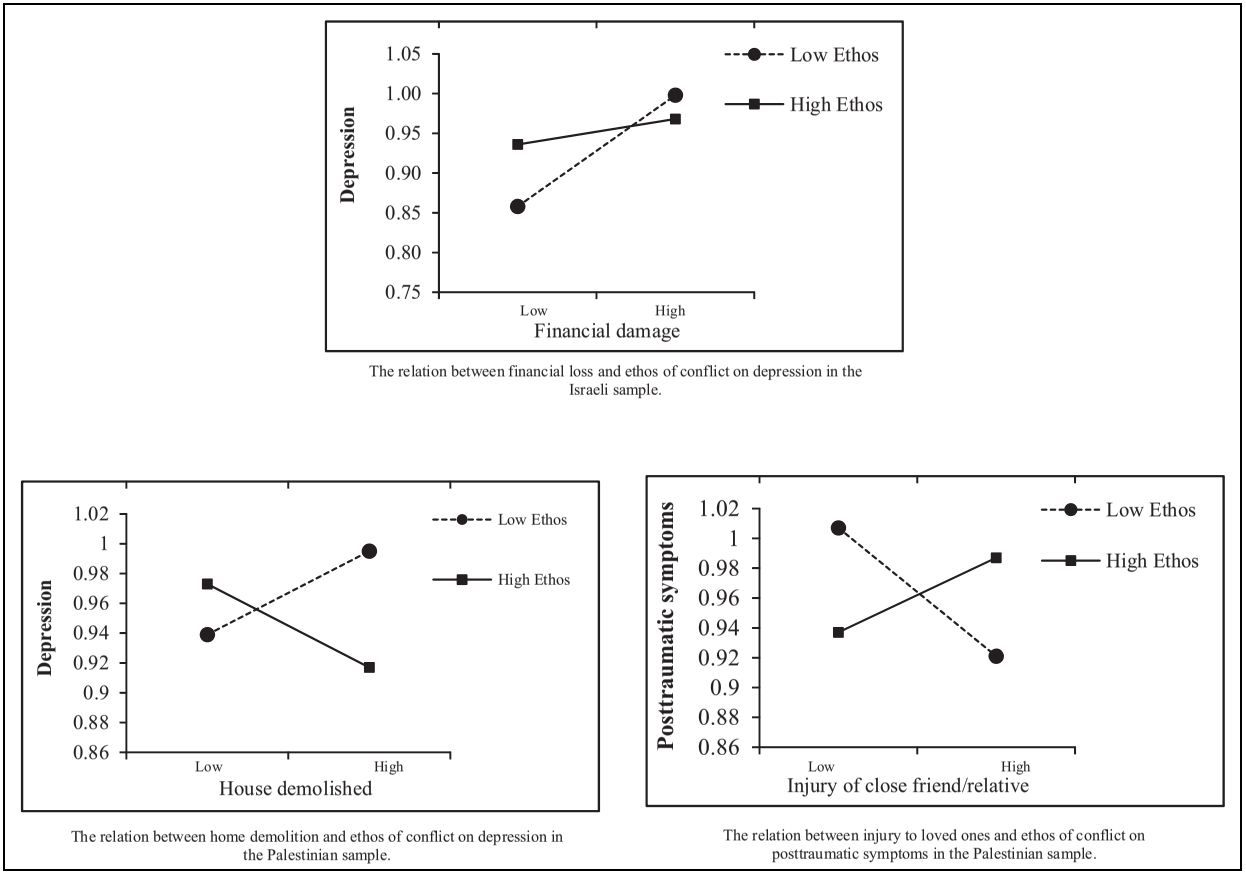

Figure 3. The relation between exposure and ethos on threat perceptions and negative emotions.

injury of a relative and posttraumatic symptoms. Slope analysis indicates that the relation between injury of a relative and posttraumatic symptoms was positive for high ethos participants ($b = .03$, $SE < .001$, $p < .001$) and negative for low ethos participants ($b = -.04$, $SE < .001$, $p < .001$).

The Relations between Exposure, Ethos, Threat, and Negative Emotions

Testing for Hypothesis 3, in the Israeli sample general exposure to conflict-related violence was related to higher levels of hatred as seen in the relevant path in Figure 1. In addition, financial loss as a consequence of the conflict was related to higher levels of hatred toward Palestinians and to perceptions of personal threat. High levels of ethos were directly related to higher perception of national threat. Ethos was also directly related to fear and hatred toward the Palestinians, yet these relations were qualified by significant interactions with exposure.

