Narratives of belonging (and not): Inter-group contact in Israel and the formation of ethno-national identity claims

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Inter-group encounters have been used for decades as a means of ameliorating relationships between Jews and Palestinians in Israel. A central focus of much of the scholarship on such encounter programs has been their potential to shape beliefs and behaviors of participants. Despite the centrality of identity to this and other intractable conflicts, however, relatively little literature has focused on the way that encounters create conditions for identity change or how this change is maintained over time. The present study makes an initial attempt to address these limitations by focusing on identity claims of former participants in two Israeli encounter programs as they are narrated in years and decades following program participation. Using life history interviews and a reconstructive analytic approach, it explores the way that former participants narrate identity claims in relation to dominant ethno-national narratives in Israeli society, and with reference to the encounter programs in which they participated. These identity claims are defined according to four patterns: (1) expansion, or limited openness to the out-group narrative; (2) accentuation, greater identification with the in-group narrative; (3) ambiguity, defined as a difficulty in integrating perspectives that do not align with the collective narrative into personal narratives; and (4) transformation, characterized by an ability to perceive structural injustices systemically and an openness to in-group critique. Findings suggest that ethno-national group, type of encounter, and location of encounter implementation may potentially shape the possibilities for identity change among encounter participants.

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1. Introduction

Inter-group encounters have been used for decades as a means of ameliorating relationships between groups in conflict (Abu-Nimer, 1999). A central focus of much of the scholarship on encounter programs has been their potential to shape beliefs and behaviors of participants (Salomon, 2006, 2009). However, although identity is a central element of the conflict between Jews and Palestinians in Israel (Kelman, 1999), relatively little literature has focused on the way that encounters create conditions for identity change and how that change persist over years and decades. The present study presents an initial attempt to address this limitation by focusing on identity claims of former participants in two Israeli encounter programs. Specifically, it explores the way that former participants narrate identity claims in relation

to dominant ethno-national narratives in Israeli society, and with reference to the encounter programs in which they participated.

1.1. The Israeli context

Since its founding in 1948, the conflict between Jewish and Palestinian[1] citizens has characterized Israel. This conflict, related to but distinct from Israel's conflict with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, largely reflects the status of Palestinian citizens as a group subject to overt and implicit discrimination (Al-Haj, 1995; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Rouhana, 1997) and is rooted in Israel's founding documents. In its Declaration of Independence, Israel is defined as both Jewish and democratic (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1948). This raises fundamental questions about the potential equality of all citizens and places Palestinians "in a circle peripheral to the core" of Israeli society (Shafir & Peled, 1998, p. 254). Moreover, the dominant ethno-national discourse in Israel – disseminated in the media and education system, and via other societal institutions – privileges beliefs emphasizing Jewish victimization and promoting their claim to land (Bar-Tal, Halperin & Oren, 2010), while de-legitimizing the Palestinian historical narrative. Thus, while Jews and Palestinians each tell a 'master narrative' of history and identity (Bar-On, 2008; Fuxman, 2012; Hammack, 2006, 2009b), the Jewish narrative is most widely heard.

Given this context, tensions simmer constantly under the surface of Jewish–Palestinian relations. Since Israel's establishment, Palestinian citizens have reacted to these tensions in different ways. In autumn 2000, frustrations among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza led to an uprising known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada. Tensions between Palestinian and Jewish citizens exploded soon after the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, when 12 Palestinian citizens and 1 Jew were killed during protests held in solidarity with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. These events were a warning to Jewish citizens about the degree of alienation felt by their Palestinian counterparts (Or, 2004), yet today there are indications that Israeli society has become even more polarized. Recent protests decrying relationships between Jewish and Palestinian citizens indicate the degree to which Jewish Israelis view Palestinians with suspicion (Hadad, 2011; Levinson, 2011), while numerous instances of vandalism, graffiti and physical violence, instigated by Jews (e.g., Boker, 2013; Kubovich, 2013; Lidman, 2013) have further damaged inter-group relationships.

1.2. Inter-group encounters

Against this background, inter-group encounter programs have been implemented in Israel since the 1980s as one approach to improving relationships between Jews and Palestinians (Abu-Nimer, 1999). These are part of the broader array of encounters, implemented both within and out of the Middle East, that bring together Israeli Jews with Palestinians from within and out of Israel, and with Arabs from other countries.

Peace Child Israel[2] and *Sadaka Reut* are two veteran Israeli encounter organizations founded in the 1980s, implementing programs for 14–18 year olds that take place over a period of 1–3 years. Their programs differ considerably in approach, reflecting differences that can be seen throughout the field of inter-group encounters. Traditionally, encounters have been characterized as based on one of two theoretical approaches: Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, which posits that inter-group encounters can lead to prejudice reduction when certain conditions are met; and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986), which argues that group memberships play a central role in the formation of social identities and asserts the salience of collective identities within inter-group encounters. Programmatically, these two approaches differ in terms of an emphasis on interpersonal relationships in Contact Hypothesis-based encounters, as contrasted with a focus on empowering participants as members of a collective group, and directly addressing structural issues, in programs based on Social Identity Theory (Abu-Nimer, 1999; Suleiman, 2004).

Maoz (2011) provides a more nuanced classification of encounters, categorizing them as fitting into what she calls *coexistence*, *joint projects*, *confrontational*, and *narrative* models. Of these, the former two are based on the Contact Hypothesis, although rather than focusing only on inter-personal relationships, the *joint projects* model emphasizes the creation of a super-ordinate identity among encounter members through engagement in a concrete process of working together. Contrasting with both of these approaches, encounters using the *confrontational* model take as their basis the tenets of Social Identity Theory and aim to encourage greater awareness among Jewish participants about structural asymmetries characterizing Jewish–Palestinian relations in Israel, while simultaneously empowering Palestinian participants by enabling them to directly confront Jewish participants about issues of national and civic identity and discrimination. The *narrative* model of encounters, a relatively new model developed in Israel in the 1990s, contains elements of both the *coexistence* and

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[1] The citizens of Israel who are of Palestinian descent have been called, at different times and by different groups, Israeli-Arabs, Arab citizens, Palestinian-Israelis, Palestinian citizens of Israel, and Israeli-Palestinians. In this manuscript, I utilize the term Palestinian citizens of Israel (shorthand: Palestinians), except when citing academic scholarship or quoting research participants who utilize a different term. My choice of terminology is based on the fact that most, though not all, of my Palestinian research participants referred to themselves in this way. I note also that the focus of my study is on Jews and Palestinians residing within the State of Israel. Thus, my reference to Palestinians does not include residents of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, or elsewhere in the Palestinian Diaspora.

[2] After 23 years of programming, Peace Child Israel closed its doors in the Fall of 2011. I refer to its programs in the present tense in this manuscript since the organization was still in existence during my fieldwork, and for purposes of narrative flow.

confrontational models, combining inter-personal interaction with discussions of group identity that emerge from life stories told by participants in the group.

While dichotomous categorization of encounters is prevalent in the literature, many programs have moved beyond easy classification or even classification according to Maoz's typology, including Peace Child Israel and Sadaka Reut. For example, Peace Child Israel brings together 14–16 year-olds to work together on producing and performing theatrical productions, with little emphasis during weekly activities on issues at the hart of the Jewish–Palestinian conflict, and with a premium placed on fostering inter-personal relationships among participants. Of the encounter approaches discussed, Peace Child most closely fits with what Maoz (2011) refers to as the *joint projects* model. Yet, as an extended program where participants meet weekly over the course of one or more academic years, Peace Child cannot fully escape from addressing the conflict. During the first few months of each group's work together,[3] before beginning rehearsals for that year's chosen play,[4] participants engage in role playing activities where participants are asked to improvise scenarios about each other's cultures. Inevitably, these role-plays and ensuing discussions address issues related to structural inequalities between Jewish and Palestinian participants. Thus, while not a central feature of the organization's work, issues at the heart of the conflict make their way into Peace Child Israel's programming.

