

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND POLITICAL AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Practice the Change You Want to See in the World: Transformative Practices of Social Movements in Israel

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This study explores the psychological challenges to social movements in the face of structural and cultural violence, and the cognitive and behavioral practices that help overcome these obstacles. It presents 3 case studies of social movements that brought about political and social transformation in Israel in the past 15 years: the struggles against industrial pollution in the city of Ashkelon; for the rights of the LGBT movement in Jerusalem; and of young Jews and Palestinians working against institutional discrimination in the city of Lydda. The research utilized qualitative methods: participative observations and interviews. We followed each group for approximately 1 year and documented its main activities for social change, as well as internal meetings and decision-making processes. We also conducted follow-up interviews with some of the groups' leaders after their goals were accomplished.

Public Significance Statement

Our research revealed 3 main practices used by social movements to effectively address psychological challenges: a complex view of identities; commitment to a moral compass; and the initiation of small and symbolic acts. Using these practices, the social movements we followed challenged the violent ground rules of a conflict situation, and promoted deep cultural and structural transformation.

Keywords: collective action, conflict transformation, nonviolence, social change, social movements

According to the conflict transformation tradition (Galtung, 1990, 2001; Miall, Ramsbotham, & Woodhouse, 2000), changing structures of domination in which one group abuses its control

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requires building power in an alternative, nondominating way, not only to resolve the unjust situation, but also to transform those structures into more just and equal ones. However, the struggle for social change often takes place in a context of conflict, where structural and cultural violence prevails (Galtung, 1990). These conflict situations have profound psychological effects: the social world is viewed as more polarized for example, Bar-On, 2008; Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003; Hinkle, Fox-Cardarone, Haseleu, Brown, & Irwin, 1996; Kelman, 1999), possibilities of action seem limited (Halevy, Bonstein, & Sagiv, 2008), and self and group efficacy appear low (Bandura, 2000; Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999). As conflict escalates, these perceptions become increasingly polarized, limiting the ability of social movements to practice what they preach and transform conflict by peaceful means.

The current study explores how the psychological challenges facing social movements that struggle against unjust, even violent, social structures can be overcome. The theory behind our research draws on psychological perspectives regarding the implications of conflicts for the mindset of individuals (e.g., Alon & Omer, 2006; Bar-On, 2008; Bar-Tal, 2007; Kelman, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and the research tradition of conflict transformation (Galtung, 1990, 2001; Miall, Ramsbotham, & Woodhouse, 2000). First, we identified major psychological challenges that may hin-

der attempts to transform unjust reality. We then analyze three case studies of political and social transformation in Israel in the past 15 years. Through their stories, we aim to learn about the practices that allow members of social movements to deal constructively with the psychological challenges of conflict, while creating a transformative collective action.

This study contributes to the literature by addressing the kind of psychological changes that are needed to transform structural and cultural violence. Moreover, it suggests a general framework that allows us to think strategically and constructively about social struggles. The framework proposed here is not limited to a specific context, and can be employed in other struggles.

Theoretical Background

Unequal distribution of resources between people and groups is often based on and legitimized by structures of domination: the domination of one species over others; of one group over others; of one person over others (Francis, 2011). Domination has power asymmetry as its goal, and depends on it. It represents the meaning of relationship as “*power over*,” meaning control over resources and over people (Eisler, 1990). Societies based on domination are characterized by very centralized control of one group over material resources such as money, goods, weapons, and so forth. Importantly, this group also controls the social discourse that constructs which groups are better and why, whose history is correct, and what knowledge is considered valid (Foucault, 1980). These last are used to legitimize unequal distribution of resources and the domination of certain groups over others. Galtung (1990) refers to the control over those means as “cultural violence,” which lays the foundation for direct violence to appear normative and natural.

The conflict transformation tradition suggests that transformation from unjust, unequal social structures to equal, just ones should occur through practices of *power with others* as opposed to *power over* others. Power with others is based on consent and identification of growing circles of groups with shared ideas and goals that use resources to promote those goals, for the sake of all members of society (Dudouet, 2008). The ability to engage people in collective action is based on this principle (see: Saab, Tausch, Spears, & Cheung, 2015; Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008). In societies that are based on power with others, all members’ needs are considered equally, everyone has a voice, regardless of his or her race, gender or class, and goals are achieved through collaboration and identification of people with an idea and not through control and coercive means (Francis, 2011; Galtung, 2001).

By using “power with” practices, social groups redress not only the unequal distribution of goods, but also the cultural aspects that legitimize the superiority of one group over others by creating mechanisms and structures that are based on participation and inclusion. Initiating collaborative and equal practices is not easily done in a reality of violence and inequality: Structures and cultures of domination create psychological challenges, which often result in the replication of destructive basic assumptions, rather than in their transformation into constructive ones.