As seen in Figure 1, a marginally significant interaction was found between ethos and financial loss on fear. This interaction, portrayed in Figure 3, marks a significant difference between low and high ethos participants in the relation between financial loss and fear. Slope analysis indicates a marginally significant positive relation between financial loss and fear for low ethos participants ($b = .17$, $SE = .09$, $p = .06$). For high ethos participants, this relation was not significant ($b = -.08$, $SE = .09$, $p = .40$).

The interaction between property damage and ethos on hatred, portrayed in Figure 4, indicates a significant difference between low and high ethos participants in the relation between property damage and hatred. Slope analysis of this interaction reveals a nonsignificant relation between property damage and hatred for both groups (for low ethos: $b = .07$, $SE = .06$, $p = .27$; for high ethos: $b = -.16$, $SE = .09$, $p = .09$). This interaction is displayed in Figure 4.

In the Palestinian sample, as apparent from Figure 2, the death of a relative and an injury to self were related to higher levels of national threat perceptions. Witnessing Israeli attacks was related to higher levels of perception of national threat, personal threat, and hatred. Home demolition was related to high levels of fear, and financial loss was related to perceptions of personal threat. High levels of ethos were directly related to higher levels of fear. Ethos was also directly related to perception of national threat and hatred, yet these relations were qualified by significant interactions with exposure.

The interaction between ethos and witnessing an Israeli attack on national threat perceptions, portrayed in Figure 4, represents a significant difference between low and high ethos participants in the relation between witnessing an Israeli attack and national threat. Slope analysis indicates that the relation between witnessing an Israeli attack and national threat perceptions is positive for low ethos participants ($b = .22$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$) and nonsignificant for high ethos participants ($b = .02$, $SE = .04$, $p = .59$).