Sadaka Reut's programming is even more difficult to characterize within the dominant typology.[5] On the one hand, its objectives of educating youth for social engagement and providing a model of joint Jewish–Palestinian partnership fit into what Abu-Nimer (1999) terms the *Conflict Resolution* approach to encounters, based on Social Identity Theory, particularly with respect to its emphasis on addressing issues at the heart of the conflict and inspiring participants to act for systemic socio-political change. These objectives might also be classified within what Maoz (2011) defines as encounters using the *confrontational* model. On the other hand, Sadaka Reut's weekly programming takes place in uninational groups, while inter-group encounters occur only during monthly regional or national activities.[6] This approach is meant to more effectively empower participants; yet, while it reinforces the goals of encounters based in Social Identity Theory, Sadaka Reut's approach nonetheless illustrates variation from more traditional encounter programs.

1.3. Researching inter-group encounters

A large body of scholarship examines inter-group encounters in conflict contexts, much of it addressing the question of whether and in what ways such programs can foster change among participants. This research has focused on issues such as changes in beliefs about peace (Biton & Salomon, 2006), gender differences in changes among participants (Yablon, 2009), and willingness to engage in social contact (Maoz, 2004; Rosen, 2009); as a whole, it illustrates different perspectives regarding whether, how, and under what conditions encounter programs can successfully promote change (Bar-Tal, 2004; Maoz, 2011; Salomon, 2006, 2009). Recent studies indicate that part of the reason for mixed results in the literature may be a lack of differentiation in empirical research between *core* and *peripheral* beliefs related to the nature of collective narratives (Rosen, 2009; Rosen & Salomon, 2011). Specifically, this research suggests that core beliefs about out-group narratives are difficult to shift, while peripheral beliefs can be altered via encounter participation but are also easily altered back over time or due to socio-political changes. While this scholarship provides important information about the type and extent of changes we might expect from encounter participants, however, it is limited by the lack of focus on changes due to encounter participation as they are sustained over years and decades.[7]

1.4. Identity and inter-group encounters

A second area of focus in the literature on inter-group encounters addresses issues related to identity and ethno-national discourse.[8] This area of focus is important for multiple reasons. First, Salomon defines "legitimation of *their* collective narrative" and "critical examination of *our* contribution to the conflict" as two central goals of encounters in areas of intractable conflict (2002, p. 9, emphasis in the original). In Israel, collective narratives are tightly intertwined with claims of ethno-national identity. Thus, an analysis of such claims and the link between their formation and participation in inter-group encounters is important for understanding whether encounter programs implemented in conflict contexts can reasonably be expected to fulfill their underlying goals.

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[3] Peace Child groups, made up of Jews and Palestinians in neighboring villages or neighborhoods, are located in different parts of Israel. When I conducted my fieldwork in 2010–2011, there were three active groups: one in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, one in Misgav/Sachnin, and one in Petach Tikva/Kfar Kara.

[4] Each Peace Child Israel group spends the majority of the academic year preparing to perform a play that addresses in some form, often indirectly, majority–minority relations or other social issues relevant to the Israeli context. These plays are translated from English into Hebrew and Arabic and are performed bilingually by participants. In 2010–2011, for instance, the Tel Aviv-Jaffa group performed a Hebrew-Arabic adaptation of *West Side Story*.

[5] I refer here to programming that is part of Sadaka Reut's flagship program, *Building a Culture of Peace*. In addition to this weekly, after-school program for 14–18 year olds, the organization implements programs for older teenagers, university students, and adults.

[6] This is not the case for Sadaka Reut participants in their 2nd or 3rd year of participation, who are often placed in regionally based binational groups rather than locally based uninational groups.

[7] Lazarus (2011) provides one of the few studies of encounter participation looking at a time period of more than a few years.

[8] The phrase "ethno-national identity" or "ethno-national belonging" refers to the way that individuals situate themselves in reference to collective narratives as well as with respect to their own cultural, ethnic, and religious heritage.

Second, claims about ethno-national identity provide an opportunity for interrogating the centrality of the Jewish/Palestinian dichotomy that permeates the Israeli context. Lavie (2012) writes, "The global public typically knows Israel through the two dominant binarisms available for international public consumption. One is that of the Jewish state versus Arab neighboring states who are its enemies. The other is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" (p. 781). Moreover, Shohat (2003) argues that there is a dire need to "dismantle the zoning of knowledge" compressing all identities into a binary relationship (p. 51). In academic scholarship, as in national and international media, little attention is given to complexities that undermine this binary, even as everyday lives of individuals within Israel reflect significant nuance. Thus, close examination of identity claims held by encounter participants is important for interrogating the binary and holistically illustrating the way that ethno-national identity is reflected in the lived experiences of Israeli citizens. Indeed, as Hammack (2010) asserts, an examination of personal narratives is central to understanding how individual identities are developed via engagement with collective discourses.

Scholarship on identity and inter-group encounters provides important insights into the way that collective discourses are reinforced and/or challenged by opportunities for sustained inter-group interactions. To begin with, literature addressing the distinction between encounters that are based on the Contact Hypothesis and those based on tenets of Social Identity Theory points to an understanding of how the structures and theories underlying interactions between members of different collective identity groups can either reinforce dominant power dynamics or provide a platform for empowering minorities and challenging hegemonic discourses (see, i.e., Halabi, 2004; Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Sonnenschein, Halabi, & Friedman, 1998; Suleiman, 2004). Empirically, studies also address the way that participant language or discourse in Jewish–Palestinian encounters reflects identity construction (Steinberg, 2004; Steinberg & Bar-On, 2002) as well as the larger contextual forces of asymmetry between Jewish and Palestinian citizens and the collective culture of each group (Bekerman, 2002, 2009a; Helman, 2002; Maoz, Bar-On, Bekerman, & Jaber-Massarwa, 2004; Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On, & Fakhereldeen, 2002). Moreover, Bekerman's extensive ethnographic study of an integrated Jewish–Palestinian school in Israel (see Bekerman, 2009b; Bekerman & Maoz, 2005; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2012) demonstrates how the school's goals, and its teachers, promote a static concept of identity that reinforce conflict norms, even as students are able to move beyond these.

Yet despite the interest in identity among scholars of inter-group encounters, relatively little focus has been placed on the way that such encounters can potentially shape identity change among participants in a manner that is sustained over time. One set of studies focusing on the perspective of Jewish Israelis suggests that repeated encounters are important in fostering critical awareness among Jews of power dynamics in Israeli society and of creating questions about dominant narratives within Israel's Jewish community (Ron & Maoz, 2013; Ron, Maoz, & Bekerman, 2010). However, these studies focus on facilitators of Jewish–Palestinian encounters, whose experiences can vary significantly from those of participants.