In the next section, we elaborate on the psychological challenges that are direct results of the structure and culture of domination, and explain why they make it so difficult to “practice what you

preach.” Then, we analyze three case studies in order to investigate how these challenges can be overcome.

Psychological Implications of Structures and Cultures of Domination

Structures and cultures of domination deeply affect the mental state of people involved in social struggles (Alon & Omer, 2006; Rubel-Lifschitz & Ben David, 2013). The mental state that characterizes people who face injustices and violence is often described as a “tunnel vision:” narrow-minded, often black and white, thinking about a particular situation that is accompanied by feelings of pressure, suffocation, and lack of choice (Miall et al., 2000). There are three major psychological challenges that result from structures and cultures of domination:

First, they foster a polarized view of the struggling camp versus the rival camp, intensifying the tendency of group members to validate their own positive identity by negating the identity of the out-group (Hinkle et al., 1996; Kelman, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As conflict escalates, these polarized perceptions intensify, and the rival often seems increasingly evil and dangerous; its actions are perceived as vicious attempts to hurt us. Even positive gestures are interpreted as a devious manipulation (Alon & Omer, 2006; Ashmore, Jussim, & Wilder, 2001; Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992). A polarized view of “us” versus “them” is both the vehicle for and the result of structures of domination. In turn, it limits the ability to generate a complex, dynamic understanding of the social actors affected by the situation, and their various interests and motivations, which is a crucial component of a successful collective action (Saab et al., 2015; Subašić et al., 2008).

Moreover, this polarized view may also intensify the need to be united when facing an external threat (Bar-Tal, 2007). This tendency may contribute to the social cohesion and sense of belonging among members of the group; however, it may also lead them to perceive differences between group members as a threat. An impulse to decide all issues, and thereby achieve consensus and unity, can arise within the camp, making it harder for it to contain multiple voices on both ideological and pragmatic levels. Although a negative view of the rival often serves as an important vehicle for engaging in collective action (see: Simon & Klandermans, 2001), it may also limit the ability of social movements to transform structures of domination.

Second, structures and cultures of domination limit the perceived possibilities for action. In particular, it fosters desire to be victorious over the other and to pay back as they deserve (Halevy et al., 2008). In social struggles, the rival is often perceived as a sworn enemy who must be defeated lest he or she destroy us. This tendency may lead struggling groups to define their success in terms of their rival’s failure, which in turn damages their ability to promote common goals. When sides involved in a struggle feel that their goals can be achieved only to the extent that their rival loses, they may concentrate all efforts in the attempt to defeat the “bad person” in the story, forgetting why they initially started the struggle. The original goals may be forgotten, and the struggle itself may turn into a battle for revenge. Retaliatory response is a highly rewarding path for discharging emotions such as insult, anger and frustration. It can also serve as a bond between people who find a common enemy. But meeting injustice with injustice may run directly counter to the purpose of the reaction, adopting

not only the same behavior that activists want to change in the other, but also a culture and structure of domination that resembles the starting situation.

Third, structure and culture of domination severely impairs self and group efficacy (Bandura, 2000; Keltner et al., 2003; Mummendey et al., 1999). Empirical studies suggest that low-power fundamentally alters psychological experience. Cognitively, low-power decreases attention to the self (Weick & Guinote, 2008). Consequently, powerless individuals are less able to define their own goals, particularly abstract and long-term ones. Regarding motivation, low-power increases mental and behavioral inhibitions (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003), decreasing the likelihood of initiating any action. Thus, structures and cultures of domination construct the way people perceive themselves and their possibilities for social mobility, leading to a passivity and inhibitory behavior in face of injustices (Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Paradoxically, individuals who suffer most from social inequality are the ones least likely to become proactive in an attempt to alter their life conditions.

In the current study, we consider the question: what kind of practices do social movements use in order to constructively overcome these challenges? We do this by analyzing three case studies of social movements that successfully affected social change in Israel through a social struggle. We will address three main questions:

1. How can people involved in a struggle overcome polarized views of “us” versus “them,” and broaden their perspectives regarding actors in the social field?
2. How can social movements withstand the temptation to defeat the other side, even in the face of violence?
3. How can movements rebuild a sense of self and group efficacy and encourage other people to engage in collective action?