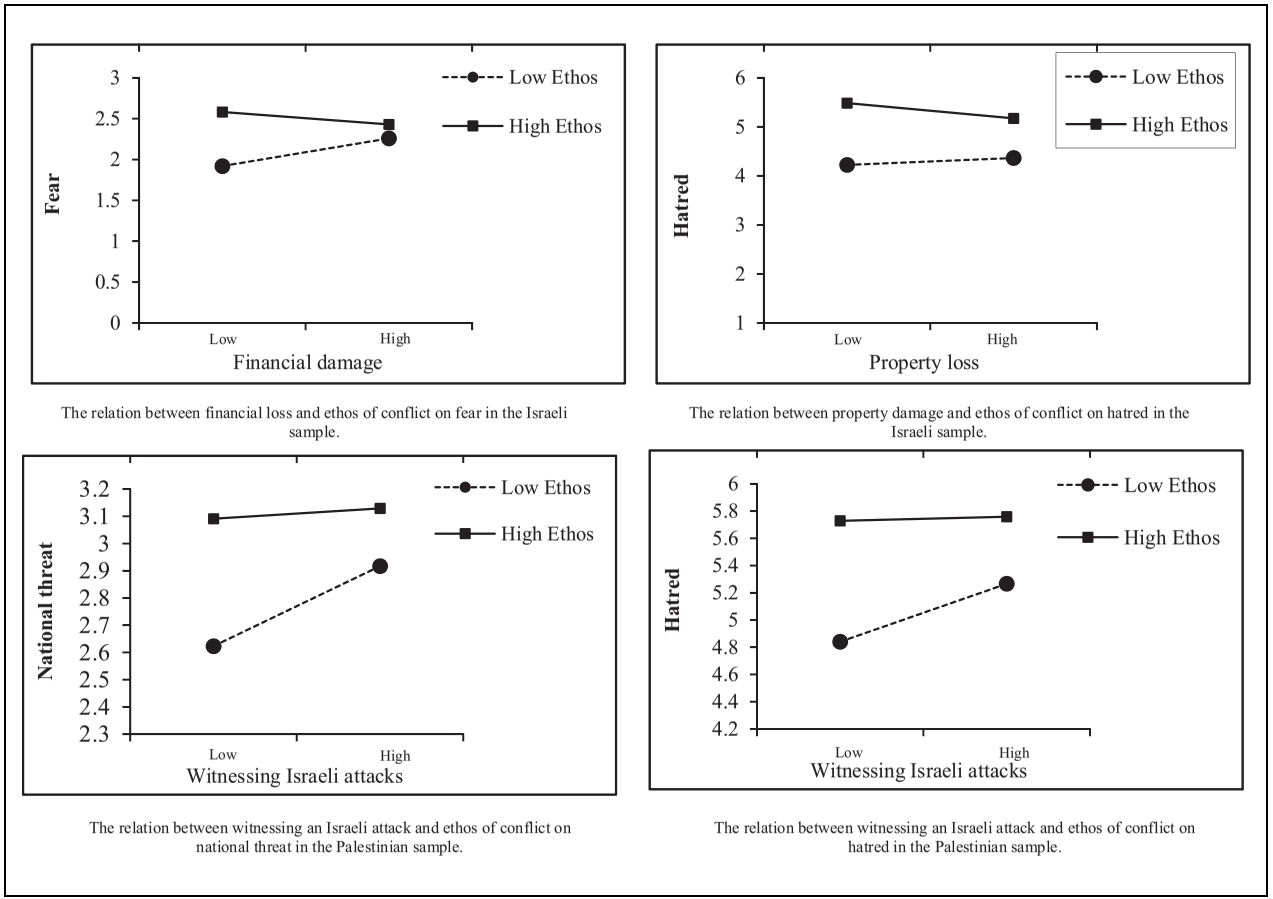

Figure 4. The relation between exposure and ethos on threat perceptions and negative emotions.

The interaction between ethos and witnessing an Israeli attack on hatred, portrayed in Figure 4, displays a significant difference between low and high ethos participants in the relation between witnessing an Israeli attack and hatred. Slope analysis indicates that the relation between witnessing an Israeli attack and hatred is positive for low ethos participants ($b = .16$, $SE = .04$, $p < .01$) and nonsignificant for high ethos participants ($b = .04$, $SE = .04$, $p = .40$).

Taken together, these results show that that, as stated in Hypothesis 2, among Israelis and Palestinians who score low (but not high) on ethos, there is a positive relationship between exposure and threat.

Discussion

Findings of this study partially support the hypotheses posed, generally indicating that adherence to the ethos of conflict limits the harmful effects of protracted conflicts. Specifically, people's support for the ethos of conflict moderated the relationship between exposure and distress, threat perception, and negative emotions. For Israelis and Palestinians, high ethos protected from the effects of exposure on depression but was not a protective factor when posttraumatic symptoms were examined. In accordance with expectations, low ethos participants indicated a rise in the levels of threat and negative emotions with exposure, whereas high ethos participants reported high levels of threat and negative emotions regardless of exposure. Interestingly, moderation patterns differed as a function of the type of exposure and as a function of type of outcome.

A positive correlation between financial loss and depression was found only among Israelis and Palestinians who reported low ethos. The linkage between financial hardship and depression was expected and is well documented in the depression literature (e.g., Price, Choi, and Vinokur 2002).

These results provide partial support for theories positing ideologies as protective factors and buffers. In comparison to low ethos individuals, coping with stressful events may be easier for high ethos individuals due to several differences between these two groups and the way they cope with conflict (Jost and Hunyady 2003). Strong ideological commitment can help the individual find the social context a stable one, with predictability and meaningfulness, even when this individual is confronted with harsh events that have resulted from the same social context. Thus, when high ethos participants are exposed to conflict-related violent events, it is possible that the ethos supplies them with a coherent explanation of the situation and the psychological effects of these violent events remain rather confined.

In addition, ideological commitment may affect appraisal of stressful events in two stages (Jost and Hunyady 2003). First, primary appraisal (Lazarus and Folkman 1984) may be affected, as the high ethos person may not perceive harsh events as stressful. Believing that the conflict is inevitable and cannot be avoided, high ethos persons also accept the conflict's consequences as unavoidable difficulties. It has

been documented that realizing that an event is unchangeable leads to acceptance of this event and satisfaction with it (Gilbert and Ebert 2002). Thus, believing that a negative event, as part of the justifed violent conflict, could not be avoided may result in less psychological distress when this event is experienced.

Ideological commitment may also affect secondary appraisal (Lazarus and Folkman 1984; Jost and Hunyady 2003) by fostering hope and a sense of control that assists in making postevent coping decisions. When exposed to harsh events, persons with high ethos may believe that they are a part of a nation that has been coping with hardships for centuries and thus has the stamina to continue coping.

