The collective self-healing process in intractable conflicts – The Israeli-Palestinians’ case

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Collective Self-Healing Process: The Israeli Palestinian Case

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This article proposes the existence of a collective self-healing process, in which parties to intractable conflicts treat their conflicts’ wounds independent of their opponents. This process is different from the reconciliation process, in which parties heal past offenses collaboratively. Various theoretical aspects of the proposed process are discussed, including the different domains of parties that take part in this process (i.e., the social, economic, political and psychological), the conflict situations in which this process is relevant, and the factors that influence it. The process is exemplified as it has been conducted by the Israeli Palestinians.

Intractable conflicts are prevalent worldwide, causing significant material, physical, and psychological problems for the parties involved. These offenses should be addressed, even when the conflict is resolved by the signing of a peace agreement (Deutsch, 2008; Nets-Zehngut, 2009). If they are not, each party will continue to suffer significant negative ramifications. Furthermore, when the aftermath of the conflict is not properly addressed, its psychological outcomes (e.g., feelings of victimization, hatred, and anger) can lead parties to reactivate the conflict. In such situations, conflicts that seem to have been resolved may reappear and jolt the social climate. Therefore, attending to the harmful impacts of conflicts is accorded major political, social, and scholarly significance worldwide (Kriesberg, 1998; Lind, 2009).

Focusing on the psychological negative impacts of conflicts, scholars have investigated appropriate methods for addressing them. Such research concentrates only on the process that involves the two (or more) parties to the conflict and primarily aims to ameliorate relations between them: the
reconciliation process (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004; Deutsch, 2008; Lederach, 1998). This article, however, conceptualizes another route for addressing these offenses, one that involves only one party to a conflict: the collective self-healing process (CSHP). In this process, a party heals the wounds it suffered during the conflict without collaborating with its rival. This process is barely discussed in the literature; however, as this article shows, it does exist and is of great importance. The argument will be exemplified by a CSHP that was conducted by Israeli Palestinians.

**Background**

A brief review of the literature on intractable conflicts will facilitate a deeper understanding of the depth of impact on groups and individuals.

**Intractable Conflicts and Their Offenses**

Intractable conflicts are characterized mostly as being protracted, of central importance to the parties involved, and violent. As such, they create large-scale offenses for the parties involved, usually more for the one that is weaker from a military point of view. These offenses occur in four major domains: social, economic, political, and psychological (Fuertes, 2004).

Offenses in the social domain may have different forms. For example, in intrastate conflicts, the social order is shattered, crime can be prevalent, and social hegemony between groups can be challenged (Whittaker, 1999). In interstate conflicts, however, some aspects of the war (e.g., the necessity of combat or the morality of the army’s conduct) may cause social rifts within the parties (Alexander, Evans, & Keiger, 2004). In the economic domain, the enormous investment demanded by intractable conflicts embodies an economic burden on the involved parties, while the conflicts cause enormous damage to material surroundings and infrastructure (Kriesberg, 1998; Whittaker). The political domain is affected mostly in intrastate conflicts, since the regime is challenged and, often, shattered (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004). In the psychological domain, members of the weaker party may exhibit posttraumatic stress disorder and collective low self-esteem and experience dysphoric emotions, such as fear, hate, rage, and desire for revenge (Arfi, 1998; Ross, 2003). They can also suffer from feelings of guilt for surviving when loved ones have died and a sense of injustice and may perceive the world as threatening and hostile. Violent behavior may also be exhibited, along with a feeling of lack of control over
their lives (learned helplessness) and a heightened need for physical and psychological security (Arfi; Cemalcilar, Canbeyli, & Sunar, 2003; Nets-Zehngut, 2007; Staub, 1998). For the stronger party, the psychological impact may manifest itself as a sense of collective guilt; members might also feel the above-mentioned symptoms of the weaker party, but to a lesser degree (Swim & Miller, 1999). Both weaker and stronger parties possess a biased and unrealistic collective memory of the conflict, which typically portrays them positively and their rivals negatively (Nets-Zehngut, 2011a, 2011b).

Addressing the Offenses of Intractable Conflicts

Conflict research intensively explores the need to address the devastating consequences of conflicts (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004; Nets-Zehngut, 2007). Parties to conflicts can address these consequences by collaborating with each other or singly. The literature deals extensively with ways to address these consequences in the social, economic, and political domains: collaboratively (e.g., Bar-Tal & Bennink; Deutsch, 2008) or noncollaboratively (e.g., Alexander et al., 2004; Lederach, 1998; Quinn, 2009; Whittaker, 1999). In this framework it discusses, for example, economic cooperation, rehabilitation of the economy and economic self-sufficiency, democratization and human rights restoration, and the possible reform of security and administrative sectors.

With regard to the psychological domain, however, the literature almost exclusively describes a collaborative method: the reconciliation process. Scholars widely accept the essence and objective of this process as healing the relations between conflicting parties. Healing takes different forms, such as the mutual determination of the truth about past events; apology and reparations offered by the stronger to the weaker one, who then grants forgiveness; and collaboration on joint projects (e.g., cultural, economic, and environmental; for example, Nets-Zehngut, 2013) that fosters gradual positive changes in their mutual psychological attitudes (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004; Deutsch, 2008; Lind, 2009; Nets-Zehngut, 2007).

