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## **Social representations of the Holocaust and Jewish Israeli identity construction: insights from identity process theory**

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This study explores how a group of young Israeli Jews understood and defined their ethno-national identities, focusing upon the role of social representations of the Holocaust in the construction of Jewish Israeli identity. Eleven individuals were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. Transcripts were subjected to interpretative phenomenological analysis. The analysis was informed by identity process theory and social representations theory. Three superordinate themes are reported, entitled: (i) “perceptions of the Holocaust as a personal and shared loss”; (ii) “re-conceptualising the Holocaust and its impact upon intra-/ intergroup relations”; and (iii) “the Holocaust as a heuristic lens for understanding the Israeli-Arab conflict”. The data suggest that awareness of social representations of the Holocaust may enhance the belonging and continuity principles of identity, in particular. It is argued that the maintenance of national ingroup security constitutes a source of (group) continuity. Implications for psychological well-being are discussed.

Keywords: Holocaust; Jewish identity; identity process theory; social representations; psychological well-being; social psychology; qualitative

The Holocaust, the mass genocide of approximately six million Jews during the Nazi era, symbolises for the vast majority of people the ultimate in human depravity and cruelty. The Holocaust continues to represent an important social and historical issue. This is exemplified by the number of Holocaust museums and memorials, which have opened around the world, as well as the widespread support for the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Days (Ben-Amos & Bet-El, 1999). Jews, both within Israel (Lazar et al., 2008) and in the Diaspora (Blumner, 2006), have been said to regard the Holocaust in terms of a ‘cultural trauma’. This is particularly acute among Israeli Jews, who are frequently exposed to social representations of the Holocaust. There has been considerable research into the psychological functioning and general mental health of Holocaust survivors (Glicksman & van Haitsma, 2002; Kellerman, 2001; Solomon, 1998; van Ijzendoorn et al., 2003), particularly given the extensive ‘silencing’ of these issues in the early days of the establishment of Israel (Bar-On et al., 1998; Bar-On, 2008). Over the last decade, there has been some socio-psychological research into the perceptions of subsequent generations of Israeli Jews towards the Holocaust, particularly from phenomenological and narrative analytic perspectives (Chaitin, 2000; Lazar et al., 2008). This research has made immensely important strides in elucidating the social significance of the Holocaust, by providing insight into the subjective meanings attached to this act of genocide. The present paper makes a

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socio-psychological contribution to this literature by exploring the role of social representations of the Holocaust specifically within Jewish Israeli identity construction. The analysis is informed by identity process theory (Breakwell, 1986) and social representations theory (Moscovici, 1988), which, collectively, provide the heuristic tools necessary for understanding the relationship between social representations and identity construction.

### **The historical persecution of the Jews**

Even prior to the Holocaust, Jewish history is fraught with acts of persecution (Wistrich, 1999a). The Jewish people were exiled from their homeland of Judah during the rule of the Babylonian Empire, giving rise to a Jewish Diaspora all over the world (Sachar, 1985; Cohen, 1996). In the Christian world, they have been accused of deicide, the killing of God, which has been invoked as a justification for anti-Semitism (Schweitzer & Perry, 2002). Subsequent to their exile, Jews continued to face persecution in the lands they settled in, including expulsion from England in 1290, from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1497. For centuries Jews have been demonised in the visual arts (Amishai-Maisels, 1999), in Modern European thought (Kulka, 1999), in Muslim thought (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1999), as well as in contemporary European culture (Friedländer, 1999; Wistrich, 1999b). Pauley (2002) argues that in some of their host countries, Jews were attributed an exceptional social position, defamed as an inferior group and constructed as 'other' to co-nationals. However, the most devastating act of aggression against the Jews was undoubtedly the Holocaust, which was perpetrated by the Nazis and their collaborators from the early 1940s until 1945 (Gilbert, 1982). Given its social significance, the Holocaust has become a metaphor for Jewish history (Stein, 1978). Knowledge of these historical acts of persecution, culminating in the Nazi Holocaust, perhaps means that some Israeli Jews regard themselves as being excluded from non-Jewish mainstream societies. This would be expected to undermine one's sense of acceptance from others and inclusion in society, which are fundamental human motivations (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Preceding the establishment of the state of Israel, tension and violent confrontation arose between Zionist Jews and Arabs regarding Jewish rights to inhabit and work in the land (Ben-Amos & Bet-El, 1999). Additionally, multiple, recurring intergroup conflicts have arisen between Israel and the neighbouring regions regarding the status of Israel as a legitimate state within the Middle East (Ben-Amos & Bet-El, 1999). This has given rise to an antagonistic psychological intergroup repertoire between Jews and Arabs (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). The aforementioned recurring incidents of persecution, coupled with the Arab-Israeli conflict, have led to the development of what is termed a 'siege' mentality, which refers to the social representation that the world, consisting of outgroups, is united in its desire and motivation to inflict harm against the ingroup (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; see also Oren, 2010). The siege mentality consists of feelings of insecurity, resulting in perceived threats to the survival and continuity of the ingroup; in the case of the Jewish people, the ultimate threat to the survival of the ethno-religious ingroup was the Holocaust. In their examination of siege mentality in Israel, Bar-Tal and Antebi (1992) identify both the historical events outlined above, the perceived inaction of the world during the Holocaust and Arab invasions of Israel during the twentieth century as contributing to and fortifying siege mentality. Furthermore, the authors propose that this siege mentality is an important variable in understanding Israeli-Arab relations (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005).