Method

In the current research, we concentrate on the story of three social movements that aimed to transform social and political situations in Israel. These groups were active at different times between 2001 and 2016, and some still are. Our purpose in this study was to understand how social movements constructively handle psychological challenges encountered during their attempt to bring about social change. Therefore, we chose to concentrate on cases in which there were “objective,” measurable achievements. In addition, to observe the transformation of structures of domination through practices of “power with,” we focused on movements that were community based, or relied on the community in order to build their power. In particular, we wanted to understand what exactly happened in these case studies that made their action so successful? What kind of process did the movements gone through? What kind of decisions did leading figures in the process make? We followed each group for approximately one year, as part of our work as organizational consultants.¹ During this time, we conducted numerous participative observations of many public activities, internal meetings, and decision-making processes of the groups’ leaders. We kept notes of those meetings, and later processed the events with our colleagues. We entered the

field as consultants whose role was to help the group to define its goals and strategies. Therefore, our position vis-à-vis our research raises issues of reflexivity and subjectivity, and clearly influenced our exploration, which we have previously described in detail (Rubel-Lifschitz & Ben David, 2013).

In subsequent years, we continued tracking the groups mainly through national and local media, in order to evaluate the “objective” achievements of each social struggle. We focused mainly on legislative and political achievements, but also on changes in the social discourse around the issues addressed by the struggles. Recently, we conducted in-depth interviews with eight major figures in those struggles, to explore their own narratives and insights, and learn about their subjective feelings regarding the organizations’ achievements. Because our focus was on the decision making processes and the main strategies that were chosen in these struggles, we decided to interview only leading figures.

All interviews were recorded and later transcribed. We analyzed the data conducted thematically, using six major categories: (a) Challenges, (b) Major dilemmas, (c) Major decisions, (d) Turning points in the struggle, (e) Achievements, and (f) Practices for handling challenges.

Results

In our analysis, we found three major themes that reflect major practices of constructive collective action:

1. *Complex view of the social actors*, the interests and needs of both the struggling camp and the rival camp, and of potential actors. This practice helped social movements optimize their ability to recruit growing circles of supporters for their action.
2. *Commitment to a moral compass* that guides their actions and decision-making helped struggling groups when they faced threats and escalating violence.
3. *Small and symbolic steps* helped struggling groups to gradually build their power and sense of self and group efficacy, and also to resilient and persistent remain throughout a long-term process of working for social change.

Although these practices were found in all three cases, their weight was varied, according to the particular major challenges each group faced. For the sake of clarity, we chose to focus on the most salient practice on each case. The discussion will explain how all three practices are played a role in the other cases.

¹ Both authors were employed by SHATIL, the operational arm of the New Israel Fund, which provides capacity building and consultation services to social groups and NGOs in Israel. The archival data that were used in the current study were mostly open to the public: published organizational documentation, information from the Internet, documentary videos and films. We also used our own diaries and documentation we made throughout the years. All of the participants we interviewed gave their full consent for using this documentation for research purposes.

Escaping the Mental Tunnel: The Coal Power Station in Ashkelon

A polarized view of two camps leaves few resources for achieving a broad, deep understanding of the conflict scene. How can social movements challenge the tendency to see both their rivals and their own camp in monolithic terms? We found that the most significant practice to cope with this challenge was the development of a complex view of the actors involved in the social struggle, and of their motivations, needs and interests. We found that successful social movements were able to engage multiple actors to act as supporters. These movements did not perceive the social scene as composed of two rival groups, and did not pressure others to pick sides. Instead, they allowed a wide range of actors to join their struggle in various ways. This flexible and dynamic view also applied to the legitimacy given to various goals, needs and interests. Rather than trying to persuade other actors of their own just causes, these social movements searched for creative solutions that would allow accomplishing the goals of multiple interests. Adopting a complex, broad view of the social scene was an important process in the three social movements we observed. However, it was particularly central in the struggle against pollution in Ashkelon, a city in southern Israel. In this case, recruiting the uninvolved local community, as well as uncovering potential supporters from the other side of the divide, was a key component in the success of the struggle, as we will explain.

In 2001, the Israeli government decided to enlarge the coal-fired power station in Ashkelon, and add two additional coal-fired boilers. Coal-fired generating plants are the most polluting, and do severe harm to the physical environment, causing human diseases and even death (Tal, 2009). Following the government's decision, environmental activists at academic institutions in the region decided to take action.