Among the various scholars, only Ervin Staub (1998, 2006) discusses briefly a noncollaborative method of addressing the offenses of conflicts, which he calls self-healing. He describes this process in the context of the Rwandan conflict, where the psychological self-rehabilitation of the weaker party did not occur through cooperation with the stronger one. He suggests that self-healing processes can be advanced by commemorating past
misfortune (e.g., in ceremonies and monuments), formulating a positive vision for the future, teaching the younger generation about the conflict and the peaceful lessons to be learned from it, and uniting the community. Staub, however, does not elaborate on this process, including its theoretical aspects.

**In Summary**

Although collective self-healing in the psychological domain is barely mentioned in the theoretical literature, it certainly exists. Parties to intractable conflicts worldwide carry out various noncollaborative activities in order to overcome the severe psychological effects of conflicts. Some of these activities—as described later—are discussed in the literature as empirical case studies. However, these studies do not address the unique role of self-healing; nor do they elaborate on the theoretical aspects of a self-healing process. The current article addresses this lack.

**Collective Self-Healing Process: Initial Theoretical Construction**

This section introduces the initial concept of the CSHP to serve as the platform for the analysis of the CSHP that has been conducted by the Israeli Palestinians. After analyzing this empirical case study, more advanced theoretical aspects are provided in the “Summary and Discussion” section.

Healing can be an individual process carried out by people (Bohart, 2000) or a collective one involving whole countries or ethnic/national groups (Boraine & Levy, 1995).

**Individual Self-Healing**

Individual self-healing occurs when healing is conducted by the individuals themselves, without external help. The literature on individual self-healing distinguishes between physical and psychological healing, although there is interdependence between the two (Bohart, 2000; S. Friedman & Van den Bos, 1992; LeShan, 1992).

Research on physical self-healing suggests that some people have an inner propensity for self-healing (LeShan, 1992). A “self-healing personality” is inclined to more protect personal health and to heal relatively quickly from illness (H. Friedman, 1991). This inclination is influenced by genetics, personal habits, and emotional responses. Physical health and the ability to recuperate from illness are also influenced by psychological characteristics.
of the person, such as chronic hostility, depression, and stress (S. Friedman & Van den Bos, 1992).

*Psychological* healing of individuals is defined as “a process of . . . restoration of or return to the patient’s true or real self [. . . to] restore psychic wholeness” (Frankel, 1998, 815). Research on psychological self-healing indicates that 40% to 60% of people who have experienced trauma were eventually able, as time passed, to overcome it on their own, without external professional aid (Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998). Individuals are innately capable of independently coping with psychological problems and overcoming them (Bohart, 2000). In a study conducted by Gurin (1990), 90% of the respondents reported that they had overcome a significant problem (e.g., a medical or emotional problem or an addiction) over the last year on their own.

Discussing *individual* self-healing is important for the current discussion for two reasons: (1) Collectives are made of individuals and are influenced by them, particularly the leaders of the collectives (Elijah, 2005); and (2) the social identity of the individual is one place in which the individual and the collective merge (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Therefore, the individual realm may serve as an analogous source for *collective* self-healing (Montiel, 2002).

**Collective Self-Healing**

CSHP is defined as a process by which a party repairs the psychological damage it has incurred during a conflict, independent from its rival. That is, the word *self* refers to the object of the process, the wounded party, and stipulates that healing can take place without collaboration with the rival.

The CSHP can be carried out by either a stronger or a weaker party. This article focuses, however, on healing the weaker party, since this party is more likely to be more damaged during the conflict.

In the course of conflicts, members of weaker parties often exhibit the symptoms of learned helplessness (Cemalcilar et al., 2003). The stronger party dominates their activities, sometimes even determining whether they will live or die (Herman, 1992). Perpetuation of unequal dynamics between the stronger and the weaker parties may also continue throughout the reconciliation process. A weaker party may expect the stronger party to take responsibility for past injustices, to apologize, or to pay reparations. In such instances, power and control over the weaker party’s destiny remain in the hands of the stronger party. In contrast, through CSHP, the weaker
party takes control over its own destiny, determining if, when, and how it will overcome its injuries (Cemalcilar et al.). CSHP may also elevate the perceived self-efficacy of a party—boost its own beliefs regarding its capacity to bring about certain outcomes and influence the future—and enhance its self-esteem (Bandura, 1994). Therefore, the mere initiation of the CSHP, let alone carrying it out, has significant positive psychological impact on the party that performs it.

The CSHP addresses the psychological offenses of the conflict directly and indirectly; directly, for example, by providing psychological support for victims. However, all four domains (social, economic, political, and psychological) are interconnected, and they influence each other. For example, a dire economic situation inhibits psychological healing: One mother from Rwanda explained that she cannot forgive her perpetrators while her son is hungry (Staub, 1998). On the other end, psychological healing promotes social advancement and economic prosperity (Gurin, 1990; Tedeschi et al., 1998). Interdependence was also described earlier, in the discussion of the physical and psychological stages of individual healing. Therefore, the CSHP also addresses the psychological offenses indirectly, through rehabilitating activities conducted in the remaining three domains (social, economic, and political). Through reciprocal relations, the CSHP can gradually flourish. Let us describe now the Israeli Palestinians’ CSHP.

