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Brief report

What you wish for is not what you expect: Measuring hope for peace during intractable conflicts

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ABSTRACT

Protracted intergroup conflicts, like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are often referred to as intractable. Intractable conflicts are termed as such, partly because group members mired in these disputes believe that the conflict is inherently irreconcilable. To better understand the nature of the perceived irreconcilability of intractable conflicts, Jewish-Israelis' hope for peace was surveyed capturing three interdependent but discrete components of hope: wish for peace, expectations that peace will materialize, and affective hopefulness. To operationalize peace, three definitions of peace, gradually refining from non-concrete to concrete, were offered to respondents (N = 120). Results reveal that expectations for peace among Jewish-Israelis are low but stable across the three definitions of peace while wishes for peace are higher, more dynamic and, for those with right-wing political orientation, highly dependent on the definition of peace provided. The more concrete the definition, the less rightists wish for peace. Further analysis shows that rightwing leaning respondents exhibit lower wishes for peace, even when the respondent is free to determine what peace might entail. By utilizing novel methods to detect nuances in the dynamics of hope and hopelessness, this study demonstrates that expectation for peace and wishes for peace function in distinct ways during protracted intergroup conflicts.

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict illustrates the typical features of intractable ethnonational conflicts (Kelman, 1987; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998). It is violent, persistent, and total in its impact on a multitude of areas such as economy, religion, and culture. A more subjective feature of the conflict is its perceived irreconcilability (Bar-Tal, 2007). Perceived irreconcilability is detrimental to conflict resolution because it lowers group members' motivation to strive for peace and, as such, serves to maintain the conflict (Pruitt, 1997). The persistence of the conflict will then feed back and reinforce the sense of hopelessness among group members. And so the cycle goes.

Palestinians' and Israelis' hopelessness regarding the likelihood of peace is demonstrated in public polls that show that about half of both Israelis and Palestinians believe that the conflict will never end (Telhami & Kull, 2013). A more recent study supports this finding by showing that Jewish-Israelis' hopes regarding the future of Israeli-Palestinian relations are very low (Rosler, Cohen-Chen, & Halperin, 2017). The rhetoric of Israeli rightwing leaders contributes to Jewish-Israelis' hopelessness. Benjamin Netanyahu's declaration that Israelis will have to live on their swords forever (Haaretz, Oct. 25, 2015), is a vivid example of a pessimistic outlook Israelis are urged to accept. The disbelief in the likelihood of peace is not only a sign of current times. Similar pessimism was expressed in 1976 by 59.1% of Jewish-Israelis who thought lasting peace is impossible (Stone, 1982). Yet, a study published in 2008 found that Jewish-Israelis' hope for peace is rather high (Halperin, Bar-Tal, Nets-Zehngut, & Drori, 2008), and in a much earlier study Israelis' "hopes for peace with the Arabs" were so high they scored more than hopes for national prosperity and economic stability put together (Antonovsky & Arian, 1972).

These differences may be attributed to the idea that during protracted conflicts, levels of hope correspond to fluctuating political

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circumstances. For instance, hopes may rise in times of negotiations, when the likelihood of peace seems higher, and drop when conflict escalates. However, a closer look at the literature on hope for peace in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict reveals that one of the reasons for differing levels of hope among the studies is conceptual, namely, that hope was defined, operationalized, and reported in fundamentally different ways.

Hope

Hope is an effortful psychological task. It requires flexibility, creativity, and imagination (Averill & Sundararajan, 2005; Breznitz, 1986; Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006). Webster's dictionary defines hope as a "desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment." However, colloquially, hope is often used to represent only *wishes,* as when one ends a conversation with "I hope you have a nice day." On other occasions, hope indicates only the levels of *expectation* to attain a goal, as when discovering interesting results increases one's "hopes" that the research will be published. Research on hope as a psychological construct identified both wish and expectation as two discrete, though interdependent, components of hope (Erickson, Post, & Paige, 1975; Staats, 1989; Stotland, 1969). Recently, Bury, Wenzel, and Woodyatt (2016) showed that hope is distinct from optimism such that optimism relies only on expectations while hope requires both expectations and a personal investment to attain the goal.