The activists began with community work to pressure the municipality to put the issue on its public agenda. This strategy was very new for environmental NGOs that usually concentrated on strategies to change policy, and directed their efforts at the national planning committees of the *Knesset* (Israeli parliament). Working with the local community challenged the balance of power between the two principal parties to the conflict: the environmental NGOs and the Israel Electric Company, by bringing new, meaningful, and powerful actors into the field. However, recruiting uninvolved community members also challenged the organizers, because it revealed the gap between the students and the community, as one of the leaders explained:

I was personally in the city square every Friday, and other students were there with me. We initiated conversations with people who walked by, asking them “Do you know the existing power station? Do you know that they are going to build another one? Do you understand the meaning of this move for climate change and on your health? Come—join our struggle!” After two or three times, we realized that we were not on the same page. We got unexpected replies like “What are you—an Ashkenazi² that you are dealing with these things?” or “We need to put bread on the table—who has time for this? Will this move bring more work to the city?” It was as if they were telling us: “We are from different stories. You are Ashkenazi students from the center [of the country] and it doesn't matter what the objective truth is. We know you. It is like a show that you are presenting, coming two, three times a week, getting some scholarship for that, clearing

your conscience. . . . You have the time for that [for a struggle]. You are nice people and all, but we [the local community] have a different story . . .”

This quote reveals how social hierarchies between groups strengthen polarized perspectives of groups, and thereby perpetuate unjust situations, creating distance between groups that could potentially act together. It reflects the challenge of creating a social movement that is based on *power with*, and explains why a group leading a struggle often becomes isolated when faced with strong forces, and is unable to recruit more people to support the struggle. Although the activists felt disappointed and frustrated, they were able to acknowledge the community's need for occupational security, rather than ignoring them or trying to prove them wrong. Specifically, they adjusted their goals so they would meet the needs of the community: From struggling against the new power station, they started struggling for the implementation of new technologies, which reduce pollution but also create new work places for residents. Incorporating the issue of employment into the environmental struggle was a key move, which turned the power station into the central issue in the local political campaigns. After the elections, one of the local activists was appointed deputy mayor, and local leadership was established.

In 2006, all of the localities in the Ashkelon area were aligned with the struggle. Building this coalition was not easy, primarily because of inconsistency of several local politicians, who publicly supported the struggle during the campaign, but disappeared after being elected. Despite feelings of disappointment and frustration, the activists persistently observed fluctuations in the field, and waited patiently for new opportunities to promote their struggle. Seeing the field as constantly changing helped the activists uncover potential supporters even among actors who seemed to be on the other side of the divide. For example, when the activists mapped the political actors in the *Knesset*, they identified Gilad Erdan, a young politician who was born and raised in Ashkelon. Despite being a member of the coalition that led the program for the new power station, the activists invited him to several demonstrations and public events. In 2009, Erdan was appointed minister of environmental protection, and promoted an alternative power station, fueled by natural gas.

The activists' approach reflects a complex, variegated view of actors in the field, which eventually allowed them to mobilize a broad range of actors and growing circles to support the struggle: a large forum of environmental organizations, many members of the communities in Ashkelon and the surrounding region who became active, politicians, and government ministers. As the result of the many years of stubborn resistance, the government decided in 2014 to freeze the plan to construct a coal-fired power station. This was a significant achievement for the struggle and for the entire environmental movement in Israel.

In conclusion, it appears that a key psychological factor in achieving social change was treating the various sides in the

² Ashkenazi Jews originated in European countries. The founders of the State of Israel were of Ashkenazi origin, and Ashkenazi Jews have played a prominent role in the economy, media and politics. Ashkenazi leaders often stereotyped Mizrahi Jews, who originated in Muslim countries, as inferior. Although highly integrated into Israeli society, discrimination against Mizrahi Jews is still common (For more details, see Chetrit, 2010).

conflict as complex, heterogeneous, and changing entities. The struggle against the power station in Ashkelon demonstrates how a dynamic view of the social field may help activists transcend a dichotomous and categorized view of “us versus them,” providing new understandings of the actors and forces in the field, and new, previously unconsidered ways of operation. This complex view allowed them to maximize their ability to achieve their goals and pressure the government to change its decision.

Articulating and Committing to Core Values in Face of Violence: The Jerusalem Pride Parade

The tendency to concentrate all efforts on defeating the rival, which is seen as the source of the injustice, harms the ability of social movements to achieve their goals. This tendency intensifies when the conflict escalates, and members of social movements are threatened, demonized and violently attacked. We found that the main practice that allowed the three social movements we observed to cope with this challenge was articulating and committing to core values. These values served as an “internal compass” for the strugglers, guiding their decisions and actions in crucial times. Articulating and committing to core values developed internal strength and resilience, which was particularly important when facing harsh attacks. We chose to present the development and use of this practice through the struggle of the LGBT movement’s struggle to hold a pride parade in Jerusalem, because it demonstrates how a strong core value can overcome the tendency to defeat the other—even in the face of a rigorous and violent religious opposition.