**Collective Self-Healing Process: Israeli Palestinian Case**

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which has lasted for about a century, evolved mostly around the competition between the Jewish Zionist and Palestinian national movements for the same territory. Until 1948, the parties violently clashed mostly on lower and local scales. The 1948 war, however, was a full-scale confrontation (a few Arab countries even joined in on the Palestinian side) that eventually led to an Israeli victory. As a result, some 650,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from the area that Israel seized at the end of that war, and they settled in Arab and Western countries and in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (the “territories”). Additionally, some 150,000 Palestinians remained within Israel. During the 1967 Six Day War, Israel seized the territories and since then has had control—to varying degrees—over its Palestinian citizens (Morris, 2001). This article focuses on one group among the Palestinians; those living in Israel. This group currently consists of about 1.5 million people, 20% of Israel’s population.


**Israeli Palestinians’ Psychological Domain: Initial Situation**

The defeat of the Palestinians in 1948 left those who remained in Israel in a state of shock and with deep feelings of guilt, humiliation, and shame. This shame was magnified by the accusations of many of their fellow Palestinians and Arabs residing outside of Israel, who claimed they were “collaborating” with the Jews for remaining in the enemy’s country. Moreover, the antagonistic behavior of many of the Israeli Jews left the Israeli Palestinians feeling alienated and perceived as hostile. Lacking the ability to control major aspects of their lives in light of the daily realities of when the country was run by a military regime led to a deep collective feeling of learned helplessness. Their casualties and injuries in the war, as well as the separation from their departed loved ones, caused them significant pain and suffering. These were very difficult times, which by and large for many years they refrained from dealing with in a significant manner (Ghanem, 2009; Hader, 2004; Kabha, 2010; Rabinovitch & Abu-Baker, 2002; Rinnawi, 2003).

All this led the Israeli Palestinians to feel deep fear, sorrow and insecurity, frustration, bitterness, and low self-esteem, as well as pent-up anger, hostility, and lack of trust toward the Israeli Jews. They perceived most Israeli Jews as significantly unjust. Many Israeli Palestinians developed subservient and obedient tendencies toward the Israeli Jews, and they self-censored due to fear of being accused of “improper” political behavior. In terms of their identity, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict became their cornerstone (Ghanem, 2009; Rabinovitch & Abu-Baker, 2002).

The Israeli Palestinians addressed these vast psychological difficulties via a CSHP, divided in this article into two periods.

**Israeli Palestinians’ CSHP: Two Periods**

The CSHP is divided into two main periods based on its causes and the extent to which it was practiced in each period (Cohen, 2006; Kabha, 2010; Neuberger, Aharoni, & Kabha, 2010; Rabinovitch & Abu-Baker, 2002; Rinnawi, 2003).

The first period dates from 1948 until the mid-1960s. During this period, Israeli Palestinians’ focus was mostly on survival, especially since until 1966, they were under a military regime that heavily constrained their social, educational, economic, and political activities. Their social structure was shattered, and many of their social institutions functioned only in part, if at all. In economic terms, many of them lost their assets in
the 1948 war and had difficulty making a living in the Israeli economic system. Additionally, they believed that Israel would eventually be defeated by Arab countries and that therefore their problems were temporary. They expected the Arab countries to represent them politically and to solve their problems (partly as part of the pan-Arabism trend, popular at that time). For all of these reasons, the scope of the CSHP they conducted in this period was relatively small.

The second period dates from the mid-1960s until today. Following the first period, the Israeli Palestinians were able to partly overcome and survive the initial psychological, social, and economic shock of the 1948 war. In addition, the termination in 1966 of the military regime gradually eased many of their daily constraints. It granted them formal equality to the Israeli Jews, but to this day they still suffer from significant informal state discrimination in terms of education, health, housing, land, welfare, and employment as well as social discrimination. Moreover, in the mid-1960s, their hopes that the Arab countries would properly represent their interests—and the vision of pan-Arabism in the region—were dashed, in part because of Israel’s decisive victory in the Six Day War of 1967. This war, however, allowed the Israeli Palestinians to reconnect with their fellow Palestinians in the territories and with their culture. Thereby the war enhanced the Palestinian aspect of their identity. Subsequent developments increased the possibility of conducting the CSHP. The 1970s witnessed the emergence in the public sphere of the second Palestinian generation after the Nakba (May 15, the day the Israeli state was declared and many Palestinians were displaced), and the 1990s the third one. These latter generations were more critical, self-confident, educated, and insistent on their rights than the first generation. Additionally, the 1977 political turnover in Israel—in which the Mapai/Ma’arach ruling party, which since 1948 had severely inhibited Palestinian activities, was replaced by the Likud party—encouraged the Israeli Palestinians to be more active in improving their situation. Moreover, the 1979 Israel–Egypt peace agreement signaled to them that if a central Arab country such as Egypt officially recognized Israel, then Israel was here to stay. From that point on, the collapse of the peace process in 2000, and the tragic events of October 2000—in which 13 Israeli Palestinians demonstrators who supported the 2000 Al-Aqsa uprising (Intifada) were killed by Israeli security forces—led to a crisis in the relations between the Israeli Palestinians and the Israeli Jews.