Another group of studies (Hammack, 2006, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2011) is based on life story interviews with Jewish and Palestinian participants in two North American-based encounter programs in the several months prior to and within four years following program participation. Hammack's research suggests that encounters can influence participants in one of three ways. First, participants may undergo *identity transcendence*, indicated by openness to out-group narratives and an in-group identity critique, or at least willingness for critique. Second, Hammack argues that the process of attending an encounter program in isolation from the conflict, and then returning to the Israeli context, makes it difficult for individuals to retain new beliefs. Individuals whose experiences in these programs may have led to strong belief shifts may have trouble maintaining changed perspectives when, upon returning home, they find themselves in an environment not supportive of this shift. This outcome is described as *identity conflict*, or *identity confusion*. Finally, Hammack argues that identity *accentuation* occurs when one's in-group identity is strengthened as a result of participation. For many of Hammack's participants, accentuation is linked closely with identity discovery, via which contact with members of a different ethno-national group enables the salience of one's own ethno-national identity to become more readily apparent. It is also closely linked to a return to the Israeli context: Hammack suggests that upon re-encountering the dominant discourse in their society, youth often "proceed from transcendence and all of its great possibilities gradually to a place of compulsory accentuation, for conflict commands conformity to a master narrative, for security and solidarity" (2011, p. 321).

Hammack provides important insights into potential outcomes of inter-group encounters. His research also has significant implications regarding encounter programs located outside of conflict environments as well as the relevance of these approaches for youth who return to their homes after encounters overseas. However, Hammack's research is limited in two ways. First, his focus on American-based programs raises questions about the salience of his findings for programs implemented within Israel. Second, Hammack's study, while extending temporal examinations of change to several years past participation, remains focused on a single key period of identity formation or configuration in individual's lives (Fuxman, 2012; Hammack, 2006).

The present study provides a starting point for addressing these limitations by focusing on the identity claims of former participants in Peace Child Israel and Sadaka Reut. In the following pages, I explore identity claims of participants in these programs in years and decades following their participation, addressing how these identity claims reference individuals' experiences as Peace Child Israel and Sadaka Reut participants and other formative life experiences. My purpose in doing so is threefold: to begin filling a gap in the research on long-term outcomes of encounter program; to bring increased attention to the ethno-national identity claims of encounter program participants; and to do both of these with a focus on Israeli-based encounters.

2. Methods

2.1. A life history approach

This study utilizes an approach meant to capture the way that Peace Child Israel and Sadaka Reut participants make meaning of their life experiences. Specifically, a life history approach offers rich opportunities for understanding the lives of research participants and is particularly useful for demonstrating "the intertwining of 'personal' problems and external conditions" (della Porta, 1992, p. 175). In other words, the rich narratives that emerge with life histories embed specific elements of individuals' lives – such as encounter participation – within the broader tapestry of interpersonal, socio-cultural, and institutional environments that shape the meaning they make of their experiences (Dhunpath, 2000). In this sense, a life history approach is particularly effective for providing insights into claims individuals make about their identity as tied to ethno-national discourses permeating the Israeli context. Moreover, scholars note that by touching upon various moments within an individual's life, life histories allowing for an accounting of temporal dimension in the analysis of identity claims and the meanings individuals attribute to their every day practices (Passy & Giugni, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1995). Finally, life history interviews, like other qualitative methodologies, are effective for capturing internal relations between the conditions for internal transformation enabled by inter-group encounters, and the identity claims of program participants.

In addition to its theoretical importance, the decision to use a life history approach for data collection was also based on several factors related to the critical methodological approach underlying the study as a whole (Carspecken, 1996). First, my initial invitation for participants to "tell me about your life" was offered as an opportunity for participants to focus the interview on issues *they* deemed important rather than topics that I, as the researcher, deemed most prudent to address. Second, I was particularly concerned in my interviews with challenging the traditional power dynamic experienced between researchers and participants, wherein participants remain disempowered in relation to their interviewers. I felt that a life history approach would best enable me to take a back seat and listen while participants told their stories, rather than actively guiding individuals during the interview process. In particular, I believed that this aspect of a life history approach was particularly important for helping overcome both real and perceived challenges posed by my identity as a Jewish–Israeli–American with fluent Hebrew and largely inadequate Arab skills, coming from the United States to Israel in order to conduct research with Jewish and Palestinian Israelis.[9]

2.2. Participants

The narratives discussed in this manuscript were taken from a larger study in which 73 alumni of Peace Child Israel and Sadaka Reut were interviewed. Participants were selected based on quota and snowball sampling methods, with approximately equal numbers interviewed based on: organization, gender, ethno-national affiliation, and decade of participation. Participants ranged from 19 to 43 years old at the time they were interviewed.

Participants in this study reflect a non-representative sample of Israeli citizens in that they participated in voluntary programs bringing together Jews and Palestinians. However, this manuscript focuses on exploring theoretical and methodological questions related to the conceptualization and assessment of potential encounter outcomes and does not aim to generalize findings from a sample to a larger population. Thus, use of a non-representative sample is not problematic.

2.3. Interview procedures

Interviews began with the request to "Tell me about your life," with subsequent questions and conversation emerging from initial narratives. Topics addressed in most interviews included: experiences as participants in the organization's programs, family background, beliefs and activities related to social change, education, and professional experiences.

Each participant was interviewed at least once during the period between August 2010 and April 2011. Interviews were conducted in a location of the participant's choosing[10] and lasted between 45 min and 2 h, with several additional interviews conducted during a follow up visit to Israel in April–May 2012. Interviews were conducted in Hebrew or in English, at the participants' choosing, and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

2.4. Analytic strategy

Hermeneutic-reconstructive analysis was utilized as the conceptual framework for interpreting data. Carspecken (2007, 2008) defines reconstructive analysis as an interpretive method for analyzing qualitative data that puts into explicit discourse the implicit understandings of participants in research, with an emphasis on reconstructing meaning and experience. The *hermeneutic* aspect of this approach refers to the reflexive process implicated in reconstructing meaning (Carspecken, 1996).

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[9] See Razon and Ross (2012) for a detailed discussion of the relationship between my own ethno-national identity claims as related to the relationships built with my research participants.

[10] 13 of the 73 interviews were conducted over Skype, due to individuals no longer living in the State of Israel.

This is an iterative process that enables meaning reconstructions to more and more closely approximate meaning, as it is understood by research participants.

Within this framework, interview transcripts were initially read holistically, after which I wrote reflective memos discussing central themes and possible angles for data interpretation. Transcripts were then coded by generating new codes and sub-codes iteratively, as necessary, with each transcript (Carspecken, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After generating an initial set of "raw" codes, certain categories emerged as major themes salient across most transcripts, including categories pertaining to ethno-national identity claims and dominant societal discourses. Interviews were then re-coded with an emphasis on these themes. This additional coding also brought to light negative cases and outliers (Miles & Huberman, 1994), requiring systematic reflection on preliminary analysis that shaped my final interpretations.

2.5. Validation strategies

I utilized a variety of techniques in order to support the interpretations emerging from my analysis as a whole, in line with accepted standards for ensuring validity in qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Among others, these included: prolonged engagement in the form of more than 13 months of fieldwork in the period between June 2009 and May 2012; triangulation via multiple sources as well as multiple methods; and checking the accuracy of my initial interpretations with research participants, both informally and via follow-up interviews and focus groups. Finally, I used the technique of peer debriefing to obtain feedback from colleagues on my codes, preliminary analytical memos and written interpretations of my data, as well as my translations. These techniques were particularly important for ensuring that my own identity did not shape data interpretations.