The LGBT movement in Jerusalem, led by the Open House for Pride and Tolerance³ (JOH), has organized an annual pride parade in Jerusalem since 2002, as a symbol of their basic freedom and civic rights. For them, Jerusalem has symbolic value as the capital of democratic Israel. However, other communities in Jerusalem see the same parade as a real threat to their core values and beliefs. For various religious groups the symbolic nature of Jerusalem stems from its identity as “holy city.” In 2005, their objections led to violence for the first time. During the parade, Yishai Schlissel, a Haredi⁴ Jew, stabbed three parade participants with a kitchen knife. He was subsequently convicted on three counts of attempted murder and sentenced to 12 years in prison. During a police interrogation, he described the motive behind his actions: “I came to murder on behalf of God. We can’t have such an abomination” (Rosner, 2005).

In the following year, 2006, the JOH announced that an international parade would be held in Jerusalem for the first time. This was met with harsh objections from various religious circles in Jerusalem. The international parade was eventually cancelled because of the 2006 Israel–Lebanon conflict, but JOH announced that a local parade would be held at a later date. This announcement was also met with powerful opposition. Rabbis from across the Orthodox spectrum called for the parade to be forbidden. The politically influential former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef called for a “demonstration of a million,” and a few nights before the parade, that demonstration led to rioting. Thousands of protesters blocked roads with burning garbage cans, and hundreds of policemen responded in force. Well-known right-wing activists called for a “holy war” against the parade. They set-up a “beast parade” in which farm animals were paraded down the route of the

planned pride parade. Activists in JOH received personal threats to their lives via anonymous phone calls and letters.

Leaders of the LGBT movement in Jerusalem faced not only their own fears of injury, but also the worries of their families and their sense of responsibility for other participants in the parade. Moreover, some members of the national LGBT movement felt that the cancellation of the parade could be negotiated for political achievements, such as marital rights for gay couples. According to one of the leaders we interviewed, there were several groups within the LGBT community who viewed the religious opposition as a “*dark and primitive group that must be stopped*,” (according to his words), thus turning the parade into a group-based conflict rather than an expression of freedom and tolerance. The leadership was faced with the need to reexamine its core values and long-term goals: is the parade a goal in itself, or means to achieve other goals? Should they replace it with other political achievements, postpone it again, or go forward as planned?

Considering their role as representatives of the LGBT community in Jerusalem, the leaders of JOH decided to hold an open meeting with community members, where they could share their concerns, and invite others to share their opinions, beliefs and suggestions. At the meeting, the members of the Jerusalem LGBT community expressed the will to go forward with the parade despite the fear of being attacked. A central leader of the community summarized the meeting by saying: “We will not succumb to violence, and we will not get dragged into violence.” His statement articulated the core value of resisting injustice, but not in a violent manner. Since that meeting, nonviolence became a central part of the core values of the struggle.

Explicitly addressing and committing to their core values, and particularly the value of nonviolence, allowed the group to be more flexible in other aspects of the struggle. As in the case of the environmental struggle described above, a dynamic view of the social field was highly beneficial. For example, JOH activists contacted pluralistic religious leaders, and collaborated with them in a joint effort for de-escalation. Through these collaborations, they learned that a main concern of many religious leaders was the exposure of young children in their communities to provocative and sexually explicit outfits worn by some marchers. Like the environmental activists in Ashkelon—they were flexible and creative in altering their initial goals to incorporate a more complex view of the social scene. Specifically, they decided to change the path of the parade from the city center, to a route near the symbols of democracy in the city: the Knesset and the Supreme Court. They also agreed to hold the final event in an arena, instead of an open park to allow for better security measures. These decisions strengthened the collaboration of JOH with the police, who now saw that the leaders of the LGBT movement were not only determined to hold the parade, but also willing to act pragmatically to promote de-escalation.

The pragmatic and flexible approach of the LGBT leaders was criticized by community members that saw it as too “soft” and “weak.” One of the most challenging moments for the leadership

³ JOH is a grassroots, activist, and community center for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the heart of Jerusalem.

⁴ Haredi Judaism is a broad spectrum of groups within Orthodox Judaism, all characterized by rejection of modern secular culture.

was when several activists sent an e-mail encouraging the participants in the parade to “wear boots and bring sharp objects for self-defense.” The organizers decided to respond to this email with an open invitation for participants to attend a training session in nonviolent reactions to threat, held prior to the parade. During the parade, the trained participants wore a special tag identifying them as peacekeepers, and worked in collaboration with the police to identify and stop security threats. Thus, not succumbing to and not getting dragged into violence was used as a guiding principle to constructively deal with a challenge from within the camp as well. In November 2006, hundreds of activists, community members and supporters participated in the Jerusalem pride parade. There were no casualties that year.

