

**Germans, Israeli-Jews and Palestinians wish to move beyond victimhood:**

**Some reflections on the possibility of displacement of aggression**

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## **Abstract**

Israeli and Palestinians are still deeply rooted in their self-perceptions and feelings as being victims of the conflict, viewing the other party as victimizers (Ruhana & Bar-Tal, 1998). In addition, the Israelis, being perceived as the more powerful party in the conflict, developed over the last thirty years sophisticated strategies of exclusion of the “other.” The Israeli strategies of exclusion hinder, restrict their ability of accepting the Palestinians’ feelings and perspectives, refraining especially from relating to them as equally moral people. A third party is introduced to help clarify the complexity of this conflictual relationship (Bar-On, 2000a). It is hereby suggested that the first order aggression that has not been retaliated after the war is the basic relationship between the German Nazis and the Israeli-Jews. The internalized aggression of the Shoah was transformed into a second order aggression and collectively displaced by the Jews toward the Palestinians. The concept of victimhood (including both aspects of being victims and victimizers) and displacement of aggression are suggested, as powerful aspects of collective and individual identity, that link together German, Israeli-Jewish and Palestinians. This paper will address the question – why did the Jews not take qualifying revenge on the Germans after WWII. The concept of displacement of aggression will be introduced, tying together the Germans the Israeli-Jews and the Palestinians. This complex process of first and second order of aggression, presented here on a micro level, could tell us what has to be worked through on the macro level, if we want to become engaged in a deeper process of peace building and coexistence in the Middle East.

## 1. Beyond victimhood

“We can forgive people in our heads without forgiving them in our hearts. Knowledge can be propositional or dispositional. For the former to become the latter, it must be – in Freud’s phrase – “worked through.” A two way process is involved: what we know in our heads must become something we know in our guts; what we know in our guts must become something we know in our heads. Psyche and soma, which have been divided by trauma, must be reunited again. The process is bound to be slow and painful... This means shifting the past out of the present; replacing psychological simultaneity with linear sequence; slowly loosening the hold of a grief and an anger whose power traps us in an unending yesterday.” (Ignatieff, 1998: pp. 164/5).

Michael Ignatieff made these insights, while citing Stephen Dedalus of Joyce’s *Ulysses*: “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.” Ignatieff reached the conclusion, cited in the epigraph, by looking at several current ethnic conflicts, in which peace making (that is represented usually by the “heads”) and peace building (that is usually dependent on the “guts”), are still far apart. In some of conflict areas - Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine, Bosnia or Rwanda - the parties that had been engaged in the conflict for generations, are living with the fear and threat that the past can take over again any minute, as it did before, sometimes quite unexpectedly.

What are the mechanisms that help maintain the separation between “head” and “guts,” “psyche” and “soma,” through which violence can take over any minute, even when top-down peace making is under way? I would like to stress three such mechanisms:

1. The powerful identity-construction of being victimized. Peace building has only “weak” social constructions to offer instead.
2. The sophistication of exclusion of the “other” especially by the perceived more powerful party in asymmetric relationships.

3. The possible invisibility of a third party that may have instigated the victimization process by first order aggression later moved out, leaving the remaining parties struggle with second order, displaced aggression

1. The powerful identity-construction of being victimized.

The identity construction around “being victims” is usually based on solid collective and individual experiences during years in which the violent conflict evolved. They gain, however, their powerful grip on the identity construction when they are transformed in the collective memory into myths that are being transmitted from one generation to the next, through family stories, school books (Bar-Tal, 1997) and national symbolic acts and festivals (Ross, 1999).

In the Irish or Balkan context Ignatieff (1998) observed that people would become very emotional about events that justified their fears and hatred, but it was difficult to determine whether these events had happened during the twentieth, the eighteenth or fifteenth centuries. This may have also specific contextual cultural reasons (Ross, 1999). In the Palestinian context, one can feel it when one speaks with children in a refugee camp and asks them where they come from. They will promptly cite the name of the village they themselves have never encountered, but their grandparents inhabited and had left, or were forced to leave – depending on which version one wants of the 1948 war one prefers to rely on (Morris, 1999), more than fifty years ago.