3. Findings

In the following pages, I address ethno-national identity claims of Peace Child Israel and Sadaka Reut participants, examining how these implicitly and explicitly reference program participation and other formative life experiences. Based on categories that emerged from my analysis, I describe four ways of characterizing the influence of Peace Child Israel and Sadaka Reut on ethno-national identity claims. I refer to these characterizations as the development of: *expanded*, *accentuated*, *ambiguous* and *transformed* identities.[11] My aim in presenting this categorization is to provide theoretical insights into the potential of encounter programs to foster different ethno-national identity claims, as well as the meaning of those claims within Israel's current reality. Thus, I focus on individual cases that can help illustrate these concepts, and where possible address their application to additional individuals involved in my study.

3.1. Identity expansion

In examining the identity claims of Peace Child and Sadaka Reut alumni, I describe individuals with a limited ability to move past deep-seated ethno-national narratives as characterized by *identity expansion*, drawing from the hermeneutic concept of horizon expansion or horizon fusion (Gadamer, 1979). Horizons are holistic worldviews, contingent upon historical, cultural, and socio-political context but always open to the integration of new perspectives. Peace Child Israel and Sadaka Reut alumni whose ethno-national identity claims pose an alternative to dominant worldviews held by Palestinians and Jews, but whose openness to in-group critique and out-group legitimacy remain limited, have undergone a relatively narrow process of identity expansion beyond the horizons determined by their historical–social–political context. These individuals commonly articulate beliefs that "we are all human" and that this shared humanity is or should be sufficient for overcoming conflict.

Neta's[12] story is emblematic of individuals whose claims reflect an expanded identity. For instance, Neta, a 38-year old Jewish woman, expressed a difficulty in referring to individuals as "Jews" and "Arabs," indicating that this differentiation does not fit with her view of all citizens as human beings. She said,

> When I started with Peace Child. . .there weren't any changes in my perspective in relation to how I feel, vis-à-vis the people in the group. And vis-à-vis Arabs in general. I say the word "Arabs" not because I feel like I am saying something bad, but really, that's how it was.
> *Karen:* What, a bad word?
> *Neta:* No. What I mean is when today I say Jews and Arabs it seems different. . . With respect to the Arabs in Israel I don't have any problem with them. But, to speak about "us" and "them," it's a conflict for me, maybe an internal conflict, it seems difficult to speak about us and them because from my perspective it's the same thing . . . Like, from

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[11] In my discussion, I draw upon Hammack's description of *transcendent, accentuated, and conflicted* identities, and my analysis is theoretically beholden to his scholarship. Indeed, the term "accentuated identities" borrows directly from Hammack. However, it is important to emphasize that these categories emerged organically from my analytical process.

[12] All names utilized in this manuscript are pseudonyms. Ages indicated are the age of each participant at the time of his or her interview.

my perspective [in Peace Child] we weren't Jews and Arabs. We came, we put on a play, and that's it. We were all kids.[13]

Neta's difficulty in referring to some Peace Child Israel participants as "Arabs" stems from a perception that this negatively differentiates them from Jews. For Neta this is problematic because she does not agree with the distinction she sees as reflective of dominant Jewish discourse, and she indicated that her difficulty is compounded by positive relationships she has with Palestinian citizens. As a result of these relationships, it is not possible for her to make a blanket distinction:

> I don't have any problem and it's also very comfortable for me in mixed groups. . .I have good friends who are Arabs . . .good friends. We have meals together and everything. Because of <u>this</u> it's difficult for me to say the word "Arabs." Because from my perspective a human being is a human being. It's not relevant. . .All the Arabs that I know, they're Arab Israelis. From my perspective they are Israelis just like you and I. They are exactly the same thing, I have no problem, and my children understand this. But when I turn to face someone, and I say that he is an Arab, it's as though I put a weight on him of something else.

For Neta, it is the word "Arab" that has a negative connotation, rather than the group of people this term represents. In her mind, individuals who identify as Arab are no different from those who identify as Jews. As she said, "When I need to say Jews and Arabs, it's difficult for me – this differentiation of, to take a group and categorize it, to say these are Jews, these are Arabs – that's difficult." From her perspective, this negative connotation is the result of the current socio-political context in Israel, reflecting tensions between the two groups, but in Neta's mind, the distinction between Jews and Arabs is largely semantic. In other words, commonalities are far more important than differences.

Despite her emphasis on the primacy of shared characteristics, Neta's beliefs do not extend beyond Israel's border: her own differentiation is between Palestinians who are citizens of Israel and those who do not hold citizenship. As she said,

> From my perspective to say "Arab," that's not an Arab Israeli. An Arab Israeli is an Israeli. There's no difference. . . We are all human beings. And it doesn't matter what your background is. We all live, in my opinion, all of us are more or less part of the same culture because we all grow up and learn in the same schools, receive the same things. There is no difference here.

Neta's comment suggests that her pluralist perspective regarding individuals within the State of Israel acknowledges similarities but does not extend to an understanding of differences; nor does it take into account elements of identity beyond ethno-national belonging that make each individual unique. Thus, on the one hand, by acknowledging the legitimacy of Palestinians in Israeli society, Neta's worldview challenges dominant narratives in Israeli society. On the other hand, this challenge is limited by the fact that Neta does not internalize or acknowledge the advantages that she, as a Jewish citizen, receives vis-à-vis Palestinian citizens, whom she views as "exactly the same." Nor does Neta account for other differences between groups, even as these differences are significant in the way individuals define themselves.

Neta explained to me that her view of "everyone as human beings" comes partly from her family, particularly her father, who taught her that, "people are people." Yet she also attributed her view of the world to participation in Peace Child Israel, speaking about the opportunity the organization gave her to meet Palestinians her own age, and her subsequent realization, through program activities, that the Palestinian children in her group were "like me, like the rest of the [Jewish] children." In other words, Peace Child Israel played an important role in enabling her to experience for herself the humanist worldview embodied by Neta's father. In fact, Neta sees programs like those implemented by Peace Child Israel as critical for creating change because they enable participants to get to know individuals who are different, and learn, through exposure to this difference, about similarities:

> Children, in my opinion, are the place where it's easiest to create change. They aren't, they are not yet entirely formed. That is to say, there is still a place to let them see different things. And let's say, if a group like [Peace Child Israel] comes and creates change from below, from the children, I would happily be part of it. In my opinion that's a great thing. [It] is something that every child can connect to, every child even with a little bit of interest can connect to it and there it doesn't matter where you came from. And in the meantime, when it really doesn't matter where you came from, you learn to get to know different things. And not fear them.

As Neta's statement indicates, overcoming fear about difference is a critical component of inter-group encounters, regardless of whether encounters emphasize these differences or simply provide an opportunity for young people from different backgrounds to meet. For her, what is important is the existence of a forum in which Jewish and Palestinian children can interact, and through this interaction, move beyond the stigma associated with each ethno-national group. Neta believes that these encounters enable young people to understand that differences in culture and language are secondary to the common humanity shared by us all.

Neta's belief system diverges from the dominant narrative in Jewish Israeli society, which suggests, among other things, that Palestinian national identity has no legitimacy (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998) and is a fundamental threat to Jewish identity (Kelman, 1999). Formed in part through her experiences in Peace Child, Neta's worldview expands beyond the "us-them"

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[13] All quotations in this manuscript were translated from Hebrew by the author. Translations were validated with a native Hebrew speaker.

mentality pervasive among much of the Jewish population. Moreover, Neta's belief in the overall goodness of human beings and in the similarities between Jewish and Palestinian citizens has been maintained through more than two decades since her participation in Peace Child Israel's activities, despite an environment not amenable to such beliefs. Thus, Neta exemplifies the potential for long-lasting identity expansion, as well as for beliefs formed (in part) through Peace Child Israel experiences to hold in the face of socio-political challenges.