The Jerusalem pride parade has been marching since, with approximately 5000–6000 participants every year. The parade remained nonviolent, and expressed values of equality, pluralism, and dignity. Unlike other parades in other cities, the Jerusalem pride parade did not include provocative clothing or loud music. In 2015, shortly after his release from prison, Yishai Schlissel attacked again. He injured six participants, including 16-year-old Shira Banki who later died of her wounds. The following year, 25,000 people marched in the Jerusalem pride parade. Despite this violent attack, the existence of the Jerusalem pride parade was never questioned again.

The case of the Jerusalem pride parade exemplifies how important it is for social movements to identify and actively preserve their core values, which serve as a moral anchor and an internal compass. Although core values are usually defined at the beginning of a social struggle, they need to be constantly articulated and observed to help the group cope with internal and external threats. By incorporating values of equality, pluralism and nonviolence, JOH developed a strong internal core, which contributed to their ability to act in a de-escalatory fashion, and persist in the face of difficulty. Moreover, their strong core values allowed for individuals from different social groups to identify with the pride parade, thereby establishing a more inclusive social movement which has continued to grow from one parade to the next.

Inclusivity as a core value became an integral part of the Jerusalem LGBT movement’s DNA, as can be seen in a video-clip released prior to the 2016 parade.⁵ It features three people discussing the core question: should there be a gay parade in Jerusalem? It starts with participants listing all possible reasons to avoid holding the gay parade in Jerusalem, thereby giving room to the questions, dilemmas, and objections of different voices in the city. This part exemplifies the first practice we discussed: a complex, multivoiced perception of actors’ interests and needs. In the next part of the video, each speaker describes his or her personal reason for supporting the parade. A female member of the Jerusalem gay community shares her need to be acknowledged, respected, and accepted in her city. Next, a secular, straight man describes his belief in values of freedom, and his obligation to resist oppression of his friends. Finally, a religious woman describes her belief in the value of pluralism, and her fight against ignorance. The clip ends with the words, “There is no ‘them’—there is only ‘us,’ together. And we will not go away.” This message combines the two practices we discussed: breaking the dichotomized perception of us versus them by the articulation and commitment to core values of tolerance, and to their right to establish their presence in the life of the city.

From Helplessness and Passivity to Gradual Power Building: Joint Jewish–Arab Social Movements in Lydda

How can social movements help individuals who suffer most from structural inequality overcome the inhibitory effects of low-power, and engage in social activism? In the three social movements we observed, a key practice for increasing self-efficacy was beginning with small, achievable initiatives that had symbolic meaning for the participants. These acts correspond to notion that resistance is not necessarily a dramatic action but rather an everyday practice that undermines power by small, every day acts (Scott, 1985; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). The joint struggle for social justice led by young Palestinians and Jews in the city of Lydda illustrates this type of action. In this particular case, the struggling camp consisted of highly marginalized population that has suffered from severe institutional discrimination for many years. Engaging the population in collective action was particularly challenging in this case, as the local community suffers from a range of problems including low socioeconomic and educational levels, high crime and unemployment, corruption, and neglect.

Lydda is a city situated in the center of Israel, approximately 15 km from Tel Aviv. Despite its rich history and central location, it incorporates several converging circles of discrimination and structural violence. Efrat (a pseudonym) came to Lydda as a young, idealistic activist, dreaming about the possibility of helping disadvantaged populations create a better future. The neighborhood in which she operated was particularly poor, and particularly diverse. On a socioeconomic scale, the neighborhood is rated “1,” the lowest level possible. Demographically, it is composed of various social groups, including Bedouins, Palestinians and immigrants from Ethiopia, many of whom are single mothers. Like many social activists, Efrat was driven by a desire to help these underprivileged populations, and create the conditions in which they could have a better future, by promoting education, employment, health and housing. Her dreams were ambitious, but her resources were scarce: she had no financial resources, no connections and no reputation in the local community. She described her first steps in the neighborhood as follows:

When I first came here I didn’t know where to begin. I came with a friend and we simply decided to collect garbage from the yard in one of the most neglected buildings. We came every Monday at 5 p.m., with garbage bags, and started working. The residents didn’t understand what we are doing there, but with time the children joined us, and it became a regular activity. Every Monday at five they were waiting for us, and together we cleaned the yard. It was hard work but it created unique connections with the residents in this area that I do not have anywhere else. In retrospect, I had no idea what I was doing. But now I understand that under the surface there was this feeling that we were also going to walk away and disappear. It was like they thought “sure, you are here now, but like everyone else you will go away.” This is something that was very strong for me. I decided that even if it takes years and years to help these people build a better life I will not go away. . . . Now, the women from this area are the ones that participate in our Hebrew classes, they send their kids to the community center we opened, they are using our work-finding service. And every time we meet I know that they remember that moment

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmkQvQWuub4>.

when I collected their garbage, like a silent agreement that I am with you together in this place.