2. The sophisticated exclusion of the “other” by the powerful party in asymmetric relationships.

Until now the problem was defined as being a symmetric one: Both sided use the same strategy of identifying themselves as being victimized by the other side. Rarely, however, are such long-term conflicts symmetrical. Usually one can define one party as being more powerful, trying to coerce the other party or to exclude and de-legitimize it. Conflicts can be divided according to their level of asymmetry. The more complex conflicts are those in which

the measures used to decide which is the more powerful party are in disagreement. For example, the Israeli are seen as being more powerful economically and militarily by the Palestinians, while the Israeli see themselves threatened by the immensity of the Arab world, relating it to their many generations experiences in Europe. They cannot therefore accept the Palestinian perspective of the current asymmetrical power division.

### 3. The invisibility of a third party that may have instigated the victimization and then moved out.

This is a difficult concept to prove and it will be the main contribution of the present paper. The basic idea is that in long and bitter conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian one, or the one in Northern Ireland and Rwanda, a third party was involved at earlier stages of the conflict, that has later moved out of the conflict site as an active party. Still, the violent relationship that this party introduced with at least one of the parties in the conflict (first order aggression) displaced itself into the current conflict between the other two parties in the form of second order aggression. I will try to clarify this notion, discussing the triad relationship of German-Nazi, Israeli Jewish and Palestinian interactive conflicts (Bar-On, 2000a). In order to address this issue we have to start with the question – why did the Jews not take qualified revenge on the Germans after the Shoah? Then, the concept of displace aggression will be introduced. Last, the triad of German-Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian relationships will be highlighted.

## **2. Why did Jews not take revenge on Germans after the war?**

In a recent visit of Israeli (Jewish and Palestinian) and German students at Buchenwald concentration camp, an interesting phenomenon could be observed (Halaby, 1999): The Jewish students came out of the camp quite agitated. They first complained that they did not like the fact that the subtitles in the exhibits were only in

German. They also criticized the German guide, feeling that he showed no empathy to the Jewish history of the camp. Still, when they set down after the visit, they expressed their anger toward the Palestinian students rather than toward the German students who took part in the tour. The Jewish participants perceived the Palestinians' behavior as being "inappropriate." Some of the Jewish students felt that the Palestinians, like the German guide, also ignored the Jewish suffering in the camp and thereby did not meet the Jewish expectations of this memorial context. The Palestinian leader wrote after the visit, that he felt that the Jewish students let out anger on the Palestinian students, anger that originally had nothing to do with the Palestinians. The Jews could not express their original anger about the Holocaust directly toward the Germans. He felt this was not a coincidence, but reflected a general pattern of the Israeli displaced aggression.

This pattern of displaced aggression is a reoccurring pattern can be observed in current conflicts in Israel in which representatives of the three groups encounter each other (Bar-On, 1999a). Why do Israelis tend to be more aggressive toward Palestinians than toward Germans in such 'triangle' encounters of Germans, Israeli Jews and Palestinians? Don't the Jews have more objective reasons to feel and express anger toward Germans? It is suggested here, that one cannot find an explanation to the current events without relating to the earlier question – why did the Jewish survivors after the war not take qualifying revenge on the Germans?

Taking revenge after the Holocaust was a common theme for both German and Jewish fantasies toward the end of the war. But in reality, very little of those fantasies had been implemented. How can we understand this gap? What has happened since with the internalized aggression among the survivors and their descendants? The literature shows that though the camp inmates had many fantasies of taking revenge

on the Germans after the war, and though the Germans had similar fantasies and fears, very little of all that materialized after May 1945 (Robinson et al., 1994). Zeev (Bar-On, 1995: Chapter 2) tells us how he went back to his village in Lithuania, after being in the partisans during the war, and burnt down the houses of the gentile people who conducted the massacre among the Jews before the German army even arrived in June, 1941. But he also does not want his children to know about it and it is clear from his story that this event was an exception rather than the rule.

We know of some groups who tried to take revenge on German people in general. Some of them even made plans to poison water systems in Germany. Other military agents tried to target Nazi perpetrators after the war and execute them. The most famous case is, of course, the capture of Eichmann who was brought to trial and hanged in Israel in 1961. Even this case can be seen as some kind of more civilized revenge (Arendt, 1963). Still, most of the plans were not put into practice and most of the Holocaust survivors became involved in rebuilding their own lives and either forgot or did not materialize their previous revenge fantasies. Symbolically, in one of our interviews, a child survivor described how he was about to kill a German person after the war, while chopping wood with an axe in a cellar. At a certain moment he lifted the axe over that person's head, just to find that he could not do it. The next day the German person proudly showed him pictures of his own son who was in the SS during the war...