According to appraisal theory, the emotion of hope is evoked when the situation is appraised as moderately uncertain and a desire to change the situation is present (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Strongly wishing to better one's situation and assessing this change as possible, but not likely, is then followed by affective hope manifested in a positive change in one's mental state (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, & Gross, 2014; Lazarus, 1999). Using appraisal theory as the theoretical framework, affective hope will thus be defined as the outcome of appraised expectations (the cognitive component of hope) and wishes (the motivational component of hope) (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010). In sum, hope requires both wishes and expectations to attain a goal which together elicit the affective component of hope. Moving the discussion on hope from the individual level to the context of intergroup conflict necessitates us to understand how hope (or lack thereof) functions on the societal level.

Societal beliefs and collective emotions during intractable conflicts

The continuous persistence of violence and hostility during intractable conflicts generates constant threat and anxiety amongst group members (Canetti, Elad-Strenger, Lavi, Guy, & Bar-Tal, 2015). To cope with this psychological burden, societies develop an inventory of societal beliefs that provide explanations and meaning under conditions of violence and uncertainty (Bar-Tal, 2007). One of the societal beliefs shared by group members embroiled in intractable conflicts is the belief that the conflict is innately irresolvable (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998). The perceived irreconcilability of the conflict stems from its extreme protraction but also functions as a coping mechanism as it grants a comforting sense of certainty and predictability (Cohen, 2005; Pruitt & Kim, 2004; Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011; Zartman, 2005).

In addition, societies entrapped in intractable conflict tend to share particular emotions that are provoked by the challenging reality of the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007; Peterson, 2002). Over the course of the conflict, these emotions are disseminated to group members as socially sanctioned emotions that group members should feel towards the ingroup (e.g. pride), the outgroup (e.g. hate), and the conflict (e.g. hopelessness) (Halperin et al., 2008; Schori-Eyal, Tagar, Saguy, & Halperin, 2015; Staub, 2005). In intractable conflicts, shared emotions may evolve into group-level emotions due to the high identification of group members with their ethnic or national group (Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007). Collective emotions can have a powerful impact on a host of intergroup behaviors (Pettigrew, 1997; Talaska, Fiske, & Chaiken, 2008). For example, collectively experienced negative emotions, such as hatred, can provoke violent behaviors towards the outgroup (Sternberg, 2005; Yanay, 2002). Positive collective emotions such as hope may elicit constructive behaviors like support for peacebuilding (Leshem, 2016), concession making (Cohen-Chen, Crisp, & Halperin, 2015) and collective action (Greenaway, Cichocka, van Veelen, Likki, & Branscombe, 2016).

During intractable conflicts, the lack of hope for peace functions both as a societal belief and as a collective emotion. Indeed, because of its centrality to peace, there has been considerable scholarly interest to explore hope during intractable conflicts, particularly in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (e.g. Antonovsky & Arian, 1972; Dowty, 2006; Halperin et al., 2008; Leshem, Klar, & Flores, 2016; Rosler et al., 2017; Sagy & Adwan, 2006; Stone, 1982). Yet, some studies reported participants' hope for peace but measured only participants' expectation for resolution, not the intensity of their wishes to attain it (assuming, perhaps, that the wish for peace is obvious or invariant). Some studies asked participants to report their "hopes for peace" but were de facto, gauging only wishes for peace, while in other studies it is unclear if respondents were expressing their wishes for peace, their assessment of its feasibility or both.[1] As noted, appraisal theory proposes that hope requires a wish and an expectation to elicit affective hope. Therefore, operationalizing hope based on wishes, expectation and elicited emotions should rectify the confusion about hope's measurements and generate a more comprehensive account of hope for peace during intractable intergroup conflicts.

Methods

A representative sample of Jewish-Israelis ($N = 120$) completed an online survey that gauged their hopes for peace on the three components mentioned above: wish, expectation, and affective hope.[2] Based on the mixed results found in the literature on hope during

[1] A tentative explanation for this confusion is that in English, Hebrew and Arabic, hope can mean "wish", "expect" or both.

[2] The study was conducted as part of a larger experimental study designed to explore hope instilling strategies.

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