All of these processes and events have led to a CSHP with a wider scope in the second period, and the scope has increased as time has passed.
An expression of the realization of a need for a wider CSHP in that period can be found in the words of the Israeli Palestinian Said Kashoa (2004): “We [Israeli Palestinians] have no choice but to do it on our own [improve our situation]. Today many [Israeli Palestinians] understand that it is not only the [Israeli] authorities that are responsible [for our dire situation], but also we ourselves.” This realization is currently prevalent among many Israeli Palestinians, including their leaders (Ghanem, 2009; Rabinovitch & Abu-Baker, 2002).

After exploring the background of the CSHP in the two periods, let us turn now to describing how this process was specifically manifested during these periods in the four domains.

**Israeli Palestinians’ CSHP: Four Domains**

**Social Domain.** The process was manifested in this domain in at least four ways: in literature, education, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and scholarship.

*Literature.* During the first period, very few memoirs were written by Israeli Palestinians about the Nakba, due to the trauma of this event and the restrictions imposed by the military regime, some of which led to the arrest of Palestinian authors and poets. Nonetheless, poetry was published, although not on a large scale, and usually secretly or while the poets were in prison. Among the poets were Taufik Ziad, Mahnud Darwish, Emil Habiby, Hana Abu-Hana, and Rashed Hasin. Their poems mostly mourned the loss of Palestine, portrayed as the “lost heaven.” These poems were important, since they helped Israeli Palestinians to cope with their 1948 trauma and reconstruct their national identity. As Benedict Anderson (1983) writes, the poems helped Israeli Palestinians to imagine a past context and connect to it, and thereby to cope with present difficulties and rebuild their present society.

The second period saw more poems being published, in part due to the healing effects of the passage of time. These poems spoke significantly of the land that was lost in 1948 and the subsequent destruction of a previous way of life, and some of these works were used ideologically and politically. For example, Muhamad Ali Tha’a wrote in 1983: “Ho, children of our neighborhood; our land was stolen; our past was cursed; our head was broken; our cow was killed” (quoted in Rabinovitch & Abu-Baker, 2002, 39). Some novels addressed the difficult situation of the Israeli Palestinians,
torn between the need to conform to the daily demands of the Israeli Jews while keeping their Palestinian identity (e.g., Emil Habiby’s 1984 “The Optimist,” a topic Mahmud Shukyer also wrote about).

Later, the 1990s peace process marked a sharp change in Palestinian memoirs, especially since 1998, 50 years after the Nakba. It motivated many first-generation Israeli Palestinians to write memoirs about their experience of the Nakba and the preceding period. These memoirs made a significant sociopsychological contribution, since they helped the authors to confront and partially heal their painful past, while providing their Palestinian readers with personal descriptions, feelings, and experiences. These memories also helped in dealing with the difficult present. Thus, the memoirs contributed to the consolidation of the Palestinian identity and collective memory (Elad-Bouskila, 1999; Ghanem, 2009; Hader, 2004; Rabinovitch & Abu-Baker, 2002).

**Education.** The level of education among the Palestinians who remained in Israel in 1948 tended to be low, partly because of the flight of the Palestinian elite before and during the war. During the first period, due to the military regime and the young generation’s need to work in order to support their families, education was given little importance and its level remained low. As time passed, however, education became a central value among the Israeli Palestinians, one that facilitates prestige and success. Scholars explain this shift partly as a compensation for the feeling of the first generation — the one that experienced the Nakba — that “they have lost everything so their children should prosper” (a colloquial saying) or as a compensation for the second generation, the ones who could not study themselves during the first period, because they had to work. Therefore, while in 1961 only 6.3% of the total high school pupils in Israel were Israeli Palestinians, in 2001 this was multiplied by more than five times, to 34.4%. Additionally, while in 1961 only 1.5% of the Israeli Palestinians acquired higher education (13 years and more), in 2001 this number was multiplied 14 times to 21%. Similarly, recently many Israeli Palestinians seek higher education outside of Israel, in order to bypass difficulties in being accepted to Israeli universities. For example, while in 1998 only some 100 of them studied in Jordan, in 2006 that number rose sharply, to 5,400 (Haj-Yahya & Arar, 2009; Rinnawi, 2003). Many of these more educated Israeli Palestinians got involved in the social domain; for instance, in the activities of NGOs and scholarship (described in the next two subsections). Additionally, beginning in the 2000s, the Israeli Palestinian educational system has served as a target for Palestinian activity for strengthening
students’ identity and their collective memory of their nation and the conflict. This has been done by dissemination of Palestinian publications, giving lectures, organizing seminars for Palestinian teachers, and other means (Stern, 2008).