Despite Neta's expanded worldview, her belief that "we are all human" is limited in its potential for enabling a significant transformation in her ethno-national identity. Exemplifying this is Neta's inability to connect systemic inequalities in Israeli society and in the Israeli-Palestinian context with the conditions, emotional as well as physical, which might lead to perceived and actual differences between Jews and Palestinians. Like many Peace Child participants, Neta is stuck, in a sense, with the belief that bringing Jews and Palestinians together, especially youth, is sufficient for enabling social change–if only enough children, and at a young enough age, participate in encounters.

3.2. Identity accentuation

The stories of Peace Child Israel and Sadaka Reut alumni indicate that, as exemplified by Neta, expanded identity narratives can remain relatively stable over time for many individuals. For almost all research participants holding the view that "we are all human," the belief was narrated as remaining constant over years and in some cases multiple decades, regardless of other life experiences. However, identity expansion was not a universal phenomenon; among some individuals, the result of encounter participation was greater identification with their in-group, or identity accentuation. These identity claims were reflected primarily among Palestinian alumni, and within this group, almost entirely among Sadaka Reut rather than Peace Child participants.

Rashida's narrative exemplifies the development of identity accentuation through participation in Sadaka Reut activities. Early in our conversation, Rashida, a 29-year old Palestinian woman, told me that prior to joining Sadaka Reut, she strongly believed in the potential and importance of inter-group endeavors. She asserted,

> I always felt the need to contribute to the society in which I live, and I also believed in peace, and dialogue. . .and I felt that it's necessary to speak, and I had a lot to say to the other side at that time, so because of that I came to Reut.

In other words, before joining Sadaka Reut, Rashida felt a strong connection to the Palestinian community, but was also interested in interactions with Jewish Israelis. Her belief in peace and dialogue reflected openness to hearing the narrative of Jewish individuals and served as motivation for her joining Sadaka Reut.

Yet, Rashida described ongoing interactions with Jews in Sadaka Reut as changing her perspective dramatically, away from the belief that productive dialogue is possible:

> Reut was the shock for me that. . .that you try and try and talk and talk, and try to get somewhere, and we never got anywhere, we only spoke. . . You try to talk to [Jews] but it's difficult, it's almost impossible, because there is a strong side and a weak side, our [Palestinian] side that does want to try to get somewhere, because [the situation here in Israel] is not good for us. And the other side, it's good for them, so they come, have this experience in Reut Sadaka, but many of them went afterwards to the army, which doesn't really make me happy.

As Rashida's comments illustrate, her exposure through Sadaka Reut to Jews provided concrete awareness about systemic differences in the experiences of Jewish and Palestinian Israelis. This exposure also served as a source of frustration – both in terms of the inability of dialogue to "get anywhere," and about the fact that many participants continued on the normative path among Jews, for example enlisting in the Israeli Defense Forces. Rashida's frustration led to a significant belief shift by the time she stopped participating in Sadaka Reut activities at the age of 18:

> I'll tell you how I felt at the end. At the beginning, I came with a lot of energy, and I wanted to do things, to change things. . .and Reut, it pointed me in the direction of, that there isn't anyone to speak with, at the end of the day, I left with a feeling that there isn't a partner. . .so there's no coexistence to speak of, actually, we need to speak about existence.

Sadaka Reut participation led Rashida away from a belief in the importance of dialogue and joint endeavors and turned her toward a view common among members of Israel's Palestinian community in Israel, that addressing issues *within* the Palestinian community is paramount (see, e.g., Rabinowitz & Abu-Baker, 2005). She told me,

> It's necessary to invest more in my own side, which doesn't have resources invested in it, and which is very depressed. And after I see that my society, and myself within my society, we are satisfied and things are good and we are living with respect, then, then I'll start to speak about coexistence. . .I felt that the significance of Reut Sadaka for me, the whole experience, was. . .just not to waste time. Not on dialogue, and not on coexistence.

Rashida's shift toward emphasizing empowerment of the Palestinian community in Israel was paralleled by greater awareness of herself as a member of that community. This, too, Rashida attributed to her participation in Sadaka Reut activities:

> When you see another culture, you become more aware of who you are. You try to compare it. . .when I am exposed to another culture, it's very important that you know – they ask you, Rashida, what's Rashida. . .what do you do, where do you study, things like that. So the questions help you be reflexive with respect to who you are. And it gives you more awareness of yourself, without a doubt. Because, those who are around you, they are like you. When you see someone different, then you have to define, to place the lines.

Being with individuals different from herself – Jewish Israeli youth – helped Rashida better understand herself as a Palestinian, and played a role in shifting her ethno-national identity claims. More than a decade later, Rashida's belief system reflects the primacy for her of working in and for Israel's Palestinian community. She is no longer interested in dialogue, and although Rashida emphasized that she "understands the other side," her comments do not reflect openness to the Jewish narrative. Instead, Rashida's story demonstrates the accentuation of her in-group identification, which is closely connected to her experiences in Sadaka Reut.

It is important to note that for Rashida, the shift in her belief system is a direct outcome of her participation in Sadaka Reut activities, rather than the result of experiences following participation in inter-group programs. Moreover, what is accentuated for her is lack of identification with Jews, a lack of belief in the possibility of coexistence, and a greater adherence to elements of discourse in the Palestinian community. In other words, it seems that through her participation in Sadaka Reut, Rashida more deeply internalized rather than distanced herself from beliefs comprising the dominant conflict narrative (Bar-Tal, 2007; Rouhana, 1993; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998).

3.3. Identity ambiguity

While almost no Jewish Sadaka Reut or Peace Child Israel participants narrated life histories in a manner congruent with identity accentuation, neither did their experiences result in uniform identity expansion. Several Jewish participants narrated perspectives reflecting ambiguity in their identity configuration vis-à-vis Palestinian citizens of Israel. In many ways, these perspectives echo what Hammack describes as identity conflict: difficulty in integrating shifts away from the collective narrative into their life story. However, Hammack's description is specific to the short period of re-integration into Israeli society following participation in overseas programs, while my research participants narrated experiences stretching years past their Peace Child Israel and Sadaka Reut participation. Their narratives can thus more accurately be conceptualized as reflecting an ongoing state of ambiguity, rather than a temporary state of conflict.

Shira, 24, exemplifies the concept of identity ambiguity. On the whole, her narrative reflects a relatively negative perception of and relationship with Palestinians and Palestinian citizens, both before and after her Peace Child Israel experience. For instance, Shira told me that prior to participating in the organization's activities,

> I remember that the [Al-Aqsa] Intifada really impacted me. It, it created a lot of fear within me. I mean, to see the people, like, to see the Arabs and. . . suddenly to see them and to fear them. . .Suddenly it reverberated and did something to me.

Shira's narrative indicates that the fear of Arabs she felt as a child has not disappeared. On the contrary, since participating in Peace Child Israel she has not had any intentional interaction with Arabs, and she said that in general she finds herself very uncomfortable in their presence:

> It really feels to me that the attitude I get from the Arabs is. . .it causes me to feel very uncomfortable. It's very unpleasant. A while ago something very unpleasant happened to me, I was at the Cinematheque[14] and an Arab man came and robbed me and another friend and it really affected my sense of security, like, to see someone and wonder. . .like, since then, I'm constantly thinking, maybe that person was the one who robbed me, maybe he was the one who took away my self confidence. . .It really made me feel. . .I feel uncomfortable when I am around Arabs.