### **Role of the Holocaust in contemporary Jewish Israeli society**

The Holocaust continues to play a prominent role in Jewish Israeli society to such an extent that it could be considered a *national* trauma (Elon, 1981; Lazar et al., 2008). In their examination of Holocaust memorial ceremonies in Israel, Ben-Amos and Bet-El (1999) demonstrate that the commemoration of both the Holocaust and the state of Israel has become an integral part of civic and educational spheres of Jewish Israeli life. For instance, Holocaust Remembrance Day, a national holiday, has been established as a day of equal prominence with the National Day in Israel. Moreover, history lessons and discussions with Holocaust survivors form part of the Israeli school system. In short, social representations of the Holocaust are particularly active in Jewish Israeli society.

As the most destructive act of genocide against the Jews, the Holocaust understandably evokes strong emotions among most Jews both within and outside of Israel (Rakova, 1997). For instance, Schaverien (1998) has argued that many Jews carry the 'inter-generational scars' of the Holocaust regardless of whether or not they have had first-hand experience with the Holocaust. Similarly, Lazar et al. (2008) have argued that the Holocaust constitutes a cultural trauma for many Israeli Jews (see also Alexander, 2004). Their results suggest that participants relate to the Holocaust via the education system, in particular, since this is a primary method of transmitting the history and societal importance of the Holocaust, regardless of whether or not they were descendents of individuals who experienced the Holocaust directly. Others have discussed the additional role of the familial environment in the transmission of Holocaust knowledge (van Ijzendoorn et al., 2003). Lazar et al. (2008) note that some participants regarded Israel as a safe, sovereign nation in which Jews could benefit from a considerable degree of security and freedom from persecution. The need for a sense of ingroup security is particularly acute within Israeli society (Arian, 1995; Bar-Tal, 1991; Stone, 1982)

Social representations of enhanced ingroup security among Jews in Israel could be attributed to their majority status within the country. Indeed, Elon (1981) identified the widespread belief that one major contributing factor to the Holocaust was the lack of a Jewish sovereign state. This social representation is likely to be of contemporary social relevance, given that there exists a widespread belief that Jews must maintain their demographic numerical superiority vis-à-vis that of ethno-religious outgroups, such as the Palestinians (Bar-On, 2008; Remmenick, 2008). Moreover, thinking about the Holocaust may be conducive to perceived threats to the survival of Jews in Israel, which in turn encourages the desire for greater intragroup solidarity (Lazar et al., 2008). In order for their group identity to persist, it is essential to preserve and enhance a sense of distinctiveness from outgroups, which constitutes a fundamental means of collective identity construction (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). Baranowsky et al. (1997) observe that both descendants and non-descendants of Holocaust survivors may exhibit a 'great death anxiety', which is comparable to the notion of siege mentality (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992). Despite this anxiety, participants in Lazar et al.'s (2008) study expressed a desire to preserve the social memory of the Holocaust in order to ensure that it may never transpire again. As illustrated earlier, the authors' findings also demonstrate that social representations of the Holocaust remain active in several spheres of Jewish Israeli society, with social memories and symbols of the Holocaust shaping individuals' dominant worldview and their personal values (Lazar et al., 2008; see also Linn, 1996).

### **Jewish Israeli identity and intergroup relations**

Bar-On (2008) identifies a number of phases in the process of Jewish Israeli identity construction, although his account focuses specifically upon secular Ashkenazi Jews. He observes that the Palestinian-Arabs came to constitute a potent 'Other' against which a *monolithic* Jewish Israeli identity could be constructed (see also Triandafyllidou, 2001). Arabs could be said to constitute the 'Other' which enhances the distinctiveness of the Jewish Israeli ingroup (Vignoles et al., 2000). Accordingly, many contemporary studies refer to the Arab-Israeli conflict as a crucial characteristic of Israeli national identity, especially since security is perceived as an important underlying principle (Kimmerling & Backer, 1985; Ben-Eliezer, 1998; Bar-Tal, 2007; Oren, 2010). Crucially, Bar-On (2008) observes that Arabs were regarded by many Jews as a 'continuation' of the German Nazis who had perpetrated the Holocaust. Moreover, the anchoring of Arabs to social representations of German Nazis perhaps meant that both Arabs and Nazis were perceived as posing an 'existential threat to the personal and collective Jewish self' (Bar-On, 2008, p. 8). Like the Nazis, Arabs were regarded as seeking the annihilation of the Jews. In fact, Bar-On (2008) observed that when his participants were asked to describe their attitudes towards Palestinians, they tended to focus on how they thought they themselves were perceived by Palestinians. Some individuals concluded that it was impossible to like people who feel such a 'deep-rooted hatred' towards one's ingroup. It is reasonable to assume that the security and even the continuity of the Jewish Israeli ingroup were thereby perceived as being threatened. One result of these threats to ingroup security and continuity is the social representation that Arabs cannot be trusted since the perceived goal of the Arabs is to annihilate the Jews, rather than to achieve peace with them. The ability to deal with security threats is likely to be conducive to a sense of efficacy, which is essential for psychological well-being (La Guardia et al., 2000). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Israeli Jews would actively seek to enhance ingroup security.