Nongovernmental Organizations. Until the end of the 1970s, the number of Israeli Palestinian NGOs was very small, about 50, due to the NGOs’ difficult situation. Along the years the situation improved, and members of the second and third generations—more educated and socially/politically aware—became active in the public sphere. These Israeli Palestinians felt the need to self-organize in order to deal with the oppression they suffered via wide state discrimination. Therefore, from the early 1980s to 1998, 1,009 Israeli Palestinian NGOs were founded (about one third in the 1980s and two thirds between 1990 and 1998). From 1998 to 2005, their number doubled to approximately 2,000. These NGOs operate in the areas of culture, recreation, religion, sport, housing, development, welfare, education, civil rights, and social change, among others. As a by-product, these NGOs also provide jobs for unemployed Israeli Palestinians. These activities have promoted Israeli Palestinian pride and self-esteem and have helped people to heal their learned helplessness problem while improving many aspects of their daily lives (Cohen, 2006; Rabinovitch & Abu-Baker, 2002).

Scholarship. During the first period, there were very few Israeli Palestinian scholars, and those who were conducted very few studies, even about their own society. For example, the Israeli Palestinian Sabri Jerais wrote the first academic book about his society; it was published in 1966. The second period witnessed the formation of a significant stratum of Israeli Palestinian scholars, who began to address their society extensively. Many were motivated to do so at least partly in order to serve their society—empower it, preserve its culture and heritage, and strengthen the national identity of its members (Ghanem, 2009). This scholarly endeavor has been conducted via Israeli academic institutions, independently, and via Israeli Palestinian NGOs, and has resulted in many studies covering various social, economic, and historical areas of Israeli Palestinian society. Consequently, these studies contributed significantly to the development of Palestinian society (Ghanem, 2009; Kabha, 2010).

Economic Domain. During the first period, Israeli Palestinian families coped with their economic difficulties in part by supporting each other with money, labor, and food. At the beginning of that period, most Israeli
Palestinians earned their living working in agriculture, usually cultivating their own land. As time passed, however, agriculture was largely abandoned (from 58.2% of laborers in 1954 to only 2.1% in 1997) in favor of working in the state public and private (Jewish and Palestinian) sectors. Initially, blue-collar jobs in these sectors (e.g., construction and industry) dominated. As the level of education among Israeli Palestinians sharply increased, however, their representation in blue-collar jobs decreased in favor of white-collar professions (e.g., academic, teaching, health, technical, and professions such as lawyers, accountants, etc.). In 1997, Israeli Palestinians in white-collar jobs increased to 35.2%, and this number is still increasing. The transition from agriculture to blue-collar and then to white-collar work significantly enhanced Israeli Palestinians’ salaries, prestige, and working standards (Rinnawi, 2003). Simultaneously, over the years, they founded many more small factories—a few in the 1950s, but 410 in 1983, and approximately 900 in 1992 (Haidar, 2005). All of these changes in employment sharply increased Israeli Palestinians’ standard of living, manifested in terms of their housing, clothing, cars, and cultural consumption (Rinnawi, 2003).

**Political Domain.** During the first period, political nationalistic activity in the usual sense barely existed among Israeli Palestinians. This was because of their severe societal and economic situation as well as the military regime that crushed every political initiative for fear of a Palestinian uprising (e.g., the Al-Ard political movement founded in 1959). Therefore, Israeli Palestinians collectively approached the Israeli authorities, mostly asking for basic civil rights in order to allow minimal communal existence. In the national elections of 1951 and 1955, for example, most of them voted for the ruling Zionist party, Mapai, in order to get fragments of the state’s support. Only a minority of them voted for the Communist Party, Maki, and its successor, Rakach. There was, however, indirect and implicit political activity of another form. Many Israeli Palestinians felt that by performing daily activities, such as raising children, working, renovating their homes, or preserving their language, they were transmitting a subversive political statement of survival and struggle. By this they were showing an ability to cope with the Nakba.

Beginning in the late 1960s, however, Israeli Palestinians became increasingly politically active on national and municipal levels (Rabinovitch & Abu-Baker, 2002). On the national level, from the 1970s on, various organizations were formed, such as the National Association of Arab Academics
(established in 1971), the National Committee for the Arab Local Authorities’ Mayors (1974), the Arab Land Defense Committee (1975), and the Higher Supervision Committee (1982). Various new non-Communist Israeli Palestinian parties also aimed to represent the Israeli Palestinians, starting in 1974 with Hadash, Ra’am (1977), Mada (1988), and Balad (1995). Since then, most Israeli Palestinians usually have voted for their own parties. Political activism also manifested itself in the public sphere—for example, in the 1976 demonstrations against the confiscation of their land and the October 2000 demonstrations against the same thing. On the municipal level, in the 1970s, Israeli Palestinian parties began to compete in local elections and gained significant victories.

On both national and municipal levels, Israeli Palestinians increasingly demanded (as opposed to “asked” for in the first period) civil rights and state support and expressed their opinions about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Even more, since the early 1990s, and especially since the mid-2000s, there has been a strong Israeli Palestinian demand to change the definition of Israel from a “Jewish-democratic state” to “a state of its citizens” (Cohen, 2006; Kabha, 2010; Neuberger et al., 2010; Rabinovitch & Abu-Baker, 2002; Rinnawi, 2003).

**Psychological Domain.** The CSHP was manifested in the psychological domain directly and indirectly.

Two kinds of direct activities were performed: pilgrimage and off-site commemoration.