The words "fear" and "uncomfortable" illustrate Shira's emotions regarding Palestinian citizens of Israel, but do not necessarily tell us much about her perspective regarding their narrative and its legitimacy. More insight into these beliefs comes from Shira's description of her Peace Child Israel experiences. For instance, Shira spoke about an activity where participants were asked to define themselves:

> I remember that we had an argument with the Arabs, like, why are you Palestinians, this is the State of Israel, and they told us, no, it's the opposite, it's not Israel, it's occupied territories, and it became a big argument and when we left, I remember that I was totally worked up. . . I remember that I was totally shocked that, how do you dare to call this country Palestine? It's clear that it is Israel, and we let you be part of this country and it's as though you remove yourselves from the State. And I remember that I left that meeting with very difficult emotions.

In her first encounter with Israeli citizens who called themselves "Palestinians," Shira was "shocked." Nearly a decade later, she described citizens' reference to themselves as Palestinians as "hurtful," explaining,

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[14] The Jerusalem Cinematheque is a well-known theater straddling East and West Jerusalem. It shows primarily independent films and is home to the annual Israel Film Festival.

> It hurts, it really hurts and it's like. . .he is in this place that's called Israel and he separates himself from it. Like, he isn't willing to acknowledge the fact that this isn't Palestine. . .it's not. . .it's Israel, it's a State that since ancient times has belonged to the Jewish people and he comes and changes its name and doesn't acknowledge what they actually call it here, and, allows himself to claim it for himself. . .
> *Karen:* And if there is a Palestinian state here, do you think that then, also. . .?
> *Shira:* No, I think that it's the right thing to create. Because they want autonomy and rights that. . .I don't know how worthwhile it is for them economically and socially, and how well they will succeed in this autonomy, but they do deserve it, because they live here and they should receive what they aspire to. . .but they do have identity cards and they use the services of the State and they live here in Israel. They receive what they need from the State. So. . .that's what really infuriates me, that they know how to take but they can't give anything for the State.

On the whole, what are we to make of Shira's comments? Her statements illustrate a complex perspective that does not clearly fit into either an expanded or accentuated point of view. On the one hand, Shira's use of the phrase "it infuriates me," along with her perception that "they [Palestinian citizens] can't give anything in return," suggests that her horizon has not expanded in a way that integrates the Palestinian perspective: for her, calling the land Palestine is wrong and personally hurtful. Such a perspective aligns with the dominant Jewish narrative in Israeli society, and Shira's expression of discomfort around Palestinian citizens also reflects emotions characteristic of the majority of Israel's Jewish population (Smooha, 2010). Yet, Shira indicates that Palestinians *should* have autonomy, contradicting the dominant view among Jews in Israel (Benhorin, 2012). Moreover, Shira's overall assessment of her experiences in Peace Child Israel reflects a very different perspective than that of most Jewish Israelis:

> It opened up something in me, the activities [in Peace Child]. Despite the fear I have, that fear of Arabs, it opened in me tolerance and, and understanding. . .despite everything I said about the fear, I do care, and I do respect [Arabs]. . .and in the end I saw in it, in Peace Child Israel, something that's actually good and opens up the opportunity to get to know people who live next to me. . .and to connect with them. Because they are just like me and like you, like, human beings.

Shira's statement that "they are just like me and like you" points to a perspective far different than her earlier comments would suggest, a perspective more in line with an expanded identity narrative. Her own worldview vis-à-vis Palestinian citizens might thus best be described as ambiguous. This ambiguity characterizes several other Jewish Peace Child alumni with whom I spoke, and was expressed in a simultaneous sense of distance from Palestinian citizens and acknowledgment of the legitimacy of their narrative and aspirations. Among these individuals, there was also implicit acknowledgment of the contradictions their personal narratives present. In other words, in the trajectory of their experiences following Peace Child Israel's relatively de-politicized encounter program, several Jewish alumni found themselves in a state of ambiguity with respect to the congruence of their personal perspectives vis-à-vis the collective narrative. Moreover, this ambiguity continued to be articulated years after program participation.

3.4. Identity transformation

The concept of identity expansion describes an existing, but limited, ability to see beyond the dominant in-group narratives of Jewish and Palestinian Israeli citizens. While this concept characterizes identity claims made by a number of my research participants, more than twenty individuals, mostly Jewish Sadaka Rut alumni, articulated views that extend to critiquing the status quo and the narratives of both Palestinian and Jewish citizens, and to examining systemic inequalities in Israeli society as manifested in discrimination against multiple groups. Given their emphasis not only on the Jewish–Palestinian conflict but also on other elements of the socio-political context, I describe the claims of these individuals as reflective of a *transformed identity*. These claims demonstrate greater integration of multiple narratives than identity expansion and acknowledge the salience of material inequalities in Israeli society as a whole, resembling Gramsci's concept of *contradictory consciousness*, in which 'organic intellectuals' work through ideas disseminated by the hegemony before coming to an awareness of structural discrimination and repression (Bates, 1975; Gramsci, 1971).

Efrat's narrative clearly illustrates the concept of a transformed identity, cultivated through her experiences in Sadaka Reut and the relationships formed there. For instance, when asked if there was anything she was particularly proud of related to her Sadaka Reut experiences, Efrat, 38, responded by discussing the moment when she became aware of her ability to distinguish between Palestinians as individuals and as a collective. She told me,

> As a facilitator, I traveled to the United States to a camp that had a partnership with Reut Sadaka. And there was a facilitator there who was a Palestinian citizen of Israel, who was very very problematic. As in, she behaved very badly, she didn't facilitate well at all, and so on. I remember saying to myself, that I was able to differentiate, I saw that her participants weren't able to, that society isn't able to, and it was clear to me that I was able to differentiate between the fact that she was an Arab and the fact that she was a bad facilitator. . .I was able to find the complexity. That is, yes, she is a Palestinian and she is oppressed and the State really is screwing her over and so on, but along with that she is really, really a horrible facilitator and it's not because of that [oppression]. And she is a pretty bad person, and it's not because of me. As in, I don't have any responsibility [as a Jew] with regard to the fact that she is a bad person in my

opinion. It's not part of the Zionist oppression and the fact that [her land] was conquered in 1948 and she didn't go to school. She's just a shitty person. And there was something really liberating about the fact that I could say that and say, OK, there's a Palestinian here who I can really dislike and think that she does her work badly, without it saying about me that I am a Zionist and an oppressor and so on. . .And after that, also, the choices I made in all sorts of relationships, I felt that those choices were much more real, that I'm not choosing people because they are Palestinian or because they are Jews. So, that complexity was really significant for me. And it took me many years to get to that point. And what helped me was the encounter, the constant encounter and also the almost uninterrupted conversations. . .of the Sadaka Reut group and of other groups and of facilitators and participants.

Efrat's comment demonstrates her ability to understand complexities challenging the binary Lavie (2012) describes as characteristic of Israeli society and that differ from the dichotomous perspective she describes as typical of most Israeli Jews. Unlike Neta, whose discourse about individuals being "bad" or "good" focuses only on individual characteristics, Efrat's distinction between Palestinians as a collective and as individuals also signifies awareness of structural discrimination.