This story exemplifies what was common to all the successful initiatives we encountered: They were *achievable*, *symbolic*, and suggested an *alternative* to the existing situation. The first major aspect of these activities was that they could surely be achieved with the existing resources. This seems almost obvious, but social movements often act in the opposite manner: Because their vision is ambitious, they initiate ambitious activities. If these initiatives do not match their financial and social resources, they fail, resulting in disappointment and reinforcing helplessness and passivity among the group members. Working with oppressed populations, this could weaken their already weak sense of efficacy. Conversely, when initiatives are *small enough* to succeed using existing resources, they strengthen the sense of self-efficacy and thereby spark a process of shared power building. In turn, these achievements allow for the next action to be a little more ambitious. In the above example, the garbage collection required two hours a week, one friend and a few garbage bags. Because it was so achievable, it could be successfully and consistently carried out. Over time, more and more power was built: people joined the activity and initial trust between the activists and the community members was established.

A second important aspect was the symbolic value of the cleanup: it demonstrated how the community could take itself out of the “garbage.” In other words, it signified the alternative to the existing situation and marked the community’s potential ability to change its immediate environs, and take action to improve its life conditions, thereby strengthening group efficacy. This symbolic value seems to bridge the otherwise unbearable gap between ambitious goals and the small steps that can actually be obtained. Finally, by clearing their garbage, Efrat agreed to voluntarily give up her privileged social position as an Ashkenazi Jew. Her action marked an alternative to the existing social conventions, one of solidarity and equality between the city’s residents.

Small and symbolic acts were initiated gradually, according to the resources that allowed for their achievement. When some goals are achieved, new ones can be set, gradually building self and group efficacy, the internal power of the local community. For example, Hebrew courses were organized for Ethiopian and Arab women. Once the language was acquired, vocational courses could be offered as well, opening new employment possibilities. In addition, a nighttime market was established, where residents could sell products to tourists. Efrat recently established a local catering company, in which residents can work as cooks, preparing food that will be provided to local schools.

In the case of Lydda, small and symbolic steps managed to gradually build power in a transformative manner, even in a face of deep structural violence. This practice was also used in the two previous cases: Standing in the Ashkelon city center every Friday was an achievable act for the environmentalist activists. Physically being in Ashkelon also symbolized their commitment to the periphery. As we discussed in the next section, the pride parade itself was a powerful symbolic act that engaged various pluralistic communities in Jerusalem. Thus, small and symbolic actions allow activists to take action for change, but in a way that does not exceed their material and mental resources. The success of these initiatives strengthen self and group efficacy, which are important components of civic engagement (Van

Zomeren et al., 2008). The symbolic nature of these actions seems to transcend the present, giving a small glimpse into an alternative reality in which the groups’ values can be realized.

Discussion

The case studies described above reflect three practices with the potential to help activists overcome psychological challenges that characterize conflict situations, transforming structures and cultures of domination. These practices reflect a complex perception of the social scene; articulation and commitment to core values, which serve as an internal compass in face of escalating violence; and the initiation of small and symbolic acts.

The research makes both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, the first practice highlights the importance of inclusive identities in the process of building sustainable coalitions, based on “power with” assumptions (Saab et al., 2015; Subašić et al., 2008). Only when activists are able to capture themselves and the social scene as complex entities, are they motivated and able to persist in the ongoing recruitment of various actors in different time points. The second practice sheds new light on the motivational basis and pragmatic functions of common goals (Van Zomeren et al., 2008). Motivationally, core values serve as an internal compass for social movements, providing deep meaning for their common goals. Core values allow social movements to act constructively even when facing violence. Finally, the third practice demonstrates the importance of subtle, everyday resistance (Scott, 1985; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013) in the sustainability of social movements. We found that small and symbolic initiatives gradually built self and group efficacy, particularly among powerless groups. Thus, the gradual process of power building seems to occur simultaneously in the psychological and social levels.