In regard to pilgrimage, a few hundred thousand current Israeli Palestinians are considered to be “internal refugees”: people who left their localities in 1948 and remained in Israel but were not able to return to their homes, mostly because the Israeli security forces have not permitted them to do so and sometimes because these localities were demolished (Kabha, 2010). During the first period, sometimes these internal refugees visited by themselves or with their families the ruins or sites of their original villages. This practice was relatively rare, since the military regime officially allowed it only on one day of the year: Israeli Independence Day. During these visits, the first-generation refugees and their families experienced the atmosphere, the nature (e.g., they picked fruit, olives, and herbs or drank well water), and the remains of the villages and developed a connection to them. They also prayed, looked for movable remains that could be taken, rested, or dined at on-site. Tastes and smells of the food and flora became major agents of connection to their collective past. First-generation refugees also
told their families their personal histories and that of their villages (Ben-Ze’ev, 2003).

During the second period, after the military regime had ended, and especially since the 1990s, the scope of pilgrimages significantly increased. Not only did many more people conduct such visits (and could do so whenever they wanted), but many of pilgrimages were conducted in public, in bigger groups, sometimes also as part of public parades. Former village residents have even conducted youth summer camps on the sites of their previous villages. In some villages, Israeli Palestinians began to restore main buildings that remained at least partly intact, such as mosques and churches as well as cemeteries.

All of these diverse activities have had a profound individual and collective healing effect on Israeli Palestinians. They have enabled the first generation to confront its past and reconnect to it, to feel and express painful emotions, and to affirm its identity. It has enabled second and third generations to connect to the past of their ancestors and to affirm and consolidate their identities as well. The notion of “identity” suddenly was not just abstract but contained more substance and detail. Every generation began to feel pride as they developed the courage to demonstrate their presence in the Israeli Jewish sphere, which was constantly trying to eliminate their presence (Ben-Ze’ev, 2003; Ben-Ze’ev & Issam, 2009; Nir, 2001).

Pilgrimage represents an on-site commemoration practice, but Israeli Palestinians also conducted a variety of off-site commemoration activities. Many internal refugees preserve their connection to the original localities of their families while still residing within Israel. For the most part, people from a locality abandoned during the 1948 war tend to live in the same neighborhoods within Israel, and keep in close contact with one another. The second and third generations are also encouraged to marry people from their original locality. Many of the first-generation refugees keep the keys and the kushans (Arabic, meaning “ownership certificates”) to their houses and pass them to succeeding generations. Some people take plants from their original localities and plant them in their current ones, while others dine at their current homes using food products taken from their previous localities. Moreover, many first-generation Israeli Palestinians (and not only the internal refugees among them) serve as storytellers for subsequent generations regarding the period prior to 1948 and the 1948 war. These personal memories are told among family and friends and help to construct a collective image of Palestine and the Palestinians. In addition, for many Israeli Palestinians, food serves as a source of connection to
their past and a unifying social factor. Therefore, many keep the tradition of cooking Palestinian food, teach the process to subsequent generations, and publish cookbooks with popular Palestinian recipes (Ben-Ze’ev, 2003; Rabinovitch & Abu-Baker, 2002).

During the first period, some of these practices (e.g., storytelling) were not conducted frequently, partly because confronting such a difficult past was painful. In the second period, however, they occurred on a wider scale, and largely from the 1990s on, many Israeli Palestinians also began to collect information about their families’ original localities. From that time on, they have also publicly commemorated Nakba Day, their main memorial day, with parades and events. During both periods, first-generation Israeli Palestinians found psychological comfort and assistance in their friends and family members. All of these off-site commemoration activities affected them positively, as did the on-site activities (Ben-Ze’ev, 2003; Ghanem, 2009; Nir, 2001; Rabinovitch & Abu-Baker, 2002).

Moving to the indirect activities influencing the psychological domain, they encompass social, economic, and political activities. Social and political activities helped the Israeli Palestinians to cope with their 1948 personal and collective trauma and thereby empowered them. Such activities helped to partially ameliorate their feelings of shock, pain, fear, learned helplessness, insecurity, humiliation, bitterness, and anger, and helped Israeli Palestinians to recover their pride and self-respect. They contributed to the healing of their society, culture, and heritage, shattered by the events of 1948; they rebuilt its institutions and strengthened its members’ attachment to their society. Thereby, the activities enhanced the Israeli Palestinians’ ability to cope with their daily difficulties and positively influenced their social identity. During the first period, Israeli Palestinians kept the national Arab Palestinian aspect of their identity at a low profile. During the second period, however, this aspect was intensively nurtured (especially the Palestinian one) and became central, creating pride and confidence. Phenomena such as subservience, obedience, and self-censorship, which were quite dominant in the first period, significantly diminished as time went on. The social and political activities also shaped the Israeli Palestinian collective memory of their pre-1948 war era, the Nakba, and the post-Nakba period while living in Israel. Collective memory is a central sociopsychological phenomenon that influences people’s emotions, attitudes, and behavior (Nets-Zehngut, 2008, 2011a). The memory that the Israeli Palestinians constructed was, by and large, one that supported their heritage, culture, and connection to the land. Thus, it helped them to unify their
society and strengthen it (Ghanem, 2009; Kabha, 2010; Rabinovitch & Abu-Baker, 2002; Rinnawi, 2003).