Efrat made other comments highlighting her understanding of the complexities in Israeli society, as well as the way that she differentiates herself from the mainstream. For example, she told me,

Everywhere I come I read the reality critically and I see that, I see where equality [doesn't exist]. . . Like, for example, I spend a lot of time now on the rights of refugees [in Israel]. All the time people say to me, but things are much better for them than in the DRC Congo, in Sudan or wherever they came from. And the comparison can't be to the DRC Congo, it has to be to an Israeli child. And yes, [the refugees] earn much more than in Darfur. . .But still the oppression and racism that they deal with in comparison with an Israeli child is much greater. And like, that comparison, that standard was created for me in Reut Sadaka. I mean, the fact that, yes, the Arabs who live in Israel, it's better for them than Arabs who live in Jordan, who are Palestinians. But the comparison can't be like that. The comparison has to be to an Israeli child, Jewish. [. . .] And it's like lenses that have become my eyes, they're not lenses any more. I can't take them off at this point. It became the way I see the world. I can't see it otherwise.

The lenses to which Efrat refers illustrate a sense of self differing from mainstream Jewish Israeli society in its focus on systemic injustices; they also reflect Efrat's conscious, constant attempt to gain awareness of "the reality" of Israel's socio-political context (see also Ron, Bekerman, & Maoz, 2010; Ron & Maoz, 2013). What is also important to point out here is that her transformed identity claims address more than just a sense of self in relation to the conflict between Jews and Palestinians. Rather, a transformed identity, as embodied by Efrat, suggests a way of being in the world in which one is aware of and able to articulate interconnections between various economic, political, and social issues.

4. Discussion

There are a number of axes upon which participants in my study differ with respect to their development of expanded, accentuated, ambiguous and transformed identities. These ethno-national, organizational, and place-based differences provide important insights into the potential outcomes of inter-group encounter programs in conflict contexts.

4.1. Ethno-national differences

First, there are several differences between the identity claims of Palestinian encounter participants and those of their Jewish counterparts. For example, claims reflecting identity accentuation are almost exclusively the purview of Palestinians: identity accentuation was reflected in the narrative of only one Jewish individual. There are multiple reasons why this might be the case, but a one salient factor might be the pervasiveness of the Jewish narrative in Israeli society as a whole, in contrast with the lack of legitimated forums for Palestinians to articulate their historical narrative. Dominance of the Jewish narrative in Israeli society might therefore limit the degree to which exposure to the Palestinian narrative results in a significant shift of the belief systems of Jewish participants. In contrast, the potentially frustrating attempts of Palestinians to articulate a different narrative may lead to reinforcement of the belief, as in Rashida's case, that there is no partner for dialogue. Indeed, other research suggests that Jews and Palestinians differ in the influence of encounters on their identity development: while Palestinians go through a process of identity *construction* following the encounter, many Jews find themselves in a position of *de-constructing* their identity and beginning to critique their collective narrative (Litvak-Hirsch, Bar-On, & Chaitin, 2003).

Like identity expansion, identity ambiguity is primarily the purview of Jewish encounter participants. The distinction here is particularly stark, as no Palestinian participants narrated ambiguous identity claims. However, the distinction also makes sense in light of the suppression of the Palestinian narrative in Israel. Exposure to the Jewish narrative through formal education and other institutions means that even Palestinian encounter participants without prior interactions with Jews are familiar with the dominant discourse in Israeli society. In contrast, most Jews have few opportunities to hear alternative narratives unless they make an intentional, conscious effort to do so. Indeed, one former Sadaka Reut board member, a Jewish woman in her 50s, told me that it was not until she was an adult and made a conscious decision to seek out Palestinian citizens that she was exposed to a version of history presenting Jews as anything but victims and heroes. Thus, it is relatively unsurprising that Jewish, but not Palestinian, encounter participants do not articulate narratives that reflect identity ambiguity.

Finally, transformed identity narratives are also expressed primarily among Jewish individuals; only 5 Palestinians (all Sadaka Reut participants) articulated narratives that might be characterized this way. Why might this be the case? Anna, 20, described a Sadaka Reut group activity about identity that provides some insight:

> We had a meeting where the facilitator asked us to write down our identities. . .words that characterize our identities. . . And all the girls wrote as their first characteristic: I am a human being. Everyone except for one girl who was Mizrachi. She wrote, I am Mizrachi [. . .] And then we all started to harass her, [to say] that it doesn't matter what you are and what your ethnicity is.. . . And maybe two years later, we met the facilitator again and she told us that what happened in that meeting, that it was, like, she spoke with us about hegemony. That there is hegemony in Israeli society. And if you match that hegemony, you can allow yourself to say, I'm a human being. There are people who don't match that hegemony, and they have something to say that's more important. Like, they have something to say about themselves aside from the fact that they're human beings, because they feel this thing about themselves all the time.

Palestinian citizens do not "match the hegemony" and thus may, as Anna suggested, emphasize aspects of their identity that are subject to discrimination as a way of countering societal delegitimization. However, this does not explain the fact that among my research participants, Jews were more likely than Palestinians to focus on issues *other* than the conflict between these two ethno-national groups. This difference may have to do with the distinction between becoming aware of one's oppressed status versus becoming aware of one's privilege. Given the social legitimization in Israel of majority group identity characteristics, it is possible that once Jews are aware of the advantages they hold vis-à-vis Palestinian citizens, they need not focus solely on inequalities having to do with this specific set of relations within Israeli society, but are able to see systemic discrimination more universally. As McIntosh (1988) points out, members of the dominant group in society are generally taught that other groups are at a disadvantage but not that they themselves are advantaged or privileged. It may be that when individuals' eyes are opened to that privilege, they are able to see it reflected in a variety of structural relations. Questioning the dominance of the Jewish societal narrative therefore might enable Jewish individuals to take a birds-eye view of systemic issues that extends beyond Jewish–Palestinian relations.

On the other hand, as members of a minority in Israel whose collective identity has been historically delegitimized, Palestinians may highlight this particular delegitimization because of the need to see it addressed prior to focusing on other inequalities. In other words, Palestinian awareness of oppression largely translates into an emphasis on changing Israeli society specifically vis-à-vis their own status, rather than addressing systemic discrimination as it manifests more broadly. This possibility is further reinforced by the many Palestinian narratives reflecting an accentuated identity configuration and suggests that increased awareness by Palestinians of inequalities facing their community is related to greater identification with that community.

4.2. Organizational differences

Differences in individuals' identity claims also exist along organizational dimensions. For example, among my research participants, claims characterized by identity expansion and ambiguity were largely the purview of Peace Child participants, while Sadaka Reut participants represent the majority of individuals whose ethno-national identity claims might be characterized as reflecting identity accentuation and transformation.

Of the 12 Palestinians whose narratives reflect an accentuated identity, 11 are alumni of Sadaka Reut. Aside from Rashida, only one other individual attributed his accentuation to Sadaka Reut activities: others spoke about events such as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, or generally to their experiences of discrimination at the hand of Jews, as serving as a turning point in terms of their ethno-national identity. Regardless, the lack of an accentuated identity among most Palestinian Peace Child Israel participants is striking, and I believe results at least partly from the different approaches utilized by each organization. Sadaka Reut's explicit focus on structural inequalities, and its deep investigation of issues related to identity and belonging, contrasts with Peace Child Israel's much more superficial focus on this content. When coupled with the attribution of most individuals narrating accentuated identities to external factors, it is also worth considering that this difference may be due more generally to Sadaka Reut participants' greater awareness of systemic inequities in Israeli society, which in turn may also be a reflection of the organization's emphasis on these issues.