We know of Nazis who, toward the end of the war expected acts of Jewish revenge. For example, Helmuth (Bar-On, 1989: Chapter three) describes how he overheard a conversation between his parents toward the end of the war: would it be enough that his father committed suicide, or should he kill the whole family? The father, who was one of the leading physicians in the so called Euthanasia program,

was afraid “that they will now do to us what we did to them during the Nazi era.” The father committed suicide the next day. Helmuth refused to eat at home for the following nine (!) years, being afraid that his mother would still poison them all. Other interviewees in Germany spoke of fear of revenge and acts of suicide among the Nazi perpetrators.

This leads us back to the question: Against all expectations (of Jews and Germans), why did the survivors not take revenge on Germans after the war? They had, of course, opportunities combined with a kind of legitimacy. We know of many acts of rape and murder perpetrated by soldiers of the Red Army while advancing into Germany, in 1945. Though the Germans were brutal toward the Russians during the war (Bar-Tov, 1990), they did not planned to annihilate all of them. There were a lot of opportunities to commit acts of revenge. Hundreds of thousands of Jews who survived the Holocaust were living in Germany in Displaced Persons’ camps for about three years, waiting for their resettlement in Israel or in other countries. Yet very few of these survivors ever tried to implement their earlier fantasies of revenge on Germans.

This difficult question has a more legitimate or moral answer and an answer that is more psychoanalytic, less moral. The moral answer is that, in general, the Jews did not want to lower themselves to the level of inhumanity of their Nazi oppressors. Their feeling of “being stronger than Hitler” in their spirit and morality as some of them defined it, was one of maintaining a human image of themselves even under the most extreme inhumane conditions that the Nazis had created for them (Levi, 1960). Antek Zukerman (1991) described how he tried to convince Aba Kovner<sup>1</sup> with this argument to stop the latter’s revenge plans and activities. Zukerman argument was,

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<sup>1</sup> - Both were Ghetto fighters in Poland during the war, belonging to rival Zionist pioneering organizations.



that they should now concentrate on rescuing the remaining Jews and help them reach Israel, rather than waste their belittled energy on revenge activities, which will “burn the remaining love in our hearts.” Morally, one could claim that it was against the Jewish tradition and religion to implement the “eye for an eye” option. It is true that in writing the Nazis were equated to the Amalek: a so-called evil tribe which the Jewish tribes, arriving in Israel from Egypt, were commanded by God to annihilate totally (Gur-Zeev, 1998). Still, the modern Jews of the twentieth century could not act like their ancient ancestors, four thousand years ago.

With time, many Jews found more ‘sublimated’ ways to take revenge on Germans and Germany: They boycotted German products and avoided visiting Germany. But these were revenge activities within the legitimate culture and discourse of a civilized Western society, not qualifying the demise and barbaric destruction of the European Jewry that the Nazis had planned and executed. There were some post-war jokes on the sublime nature of Jewish revenge. A joke among the Czech Jewish survivors after the Holocaust described an act of taking revenge on Germans: Hitler, trying to hide his post-war identity, entered a Cafe in Prague and sees a survivor reading the daily newspaper. “Could I borrow your paper?” whispers Hitler politely. The Jew, recognizing Hitler answers in fury: “No, Her Fuhrer, you will never get a newspaper from me after what you have done to my people during the war.”

A moral philosophical controversy hides behind this refined joke. How come, after all the atrocities the Germans had committed against the Jews during the Holocaust, that the Jews reacted in such a moral way, like the Jewish survivor in the Czech cafe? Does this hint to the weakness the Jews exhibited after the war? Does it hint to the strength of the Jewish reaction, holding back their aggression, responding in a human way to their inhuman aggressor?

### 3. The displacement of aggression (DOA) hypothesis.

I propose, in the context of the current discussion that the Nazi aggression, internalized during the Holocaust, did not vanish. It is still there, deep inside the victims, in their individual and collective memory, deep under a shield of defenses and inhibitions searching for opportunities to express itself, even if has to come out in distorted and displaced forms, times and locations. The less morally based explanation for the lack of Jewish revenge is therefore the possibility of the **displacement of aggression (DOA)**. This explanation is based on the socially contextualized psychoanalytic assumption, that internalized severe aggression does not fade away or vanish over time, even when it is not directed back at the oppressor.