Though we chose to present each practice through a different study, each of the three practices appeared in all the cases. In the case of the power station in Ashkelon, the most prominent practice was the ability to identify multiple actors, and to incorporate others’ needs and interests into the struggle’s goals. It was, however, supported by the two other practices: articulation and commitment to core values allowed the activists in this case to decide when they could be flexible in adapting their goals, and when “red lines” could be crossed. For example, since reducing pollution was the central value in this case, changing their goal from closing the new power station to implementing low-pollution technologies was acceptable. Similarly, the residents’ interest in employment could be perceived as legitimate, because it did not collide with the desire for reduced pollution. Because their value-core was clear, the activists could avoid the temptation of trying to “persuade” others to adopt their own mindset.

The ability to articulate and commit to the core values was the major practice in the struggle of the LGBT movement in Jerusalem, which served as an internal compass in the face of internal and external threats. As in the previous example, its application was associated with the other practices: To broaden participation in the pride parade, the activists adopted a complex and dynamic view of various groups in Jerusalem, which were not members of the LGBT community but shared the core values of pluralism, diversity and nonviolence. Recognizing this complexity allowed the LGBT community to build support among individuals from other communities. For example, during the parade many individuals marched with T-shirts reading, “Straights against violence.” Although these individ-

uals were not part of the LGBT community, they were appalled by the violent attacks against it. In addition, the community leaders communicated and collaborated with nonviolent religious leaders, in a joint attempt to de-escalate the situation. Thus, a complex and dynamic perception of the two camps was used to decrease the chance of a violent conflict, for example, by altering the route of the parade. Importantly, the pride parade itself was a symbolic act, which aimed to bridge between the present and the desired future. The purpose of the parade is to walk in the public sphere without hiding or being ashamed of one's identity. In their internal discussions, the powerful symbolic meaning of the parade was mentioned by members of the Jerusalem LGBT community as the central reason for not cancelling the parade or replacing it for legislative achievements.

Lastly, the case of Lydda demonstrates how small and symbolic actions can rehabilitate self and group efficacy among disadvantaged individuals and groups, while strengthening their belief in the possibility of creating social change. As in the previous cases, this practice was related to the application of the two others. A complex and dynamic view of the various actors, as well as a commitment to values of diversity and nonviolence, served as an internal compass that allowed Efrat, as a community organizer, to join with a range of collaborators, including the members of the local Jewish and Arab communities, public figures, and even the police force. Her articulation and commitment to values of equality and social justice served as an internal compass in situations of conflict between these groups, and allowed her to initiate actions with symbolic meaning.

The current research has some limitations. First, it is limited by the fact that it was conducted in the Israeli context. Consequently, the incidents described, as well as our interpretation of them, may be influenced by the larger context of an ongoing violent conflict. Future research could explore if and how the practices discussed here appear in the context of social struggles in societies that do not suffer from an ongoing violence. Second, although we collected data from various activities that included different actors in the struggling camps, we conducted interviews only with leading figures in the struggle, because we wanted to understand the major decisions that were made during the struggle. However, it would have been possible to obtain additional information about how these decisions were perceived from different angles, as well as regarding the extent of consent to such actions if we had interviewed additional actors who weren't necessarily leaders. Future research should be dedicated to observing the question of consensus and diversity among different actors within the struggling camp in relation to the resilience of social struggles. Last, our position as consultants to these groups had enabled us an access to data but also limited our view as we were often too close or personally identified with the struggle goals and leaders.

Conclusions

The traditional literature of conflict transformation suggests nonviolence as a means through which violent reality should be transformed into a peaceful one (Galtung, 2001; Miall et al., 2000). But even when using nonviolent practices, actions can still be shaped by the violent context in which activists operate, constructing perceptions, feelings and deep instincts. We suggest that to go beyond nonviolence that is merely a tactic, social movements need to continually overcome psychological challenges that harm their ability to see the social scene as vibrant and dynamic; they need the ability to hear and acknowledge multiple voices within the self and others, and be

connected to their core values and needs. The contribution of this article is its articulation of those mental and behavioral practices that can help members of social movements change their mindset, within a situation of a struggle, and become more capable of transforming unjust reality.

Moving from polarization to complexity allows flexible thinking that is not possible when suffering from tunnel vision (Miall et al., 2000). Being inside a mental tunnel, social movements often have an ideal reality that they want to achieve, and are content with nothing less. They have a very clear perception of who they are and who the "enemy" is; consequently they have a limited set of possibilities for action. A complex and dynamic view of the social scene, the camps and the possibilities for action allows a group involved in a struggle to creatively identify courses of action that disrupt the destructive dynamic, and recruit new, uninvolved actors. Importantly, it can help activists discover who they are, identify new forces within their camp, and align what they wish to achieve with what they are actually doing.

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