These results demonstrate that not all individuals respond in the same way when confronted with exposure to harsh conflict-related events, and that this variation may be at least partially explained by levels of ideological adherence. Individuals who believe that the conflict cannot be avoided and that the in-group is just and entitled are affected to a lesser degree when the conflict collects its toll.

Concomitant with previous studies (de Jong et al. 2001; Gidron 2002; Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009), Palestinians and Israelis exposed to harsh events such as the death of a close friend or self-injury showed higher levels of posttraumatic symptoms. For both populations, high ethos did not serve as a protective characteristic when posttraumatic reactions were examined. Thus, posttraumatic reactions were not as predicted, with results opposite to the hypothesized pattern.

A possible explanation may be that when the exposure is too harsh, ideological commitment is not a strong enough protector. This result is in accordance with the *Anxiety-Buffer Disruption Theory* (Abdollahi et al. 2011), stating that in cases of exposure to severe trauma and experiences of posttraumatic responses, a breakdown of defenses may occur. In addition, the *Shattered Assumptions Approach* (Janoff-Bulman 1992) states that situations of trauma and victimization shatter basic assumptions of the world as a meaningful place. Such assumptions are central in the ethos of conflict. Thus, it is possible that one of the consequences of exposure to harsh events is that although the ethos is still endorsed, it loses its effect as a stress buffer, as this ideological commitment does not assist the person exposed to harsh trauma-inducing events such as personally witnessing an attack, a death, or an injury to a friend.

Even more so, in the Palestinian sample, while ethos moderated the link between injury of a close friend and posttraumatic symptoms, the pattern of the interaction contradicts the hypothesized pattern. Palestinians with high ethos showed increased levels of posttraumatic symptoms with exposure, while the low ethos individuals showed a decrease in posttraumatic symptom levels. A possible explanation may be a different causal ordering than that examined in this study, as the cross-sectional nature of this study does not permit determining the causal order of the effects measured here. Thus, other accounts are possible. For instance, other studies have shown that posttraumatic reactions mediated the link between exposure and hostility toward out-group (Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009). In this latter account, exposure elevated posttraumatic symptoms, which in turn raised out-group hostility. Ethos of conflict includes within it

expressions of out-group hostility. Thus, it is possible that high levels of ethos adherence in conditions of high exposure are a result of the elevated levels of posttraumatic symptoms. This could be an alternative explanation of the positive exposure-distress link in conditions of high ethos adherence, which was found in the current study. Due to the correlational nature of the data obtained here, further studies are needed in order to ascertain the directionality in these links.

The results regarding the relationship between exposure and psychological distress are in accordance with the second hypothesis. Namely, directly experiencing a conflict-related violent event was related to higher levels of posttraumatic reactions while economic hardship was related to depression. This result concurs with previous studies showing that experiencing single harsh events is related to posttraumatic reactions more than to depression symptoms (Vrana and Lauterbach 1994). So, as hypothesized, posttraumatic reactions are event specific and are related to experiencing harsh conflict-related events. Depressive reactions are related to economic hardships, which may leave the person in long-term confrontation with difficult living conditions.

The results of the current study support Hypothesis 3. People who scored low on ethos adherence showed a positive relationship between exposure and hatred, fear (Israelis), and national threat perceptions (Palestinians). As in other studies (Laor et al. 2010), strong adherence to the ethos is related to high levels of perceived threat and negative emotions toward the opponent regardless of exposure. The consistently high levels of threat and negative emotions among high ethos participants could reflect the fact that for this group, levels of threat and negative emotions are more dependent on their strong internal ideological conviction. For them, the ethos is constantly accessible, and they perceive reality as constantly threatening. Exposure simply strengthens their preexisting convictions.

Contrary to this group, low ethos participants do not have such a strong ideological conviction. Their reactions could be more in tune with the personal experiences they encounter rather than to the internal convictions they hold. For them, the ethos is less accessible, and they are more reactive to external stimuli and less to internal stimuli. They do not generally perceive the reality of the conflict as threatening. However, exposure leads them to perceptions and emotions that resemble those of high ethos individuals. These results echo the findings of Banfield et al. (2011), showing that participants with low system confidence increased their resistance to system change and defense of the system following system threat, whereas those with high system confidence resisted change and defended the system regardless of threat. Examining different types of threat and different beliefs systems, the current study and the study by Banfield and colleagues indicate that threatening contexts result in movement toward conservative views but only among those who did not hold such views in the first place.