“Displacement is the release of pent-up anger in the form of aggression against a target other than the original cause of anger. It occurs when we cannot identify the tormentor, when the tormentor is unavailable or too powerful... We displace aggression onto potential targets, those we perceive as weak and unable to retaliate... onto socially sanctioned targets – people who are negatively stereotyped so that aggression against them is viewed as “justified.” (Michener, Delamater & Schwartz, 1986: p. 314).

Social psychological approaches as well as psychodynamic ones describe a dynamic of DOA in which the oppressed has serious difficulties in attacking the oppressors. This dynamic may be triggered especially when the oppressor and the oppressed have been in severe asymmetric power relations, the oppressed being totally and traumatically dependent on that oppressor. The oppressed may therefore tend to identify with the oppressor and displace their own aggression on weaker groups or individuals in a different place and time (Michener, Delamater & Schwartz,

1986). This relationship becomes even more complicated as the relationship between the aggressor and the victim may have originally been mixed dependency or symbiosis, even with love (or intended love). At some point, however, as a result of a strong projective turn within the aggressor, this relationship has been totally distorted and become violent toward the oppressed, the latter feeling surprised and unprepared for this change. Even in the Czek joke we feel reminiscences of such love. Probably the Jew would have given the newspaper willingly to a German, but not after the love has been so severely transformed into the latter wish and practice of total annihilation.

If we take a leap and look for a moment into the literature on sexual or physical harassment in the family, the harassed child will almost never retaliate against his or her parent. The child is, in these cases, in an asymmetric power relationship and probably has been totally dependent on the abusing parent, sometimes even mixed with reciprocal love. The parents may sometimes convey their love to their child in such a distorted way of harassment. For the child the real danger is the **indifference** of the parent. Therefore, the mixture of love and aggression are welcome as a way to overcome the fear of indifference and desertion on the part of the parental figure. The aggression of the parent, however, shatters the basic assumptions of the child (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) concerning trust, positive self-esteem, the benevolence of the world and their own right for unconditional love. The child has no way to move out of this double bind. He or she can neither give up the love, nor move away from or retaliate against the aggression. They even have no language to express this extreme distress (Herman, 1992).

A manifestation of the phenomena of DOA in a wider social context was identified in regard to the relationship between white and black populations in USA. Rogers and Prentice-Dunn (1981) describe a dynamic in which “For whites, the historical pattern of appropriate behavior towards blacks was racial discrimination and inferior treatment... For blacks, the

historical pattern of appropriate interracial behavior was to inhibit aggression toward whites and to displace it to fellow blacks.” In this social context, the power relationship is asymmetrical and there is strong dependence of Afro-American groups on the white population, starting from the era of slavery, but not ending with its termination. As a result the oppressed develop identification with the oppressor, internalizing its aggression. As the aggression in the post-slavery society was transmitted in more subtle ways, it could be identified only in its internalized form, among the victims themselves, and in displaced forms of aggression. The major point is that this internalized aggression did not fade away or vanish over time. It searched for and found alternative more or less legitimate ways of expression and was displaced and executed on weaker social entities (women, children) on whom the practice of aggression was generally accepted as being “justified” (Michener, Delamater & Schwartz, 1986).

How can we understand the process of the identification with the aggressor in these situations? The oppressed social groups may desperately search for compensation for what they got (unexpected aggression) and did not get (acceptance) during the period of being severely oppressed. As this is usually not granted to them and as the aggression may have been transmitted to them in subtle ways, they will often react with frustration and aggression. It is therefore more common to find harassed children who will later harass their own children or spouses. One could also expect oppressed groups, like Afro-Americans that may search for an outlet in the form of DOA toward perceived weaker individuals or groups (Rogers & Prentice-Dunn, 1981). This may happen not only because they perceive these ‘others’ as weaker (as they have been in the original relationship) but because of the emotional expectation that has not been fulfilled. I describe here a very complex cycle of victimization and distorted social relationship which is very difficult to

move out of or work through and which can therefore be transmitted from generation to generation (Herman, 1992).

There are other social processes in which a similar social dynamic can be observed. We know, for example, of the traumatic dependence that develops between captives and their captors (Lifton, 1983). A common possibility is that the captive goes through an emotional kind of “death” from which he or she emerges only by identifying with the aggressor. The captive may identify and even fall in love with his/her captor and may try to follow in their footsteps as part of a reaction formation. It even has a name: The Patty Hearst Syndrome, named after the daughter of the Californian multi-millionaire who was held hostage, later became part of the terrorist organization that had captured her and was caught and sentenced after one of her own terrorist activities. We also know about soldiers who became fascinated with the perceived moral or psychological strength of their and went through an emotional and behavioral transformation that caused them to identify with their enemy’s means and goals (Linsey, 1998)<sup>2</sup>.