Similarly, claims reflecting identity transformation are largely the purview, not only of Jews, but also of Sadaka Reut participants: only 3 of the 21 individuals interviewed whose narratives can be characterized this way were Peace Child Israel participants. In contrast, identity ambiguity is characteristic of narratives articulated only by Peace Child Israel alumni with whom I spoke. There are a number of reasons why this might be the case, such as greater openness to the Palestinian narratives among Sadaka Reut participants even before joining the organization. However, it is reasonable to believe that differences in the organizations' approach are relevant here – in particular, again, Sadaka Reut's emphasis on addressing structural issues at the root of the Jewish–Palestinian conflict in Israel as contrasted with Peace Child's less directly political approach. Given this, lack of identity ambiguity among Jewish Sadaka Reut participants' narratives may be a result, not of delegitimation of the Palestinian narrative, but of the opposite – greater openness to the Palestinian narrative and critique of dominant Jewish discourse.

Some might suggest that the ambiguity characteristic of Jewish Peace Child participant narratives is an indicator that the program was not been successful in significantly shifting the way participants view either the conflict or themselves within

it. However, I argue that identity ambiguity and its stability over time suggests that even encounters that do not address the conflict, but that present an alternative to the segregation permeating Israeli society, can play a role in raising questions about the pervasive dominant narrative into which Jewish youth are socialized, even in programs that do not directly address systemic inequities between Jews and Palestinians in Israeli society. Even without this emphasis, participants in inter-group encounters are exposed to perspectives that can raise questions about dominant societal messages. For example, Shira described a situation in which one of the Palestinians in her Peace Child group was late to rehearsal because he was stuck for several hours at a checkpoint, illustrating the new knowledge to which she was exposed as a result of his experience:

> He arrived towards the end of the meeting, and he was so angry about how they examined him at the checkpoint. . .I mean, I didn't understand the significance of checkpoints until that moment. What happens there and. . .what level of bitterness it can create.

Thus, it seems that even without a direct focus on systemic issues underlying the Jewish–Palestinian conflict, Peace Child helped increase Shira's exposure to experiences that shape Palestinian ethno-national identity. By providing this exposure, no matter how limited, the organization perhaps created just enough awareness for Shira to result in uncertainty regarding the ethno-national identity into which she was socialized and which dominant discourses aim to solidify.

4.3. Local-international differences

Finally, narratives of Peace Child and Sadaka Reut participants, both Jewish and Palestinian, point to a number of differences between programs implemented within conflict regions and those implemented internationally. For instance, differences in the nature and degree of identity accentuation experienced by Peace Child and Sadaka Reut participants, relative to Seeds of Peace and Hands of Peace participants in Hammack's study, are well illustrated by a comment made by Idan, a 39-year old Jewish male, regarding the benefits of his participation in Sadaka Reut activities:

> Something that is really nice about [Sadaka Reut], it's once a week but then you return to your community, to the real dialogue that is between you and your community, with the support of some sort of group within which you have some freedom.

Idan's comment emphasizes the importance of the iterative learning process created through the continual back-and-forth between a uninational home community and the inter-group forum characterizing Sadaka Reut, and differs significantly from the experience of individuals attending an intense but isolated encounter program located in the United States. This points to the possibility that if individuals must cope with different perspectives and find ways of fitting them into their worldview on a regular, ongoing basis, rather than being exposed to new perspectives intensively for several days or weeks before suddenly returning to their uninational home community, they may be less likely to experience a dramatic accentuation of in-group identification.

The lasting nature of identity change among Peace Child and Sadaka Reut alumni provides some conceptual insights into to the potential role local encounters can play in shaping ethno-national identity in an enduring manner, and serves as a starting point for contradicting arguments regarding the limit to which identity changes can be maintained over time. In his conclusions, Hammack offers two suggestions for the programs he studied did not succeed in achieving their mission of cultivating "cosmopolitan identities" among participants. First, he argues that they do not address issues of power asymmetry, and "in so doing, they inhibit the extent to which issues of structural reality can be acknowledged and addressed by youth" (2011, p. 347). Second, Hammack suggests that these programs are founded on an American model of the life course and American models of inter-group relations that do not set them up for success in bringing together youth from the Middle East.

Although Peace Child Israel also does not address issues of power asymmetry, discussions with participants in both this program and Sadaka Reut indicate that experiences there shaped participants' views vis-à-vis collectivities in Israel in ways that have remained stable over periods of years and decades. I believe that, at least partly, this may be the result of participation in programs not only developed locally, but also that are implemented within Israel. This geographic difference has important implications, including, as Idan's comment indicates, a continuous process of "re-entry" into one's community (Kelman & Cohen, 1976; Lazarus, 2011) rather than a single sharp distinction between encounter and home. The contrast thus suggests a need for situating future research on encounters both within the socio-political context in which they are implemented and in a way that takes into account where and by whom they were established.

The patterns discussed above provide conceptual and theoretical insights that can help us to better understand the potential outcomes of inter-group encounter programs. My research reinforces scholarship pointing to potentially different outcomes experienced by members of different ethno-national groups as well as participants in different types of encounter programs. However, results also provide preliminary insights that highlight differences in experiences of youth participating in local encounters, as contrasted with participants in programs developed and implemented internationally. Moreover, my findings also suggest that while identity claims are closely related to Israel's socio-political reality, they *also* may be strongly connected to individual experiences, and can be maintained over long periods of time.

It is important to remember that in many cases, extended encounter participants, in the months and even years following encounter participation, refer to this experience as a high point in their lives (Hammack, 2011;

Lazarus, 2011; Maddy-Weitzman, 2005), even as their ethno-national identity claims shift away from the "ideal" of transcendence. This suggests that extended encounters – occurring either in weekly format or in condensed but intensive 2–3 week programs – do have some sort of lasting impact on participants. Future research might therefore focus on further elucidating differences in *types* of potential impact as it varies according to the dynamics of extended encounter implementation.

Moreover, it is important to note the age range of participants interviewed in this study (19–43), as contrasted with Hammack's participants, all interviewed during the years immediately preceding and following their entry into adulthood at age 18. Two issues are significant here. First, as Hammack (2011) notes, the age period during and immediately following participation in encounter programs is, for most adolescents, a time of identity *consolidation*. Second, Lazarus (2011) indicates that the beliefs of Jewish and Palestinian youth in the few years following encounter participation are significantly shaped by experiences such as service in the Israel Defense Forces (for Jews) or university study, as well as by changes in the socio-political climate. Together, these issues indicate that ethno-national identity claims may fluctuate more over time than suggested by the narratives of my older interviewees, illustrating the limitation of retrospective interview approaches. Unfortunately, few resources exist for conducting a sufficiently extensive longitudinal study to empirically speak to this issue; however, such an approach would help address this drawback.

This study is also limited by its non-representative sample and by an inability to account for causal statements about the relationship between encounter participation and ethno-national identity narratives. However, my goal was not to produce results generalizable to a broader population, but rather to explore theoretical and methodological questions about the nature and duration of identity change among inter-group encounter program participants. The comparative nature of my study, moreover, provides insights into the possible salience of different factors in accounting for identity change. Future research might address this limitation by using a larger sample.

Ultimately, evidence of long-lasting change in the ethno-national identity repertoires of Peace Child Israel and Sadaka Reut participants provides insights that are relevant for contributing to our understanding of the potential contribution encounter programs in conflict contexts can make to attempts at peace building. Given dominant perspectives in Israeli society, these narratives are indicators of the challenge encounters pose to societal beliefs, and thus have significant implications for both the study and practice of inter-group encounters in conflict.

Acknowledgements

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