The magnitude of the relations between exposure on one hand and negative emotions and threat perceptions on the other hand is different for Israelis and for Palestinians and is stronger in the Palestinian group, in comparison to the Israeli

group. One possible explanation for this intriguing finding is the dissimilarity in collective exposure between the two groups. Personal exposure for the Palestinians is embedded in chronic continuous collective exposure. For the Palestinians, movement limitations and the close presence of the Jewish settlers represents constant reminders of the conflict. Thus, even for low ethos participants, exposure is more easily translated into hatred and threat perceptions. For the Israelis, exposure to conflict-related violent events is more sporadic. For many Israelis, Palestinians are not in sight and their presence is pushed away from consciousness. This could explain why the link between exposure and negative emotions is more confined and weaker for Israelis, as contact with Palestinians is not rooted in high constant collective exposure.

These results shed light on the development and perpetuation of the cycle of violence in protracted conflicts (Bar-Tal 2007a, 2007b). Under conditions of low violence and low exposure, there are variations in levels of negative emotions and threat perceptions between low and high ethos individuals. Results of the current study show that this variation decreases in cases of high conflict-related exposure to violence. Under these conditions, even low ethos individuals show high levels of hatred, fear, and threat perception. These negative emotions and perceptions increase the probability of negative and violent counterreactions and inclinations, which represent a cycle of violence.

Conclusion

The findings of the present research demonstrate that the ethos of conflict is a powerful and sophisticated element in the psychological repertoire of protracted conflicts. It is an ideological system that appears to serve the needs that arise when facing the harsh conditions of exposure to conflict-related violence. Jost et al. (2003) have proposed that political ideologies are a case of motivated social cognition. In other words, people adhere to particular ideologies because they serve certain needs. More specifically, endorsement of conservative ideologies is motivated by the desire to reduce stress, and such ideologies fulfill this need by providing a sense of order, predictability, control, and positive self-esteem (Jost et al. 2003). All of these are important elements in coping with stress according to numerous theoretical approaches (Taylor 1983; Kobasa 1985; Antonovsky 1987; Janoff-Bulman 1992; Hobfoll 2001; Bonanno 2004).

The ethos of conflict can be considered a specific case of a conservative ideology, which is adapted to the specific circumstances of protracted conflict and the particular needs that it engenders. The ethos of conflict provides a sense of logic, order, control, and positive self-esteem and thus serves coping needs that arise in the frequent stressful situations that such conflicts entail. Though functional at the individual level, the societal implications of the ethos are more equivocal. The present findings suggest that the ethos may, in fact, function as a double-edged sword. Exposure to violence and financial loss can highlight the costs of the conflict, which

may increase the willingness to resolve it peacefully (Gayer et al. 2009). However, the ethos appears to serve as a buffer against these effects. Furthermore, even in the absence of direct exposure to violence, the ethos facilitates negative emotions toward the opponent, which may also contribute to further violence and reduce the likelihood of peaceful conflict resolution.

The results of this study demonstrate the cyclical process that contributes to maintenance of protracted conflicts. These conflicts pose challenges to involved societies and their individual members. Society members develop psychological mechanisms, including the ethos of conflict, which allow them to cope with these challenges and to satisfy the needs that are deprived by the conflict. However, while these psychological mechanisms serve important functions, they also increase the likelihood of violence and pose barriers to possible conflict resolution, thus contributing to further intractability (Bar-Tal and Halperin 2011).

Ethos of conflict appears to be a societal mechanism that plays a role in individual and societal coping with adversities, but it is *by no means* an ideal mechanism. In certain circumstances, it may lead to less than optimal outcomes. The ethos of conflict may be portrayed as a practical mechanism of coping with drawbacks as well as advantages, which societies engaged in protracted conflicts develop and impart to their members, and which individuals may invoke when faced with difficult conditions. Alongside its distress-buffering role, its relation to high threat perceptions and negative emotions has its drawbacks. Deepening our understanding of the effects of exposure to violence among individuals with various ideological commitments can assist in untangling the psychological processes that feed the conflict and contribute to its persistence.

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Notes

1. The other variables included in the survey were irrelevant to the hypotheses tested here and are reported elsewhere.

2. Here and in the following analyses, low ethos adherence participants have ethos adherence lower than the median score, and high ethos adherence participants have ethos adherence higher than the median score.

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