We return now to our original question – why did the Jews not take proportional revenge on the Germans after the war? It becomes obvious that there are very few examples in history, in which one civilized group of people was so violently and openly persecuted and annihilated by another as the Jews by the Nazis. There are even fewer examples of historical processes in which most of the survivors of this aggression then immigrated into another geographical and social context. In that new context the oppressed identified an “inferior” group on whom they could exercise a

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<sup>2</sup>- It could be interesting to reformulate colonial aggressions in the light of the present analysis (Fenton, 1999): Did the British colonialists in India or Africa not suffer from this mixture of quest for love and aggression in their own homeland? May this be true of the Spanish conquerors of Latin America, or the French and English settlers who chased the Indians and later the slaves in Northern America? Such collective processes will soon be the focus of the present discussion.

collective displacement of aggression. This rare process had happened in the case of the Nazi-Germans, Israeli-Jews and the Palestinians.

Interestingly, the Jews have an ancient legend of such a complex process and relationships. The Jewish Bible describes a process in which the Egyptians oppressed the Jews and enslaved them. The survivors of that oppression moved out, went to the 'Holy Land' and displaced that aggression against Amalek and other native tribes in Canaan. In earlier historical parts of the Bible, personified stories are being told of a period of mixed love and aggression between the ruling Egyptians and the Jewish people (the stories of Joseph and Moses). Perhaps not surprisingly, we have different accounts of love and aggression between the Jewish conquerors of the Holy Land and the native nations whom they tried to subordinate or annihilate.

In this respect, it is interesting to analyze the difference between the story of Delilah and Samson and the stories of Joseph and Moses. Samson is the Jewish conqueror, symbolizing the physical power encountering the native Delilah who tries to disempower him by cutting off his hair, the source of his unusual strength. In the stories of Moses or Joseph, the power resided with the Egyptians but wisdom and spiritual capacities created the strength of the Jewish figures. The story of David and Goliath shows a different aspect: how a Jew is described as being physically weaker but cleverer compared to his huge Philistine aggressor. In the Jewish tradition the story of Samson is an exception, suggesting that this was a temporary reaction of admiring physical strength, shortly after the exodus from Egypt, that did not last very long.

It is important to remember, before we move further with the argument of displacement of aggression that we talk about a triad of unresolved relationships that comprises this phenomena:

1. A dominant powerful social group that is in a close and asymmetrical relationships with a weaker or dependent group. The asymmetry in power relations facilitates the tendency of using manifested or subtle forms of power and aggression in the interaction with the other group, to fulfill ones' needs or goals, without a real danger of being hit back directly. At a certain point, a projection of evil on the weaker group may bring about severe violent acts toward the latter. This I define as first order aggression.
2. The oppressed group, being motivated by their own need to survive as a collective, cannot retaliate because of its own dependency on the dominant group. Therefore, it internalizes the aggression, as part of its identification with the aggressor.
3. The emotional burden of the internalized aggression does not fade away over time. It searches for ways of legitimate expression in forms of displaced aggression, usually on available weaker social entities. This I define as second order aggression.

None of these three social groups involved in such a triad succeeded in solving its basic problem by this process: The dominant group does not create a reciprocal relationship of mutual respect with their dependent social group. Instead, a rather complex relationship develops of extreme traumatic power and dependence, usually mixed with intentional silencing or paradoxical morality (Bar-On, 1989a; 1995). The oppressed group escapes indifference with the cost of internalizing the unacceptance and the aggression. The third group, that is the subject to the displaced aggression of the oppressed group does not understand where all this came from and may follow later the oppressed own pattern, after their own relationship has been asymmetrically distorted and transformed as well. This reaction may hinder them from approaching

the dominant group, clarifying the origins of this complex pattern in an effort to resolve it (Bar-On, 1999b).