As for the economic domain, the improvement of the Israeli Palestinians' income allowed them to shift from a mode of mainly passive survival to an active mode of societal advancement. During the second period, they involved themselves in the diverse social and political activities described earlier and improved their education. The economic improvement also helped to partially heal their learned helplessness problem and ameliorated their insecurity, self-efficacy, and low self-esteem (Ghanem, 2009; Kabha, 2010; Rinnawi, 2003).

Summary and Discussion

The Palestinian CSHP described demonstrates the significant impact of this process. As shown, since 1948 and especially since the mid-1960s, the Israeli Palestinians have performed a wide-scale CSHP. This process took place in four domains: societal (literature, education, NGOs, and scholarship), economical, political, and psychological (pilgrimage and off-site commemoration). It was successful to a large degree, allowing Israeli Palestinians to heal significantly from their dire psychological state following the 1948 war.

Various theoretical aspects of this process should be elaborated on, aside from those already discussed.

Partial Versus Complete Healing

The CSHP does not necessarily heal the conflict's wounds completely but may do so partially. Even partial healing is, however, also important.

Relevance of the CSHP

The CSHP is relevant for three phases of conflicts: the pre-resolution phase; the postconflict, pre-reconciliation phase; and the postconflict, reconciliation phase.

Pre-Resolution Phase. Addressing the severe consequences of conflicts is particularly important before the conflict is resolved, when typically violence is still rampant. When that is the case, it is more difficult for the parties to cooperate in the implementation of a reconciliation process (Bar-Tal, 2000). However, CSHP can still take place at this phase, to a greater or
lessor degree depending on the circumstances. The Palestinian CSHP described in this article exemplifies such a situation.

**Postconflict, Pre-Reconciliation Phase.** Even when the conflict is resolved, one or both parties might not agree to cooperate in a reconciliation process. This may be because one or more of the conditions for initiating this process has not been met (e.g., the parties lack mutual interests in reconciling or the stronger party is not willing to acknowledge its unjust behavior). Nonetheless, in such a situation, the parties can still conduct CSHP. An example is the war between Japan and China, which ended in 1945. The two countries have not conducted a reconciliation process until now, mainly because Japan has historically refused to acknowledge unjust behavior conducted by its soldiers during the war (e.g., the 1937 Nanking massacre). Nonetheless, the Chinese do conduct wide-scale commemoration events and projects in memory of their casualties (Reilly, 2004).

**Postconflict, Reconciliation Phase.** Even when a reconciliation process is under way in the postconflict phase, at times it may not sufficiently succeed in healing the parties. The same factors that may prevent the initiation of a reconciliation process may also inhibit the success of such a process that is already under way. The apology extended in Northern Ireland by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in 2002 for the killing of Protestant citizens in a terrorist act is an example. Part of the Protestant community rejected this gesture due to their basic lack of trust in the IRA and their suspicions regarding the gesture’s sincerity (Sadeh, 2002). In addition, since a reconciliation process—successful or not—requires a long time to take effect, even a parallel implementation of CSHP may hasten the healing of the parties (as well as improve its quality). An example of a CSHP conducted simultaneously with a reconciliation process is the case of Israel and Germany after the Holocaust. Although an extensive reconciliation process has taken place between these countries since the 1950s, a wide-scale parallel Israeli CSHP also has been conducted. This latter process includes, for example, establishing the Israeli national Holocaust memorial institute Yad Vashem (Hebrew, meaning “memorial and name”), setting an annual memorial day, establishing special educational programs, publishing numerous popular books, providing psychological and financial support for the survivors, and engaging in academic research (Segev, 2000).

In summary, the CSHP is very relevant in addressing the destructive aftermath of conflicts, either as an exclusive process or as one tangential to the reconciliation process.
Factors Shaping the CSHP

The previous discussion highlights the five main theoretical factors that promote the initiation of the CSHP or shape its results.

1. Conflict. The events of a given conflict have an impact. Largely, when the conflict is not yet resolved, it will be more difficult for the given party to self-heal. Animosity and suffering are still high, and there is a need for big economic investments in order to win the conflict (investments that at the same time inhibit the economic well-being of the in-group) (Bar-Tal & Bennick, 2004). In addition, the events of a conflict might have other, unexpected influences. For example, the 1967 Six Day Wars signaled to the Israeli Palestinians that Israel is a fait accompli and therefore their CSHP should be accelerated within the framework of Israel. At the same time, the seizure of the territories in that war enabled the Israeli Palestinians to reconnect with Palestinians in the territories and thereby nurture their culture and identity.

2. Social, economic, and political domains. Due to the interconnectedness of these three domains, along with the psychological, the state of affairs of the former highly influences the extent of healing in the latter. Largely, the better the circumstances in these three domains (e.g., the better the economic situation), the more psychological healing will occur. The discussion of the Israeli Palestinian CSHP provides many examples of this phenomenon.