Could this complex process of second order aggression, of displaced aggression and identification with the aggressor, account for why Jews did not take revenge on their Nazi oppressors? This is not an easy issue to address. First, it seems to put an additional labeling on the side of the victims of Nazism. Second, it is very difficult to follow through such processes on the level of socio-historical processes. One cannot eliminate or control other factors that may affect these complex processes, besides the after-effect of the relationships between the German oppressors and their Jewish victims and the latter relationships with their victims. Still, can the concept of displaced aggression help us understand why Jews did not take revenge on Germans?

In one of the discussions of the TRT group<sup>3</sup> (Time Watch, 1993), Joe Albeck, a child of a survivor, said: “When I write about the Holocaust, I describe it as lost love. When the Nazis decided to kill the Jews love was lost there, at that moment. Until now I thought of the lost love only on the side of the victims. But after we hear now the children of Nazi perpetrators, I see that love was lost there not only for us but also for their own families, in ways which we only now start to understand.” The term presented by Joe as ‘lost love’ suggests some usually ignored element in Jewish-Nazi relations. While this term can refer to the lost love among the victims’ family members, or to the lost love among the

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<sup>3</sup> - TRT (To Reflect and Trust) group grew out of a group of descendants of Nazi perpetrators that met as a self-help group since October 1988, as a by-product of the interviews the author, carried out in Germany (Bar-On, 1989). After following their work with admiration, as they were the only such self-help group who confronted these issues in Germany, the author asked the group if they would now be ready to meet a group from “the other side.” After they answered positively, he approached a few of his students from Ben Gurion University who studies with him a seminar on the Psycho-social after-effects of the Holocaust on second and third generations. He also approached a few members of ‘One generation After’, an organization of descendants of Holocaust survivors in Boston and New York, whom he met during his Sabbatical at Harvard and MIT, in 1991/2. These three subgroups created the composition of the first Wuppertal encounter, of the group to be later known as the TRT group (Bar-On, 2000a).



perpetrators' family members, can it also refer to the lost love between the Jews and the Germans, the German and the Jews?

We know of love between Jews and Germans prior to the Nazi era. It was kind of symbiotic relationships of love mixed with stereotyping and internalized anti-Semitism (Bar-Tov, 1999; Kirshheimer, 1997). We hear, even among the non-German Jews, such as Anya's father (Bar-On, 1995, chapter four) that Jews trusted the Germans when the war broke out and did not flee from Poland, as they could not imagine that these "civilized people" will harm them in any way. Anya's father was much more afraid of the aggression of the Polish, as Zeev (*ibid*: chapter two) was rightfully afraid of the aggression of his Lithuanians neighbors, than that of the Germans. We heard of accounts from the camps during the war, in which Jews magnify events where they had experienced some acts of benevolence on the side of their oppressors. Even when aggression was part of the relationship, these were experienced as being better than expressions of inhumanity or indifference (Levi, 1960).

The difficult task remains – when accepting the assertion of the lack of proportional aggression and qualifying revenge on the part of the survivors toward the Germans, to follow and clarify the ways and forms in which the survivors displaced their aggression after the war? There is no simple answer to this question. We know from several studies (Rosenthal 1998) that some survivors displaced their aggression against their own children. We would like to believe that this was an exception rather than the rule, as the children were perceived also as the 'total good' which helped the parents struggle with the 'total Nazi evil' (Hadar, 1991). For example, Genia (Bar-On, 1995: Chapter one) describes how her children "paid the price" for what she went through in Auschwitz ("where my heart was burnt"). Her daughter, Zipke, tells us how she was beaten up and humiliated by her mother. Here we find an example of this complicated composition of aggression and love or need

for protection. In Boston, a group of battered women was formed in 1995, daughters of Holocaust survivors, who tried to work through their abusing parents' behavior. This aspect of the Holocaust was silenced for many years, because of its difficult moral and human implications. Still, for most of the survivors their children were the most precious part of their lives. They wanted to defend them from any harm, rather than let their internalized aggression onto them<sup>4</sup>. So, who else could be the target group of this displaced aggression?

#### **4. The triad – German Nazis, Israeli Jews and Palestinians**

Coming back now to the visit of Jewish Israeli, Palestinian and German students in Buchenwald, from the perspective of displacement of aggression, the most significant target group of Israeli-Jews aggression, when confronted with the Holocaust, were the Palestinians. The Jewish students at that visit did not direct their anger and grief at the German participants. Even when they were critical in regard to some specific aspects related to the attitudes of Germans during their visit at the camp, these were presented by them as concerning practical and technical issues and did not cause any deeper uncontrolled outburst of emotions. The deeper negative emotions came out later during that day and were clearly aimed at the Palestinian students (Halaby, 1999). We have several other examples of such triangular encounters in which this pattern repeats itself (Bar-On, 2000).

It is quite clear that the relationships between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians are complicated and multi-dimensional, composed of several historical periods and social constructions. One historical social construction of Zionism was that the Palestinians were the aggressors and the Jews were their victims. There is also the contrary construction that the Jews were the powerful and dominant group, relating toward the Palestinian with

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<sup>4</sup> - Though, as psychologists we know that overprotection can be also a transformed form of aggression (Freud, 1930).

indifference, or in a patronizing and stereotypical way, using at times extensive aggression to humiliate and oppress them as a collective. My additional point to this controversy is, however, that the combination of severe use by the Israeli-Jews of verbal and physical power against the Palestinians, compared to the lack of **similar passion** and activity against the Germans after the war, suggests a hidden process of displacement of aggression.

Can it be that the Palestinians have become targets of the displaced aggression of Jews after the Holocaust? The relationship with the Palestinians was initially ignored or idealized by Zionist visionaries such as Herzl (Bar-On, 1999b). Like in typical other Colonial relationships, the Palestinians were expected to admire and be thankful to the Jews for the economic and social benefits that they would gain from the new settlers. If at all Palestinians initially reacted with admiration it was soon replaced by anger and hatred toward the new settlers who took over their land and political power. Palestinians, feeling totally ignored by the Jewish settlements and later by the British Mandate (especially after the Balfour declaration, in 1917), reacted with violence. The Zionists, first as an act of self-defense but also as part of an ultimate redemptive ideology of ownership, reacted violently (Morris, 1999).

Gur-Zeev and Pappe emphasize the way both Palestinians and Israelis tend to ignore the pain of the Other's collective memory, specifically the Holocaust and Al-Nakba<sup>5</sup>, as part of maintaining the conflict (Gur-Zeev & Pappe, in press). They recognize today a shift in the form in which a few intellectuals from both sides tried to develop a counter-argument in favor of mutual recognition of both collective memories (Saghiyeh & Bashir, 2000). Still, the authors see the mutual lack of acknowledgement in a symmetrical way, as part of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, rather than an asymmetrical relationship, associated to a more complex triad of relationship between Germans, Jews and Palestinians.

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<sup>5</sup> - Al-Nakba, the Catastrophe in Arabic, presents the Palestinian perspective of what had happened to them in the 1948 war.

In order to follow this complexity, one should remember that the Jews, who emigrated from Europe before and after WWII, still saw themselves as Europeans in spite of the emigration to the Middle East and in spite of the Holocaust. As such, they saw themselves closer to their European aggressors than toward the native Muslims of the Middle East, perhaps even closer to their European oppressors than toward the Jews who used to live among the Muslims in the Afro-Asian countries (Bar-On, 1999b). The latter, not having the Holocaust as part of their personal memory and family heritage, learned with the generation change to identify with the Holocaust and use it as part of their struggle to be accepted by the dominant Western Jewish culture. The Afro-Asian Jews did so among others, by displacing their internalized aggression as an oppressed minority on the Palestinians, the ones further down in the Israeli pecking order.

The Palestinian argument that they have “paid the price” for what the Jews suffered in Europe (Bishara, 1996; Said, 1997), especially for the Nazi aggression against the Jews in the Shoah, cannot be totally ignored. One could claim that the Palestinian acts of hostility towards Israeli Jews hit an open nerve and brought extreme reactions from the Jewish side. The idealized expectation of love was replaced now with aggression and violence. In such situations it is useless to ask who started this vicious violent cycle. The Jews who were “loaded” with the Nazi and other persecutors’ aggression needed only a spark to let it out and the Palestinians provided such sparks on many occasions during the post-Holocaust years.

In a way, Jews have probably carried aggression from many generations of programs in Europe and other continents. Still, the Holocaust created a new dimension of internalized aggression and lost love and probably new demands for its displacement. In Kazetnik’s fifth book - *Haimut*, (1976), he describes the need of a Holocaust survivor to identify with his aggressor from Auschwitz. He describes a young Jew who wishes to become as vicious

and angry as his oppressor, in order to confront the Arabs who wanted to push the Jews out of our newly built shelter country “into the sea” (Bar-Tov, 1999).