3. Time. The passing of time acts as a healing agent, mainly in the post-conflict phase, in two ways (Nets-Zehngut, 2012a). First, among the generation that was harmed by conflict directly, the passage of time may accompany gradual recovery, increased well-being, and acceptance of trauma (Jedlicki, 1999; Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 1998). As described earlier, many people possess the ability to heal themselves from psychological wounds as time passes, even without being professionally treated. For example, it was only in the 1990s, some 50 years after the Nakba, that the Palestinian Nakba generation was able to produce memoirs of that event in a significant manner. The second way time influences the CSHP is via generational turnover. Younger generations are naturally less influenced by a given event and therefore usually will be less harmed in comparison to the direct-experience generation (Bar-On, 1996; Nets-Zehngut, 2012b). Therefore, these
younger generations will be more competent in supporting a CSHP, as were the second and third Israeli Palestinian generations.

4. **Place of residence.** When the weaker party resides in the stronger party's country, it might face more obstacles put forward by the latter for initiating a CSHP or performing it successfully. The constraints the Israeli Palestinians encountered during the first period and on exemplify this. In contrast, when the weaker party resides in its own country, there are no such obstacles. In other words, the CSHP is more feasible for the weaker party in an interstate conflict than in an intrastate conflict. Thus, the fact that the Israeli Palestinians were able to conduct such a wide and successful CSHP even in an intrastate context highlights the feasibility and importance of this process even in intrastate conflicts.

5. **Support of third parties.** The CSHP is often conducted with the support of third parties, such as an international organization/institution or another country and its entities. This support can be, for example, financial or professional (e.g., the assistance of psychologists and educators). Especially when a CSHP is conducted by the weaker party (whose resources are more limited), this support can significantly contribute to the initiation of this process as well as to its success. Thus, the more that third parties are inclined to support a CSHP, the more it will flourish. For example, many Israeli Palestinian NGOs are supported by third parties (e.g., governments, foundations, and organizations) from Arab, Western, and North American countries.

However, expectations of third-party help can inhibit the CSHP. This might be an outcome of the point of view: “Why stand up alone, when others can do our work?” For instance, in the first period, Israeli Palestinians expected Arab countries to represent them and solve their problems. This was one reason why they conducted only a low-scale CSHP during that period.

Among these five factors, three are the most important: the conflict, the circumstances of the other three domains, and the place of residence.

**Applicability of the CSHP to Tractable Conflicts**

The CSHP is especially important and relevant for parties to intractable conflicts, since they are especially damaged. However, it is also relevant to parties to tractable conflicts, even if damage exists to a lesser degree.
CSHP as Promoting Peace

One might wonder to what extent a CSHP promotes peace. The answer is not simple. Generally, the more that a CSHP is effective in healing the psychological wounds of a party, the less likely it is that this party will reengage violently in conflict. This party will have less psychological motivation to do so. In other words, on its own, the CSHP does promote peace. However, some factors external to the CSHP influence its impact on the party performing it. For example, the CSHP’s impact is highly dependent on the phase of the conflict during which it is performed. A CSHP performed in the postconflict phase is much more likely to promote peace than one performed in the pre-resolution phase. After all, in the latter state, the CSHP will not lead the party who performs it to give up its concrete demands. Further, the place of residence of the weaker party and the quality of its relationship with the stronger party while conducting the CSHP are important. The worse these relations are, the more the positive impact of the CSHP is diminished. In contrast, when the weaker party resides in its own country, less negative impact occurs. For example, in our case, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has not been resolved and the Palestinians in question live in Israel (the stronger party’s country), which partially inhibits their CSHP. Therefore, the positive impact of the Israeli Palestinians’ CSHP has been somewhat limited.

CSHP of the Stronger Party

Although the article focuses on healing the weaker party, it is also applicable to the stronger one. Winning a war does not prevent a party from being significantly damaged psychologically, even if it is to a lesser extent than the loser of the war (Nets-Zehngut, 2009). Numerous cases exemplify this phenomenon, including that of Israeli Jews in the context of the Israeli–Arab/Palestinian conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007). The impact of some of the factors mentioned will be different in a CSHP conducted by a stronger party than by that of a weaker party. Typically, a stronger party will not encounter obstacles in conducting a CSHP in an intrastate conflict (while residing with the weaker party in the same country). Moreover, the social, economic, and political domains of the stronger party usually will be in better condition than those of the weaker one. Therefore, the domains will support the CSHP more significantly. Likewise, the stronger party usually will be less dependent on the support of third parties.
**Limitation of the CSHP**

The positive interaction between former rivals—as is conducted in a reconciliation process—ameliorates the rivals’ mutual perceptions of distrust and often promotes healing between them. This aspect of healing is missing in a CSHP, since no such cooperation takes place in its framework. This fact highlights the need for the two processes combined—reconciliation and CSHP—to be conducted to maximize healing and the promotion of peace.

**Conclusion**

This article provides an empirical contribution by describing the Israeli Palestinian CSHP. Based on these findings, the article contributes various theoretical aspects of the CSHP, initially its definition, its difference from and importance in comparison to the reconciliation process, its contribution regarding the learned helplessness phenomenon, and direct and indirect paths to psychological healing. The “Summary and Discussion” section addresses additional theoretical aspects, such as the significance of partial healing, the relevance of the CSHP for various phases of conflicts, factors that promote the initiation and success of the CSHP, the extent to which the CSHP promotes peace, the applicability of the CSHP to the stronger party and to tractable conflicts, and the limitation of the CSHP. It is suggested that additional research be conducted regarding the CSHP in order to learn more about these effects.

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