As I described earlier, the private burden and after-effects of the Holocaust carried silently by the survivors in the fifties and sixties, has been replaced in the eighties and nineties by a politicized national burden, which justified ones’ own use of power in light of past victimization. This in itself was a rhetoric of displaced victimization, which was used by right-wing leaders, such as Begin and Shamir, to describe Arafat and Saadam Hussein as the natural continuation of Hitler. The Palestinians were now reconstructed as the aggressor rather than the oppressed, the continuation of Amalek. This construction self-justified retaliation by the Israeli-Jews. Through such a construction, one can project the internalized aggression that was not directed against one’s own aggressor. Through such a reconstruction, Israeli-Jews could also ignore the oppression and suffering of the Palestinians. The latter reacted to this transformation by ignoring the earlier suffering of the Jews or equating what the Jews do to them to what the Nazis did to the Jews during the Holocaust (Gur-Zeev, 1999; Saghiyeh & Bashir, 2000). Saghiyeh and Bashir write in this respect:

“The Arabs and Palestinians adopted the point of view... that admitting the occurrence of the Holocaust is an indirect acceptance of the right of Israel to exist. Therefore, they prefer to doubt its occurrence or even react favorably to its denial... at most they perceive the Holocaust as an event that has nothing to do with them. The problem is that thereby, unwittingly, they adopt an Israeli inference that draws a direct line between the Holocaust and the need for the State of Israel. The Arabs inability to accommodate the Holocaust is understandable, even if not justified. They have been hurt by a history which is not theirs and they had to carry the burden of the consequences of that terrible crime.”

We can see how the relationship became symmetrically polarized, with no place for mutual acknowledgement of the real pain of neither the Israeli-Jews nor the Palestinians.

Where are the Germans as the original instigators of this triad of displaced aggression? Some are loaded with collective guilt feelings, as to what they had done to the Jews during the Holocaust. As such, they must also be worried by the possibility of the Jewish aggression against Palestinians, as they themselves could be the origin of this aggression. Only now they have no more control over its ripple effects or second order aggression. Others feel relieved when they hear about the Israeli-Jewish aggression toward the Palestinians. These Germans feel that this second order aggression exhibited by the Israeli-Jews toward the Palestinians diminished their own responsibility for the first order aggression, e.g., the crimes their people had committed against the Jews during the Holocaust. This process helps them relativize the one to the other.

Germans tend therefore to feel deeply involved in the Middle Eastern conflict in several ways. For some, the first order aggression is in the focus. One can feel their deep commitment for the safety of Jews in general and Israel, in particular, as a kind of compensation for “what we have done to them” during the Nazi era. For others, we can observe that the second order aggression is in the focus. They feel a kind of relief from the burden of guilt as they construct the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as “the Israelis do to the Palestinians what the Nazis did to the Jews.” This construction became relevant, for example, after the Sabra & Shatilla massacre in 1982 (Segev, 1990). We can also find a deep sorrow among some Germans for “the Void” (perhaps an alternative expression for lost love) they have created, as a result of the extermination of the Jews in Europe (Bauer, 1982). There is today also a claim for normalizing the special relationship between the Jews and the Germans<sup>6</sup>. This claim, however, still meets the roar of those who carry in

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<sup>6</sup> - A presentation after the 1998 elections in Germany in which Wassner suggested that Germans should deal with their future and not with their past.

them the unfinished emotional burden of the original aggressor, which goes on in one displaced form or another.

It is interesting that the psychological perspective of the displacement of Nazi aggression was never considered in the Holocaust literature till now as an outcome of the lack of revenge by Jews against Germans after the war. Perhaps it has to do with the fact that only now the possibility of lost love between Germans and Jews can be considered (Bar-Tov, 1999). Earlier, such an argument, especially if presented by non-Jews, would probably be immediately refuted and deconstructed as a new form of anti-Semitism. The Palestinian's claim that they "had to pay the price for what the Jews went through in Europe" would go through a similar process of deconstruction by the Israeli and the Diaspora Jews. Accepting such a claim creates for Israeli Jews a need for reflection that they have tried to avoid until now. Perhaps it is time for such a process of recognition and reflection to take place between the three partners of the triad. This should definitely happen between the two victimized peoples of the Middle East conflict, as part of the Peace Process and as part of their own need to mature from the complex after-effects of the Holocaust, from seeing themselves only as mutual victims (Bar-On, 2000; Maoz & Bar-On, submitted).

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