Clearly, the Holocaust plays an important role in the construction of this monolithic identity, since it embodies the threat of annihilation which continues to be feared by many Israeli Jews (Bar-Tal, 1991; Rakover, 1997). It has been observed that the Holocaust has been employed rhetorically as a political tool to justify policies regarding the Palestinian-Arabs (Segev, 1992). Political parties in Israel frequently employ security as the key 'buzzword' for attracting votes, primarily because ingroup security constitutes an issue which dominates the public agenda in Israel (Bar-Tal, 1991). Moreover, some Israeli Jews perceive themselves as 'eternal victims of the Holocaust' (Bar-On, 2008, p. 128). This line of thought is supported by a study, which explored the effect of visits to Auschwitz in Europe upon Israeli Jews' empathy towards Palestinians (Shechter & Salomon, 2004). It was shown that participants who initially held fairly negative attitudes towards Palestinians exhibited a decreased level of empathy towards Palestinians following their visit to Auschwitz. Given the hegemonic social representations of threat and the siege mentality which permeates Jewish Israeli society, it would be reasonable to assume that attitudes towards the Palestinian Other are generally negative. This leads to the hypothesis that invoking the Holocaust may generally increase feelings of threat and decrease feelings of empathy.

### **Identity process theory**

The present paper focuses upon individuals' meaning-making vis-à-vis the Holocaust and the role of social representations of the Holocaust in the construction of Jewish Israeli identity. Identity process theory (IPT; Breakwell, 1986, 1988, 1992, 1993, 2001) provides an integrative

framework of identity construction, with a particular focus upon individual and collective responses to threatened identity.

IPT proposes that the structure of identity should be conceptualised in terms of its content and value/ affect dimensions and that this structure is regulated by two universal processes, namely the assimilation-accommodation process and the evaluation process. The assimilation-accommodation process refers to the absorption of new information in the identity structure and of the adjustment which takes place in order for it to become part of the structure. The evaluation process confers meaning and value upon the contents of identity.

Breakwell (1986, 1992) identified four identity principles which guide these universal processes, namely continuity across time and situation, uniqueness or distinctiveness from others, feeling confident and in control of one's life, and feelings of personal worth or social value. IPT refers to these, respectively, as continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy and self-esteem. Extending IPT, Vignoles and colleagues (Vignoles et al., 2002; Vignoles et al., 2006) have proposed two additional identity 'motives', namely belonging, which refers to the need to maintain feelings of closeness to and acceptance by other people, and meaning, which refers to the need to find significance and purpose in one's life. Jaspal and Cinnirella (in press, a) have proposed the psychological coherence principle, which refers to the motive to develop and maintain the subjective perception of compatibility between one's (interconnected) identities (see also Jaspal & Coyle, 2009). The theory suggests that when the processes are unable to comply with these principles, identity is threatened. This has clear implications for mental health since threatened identity will be conducive to low levels of psychological well-being (Breakwell, 1986). To minimise the negative impact for psychological well-being, the individual will engage in coping strategies to alleviate identity threat. A coping strategy is defined as 'any activity, in thought or deed, which has as its goal the removal or modification of a threat to identity' (Breakwell, 1986, p. 78). An additional benefit of applying IPT is that it allows the researcher to theorise the relationships between these principles in specific socio-psychological contexts.

IPT acknowledges the importance of social representations in shaping how social phenomena will impact the principled operation of identity processes (Breakwell, 1986, 2001). For Breakwell (1986, p. 55), a 'social representation is essentially a construction of reality', which enables individuals to interpret the social world and to render it meaningful. The two processes of social representations include 'objectification', whereby abstract phenomena are rendered concrete, and 'anchoring' whereby unfamiliar phenomena are integrated into existing ways of thinking (Moscovici, 1988). IPT postulates that identity processes will determine how the individual will 'personalise' a representation, that is, the extent to which it is accepted and internalised by the individual. Conversely, social representations are said to shape the content and value dimensions of identity (Breakwell, 2001). The social representational dimension of IPT is fundamental for understanding the dominant representations of the Holocaust and how they subsequently become personalised at the individual level. The personalisation of social representations is important as it is likely to predict individual behaviour (Breakwell, 2001).

### **Aims**

The present paper explores the subjective meanings, which a group of young Israeli Jews attach to the Holocaust, and the role played by the Holocaust in the construction of Jewish Israeli identity. More specifically, this paper investigates the ways in which social representations of the Holocaust impinge upon the principled operation of identity processes (Breakwell, 1986).

An important aim is to demonstrate the socio-psychological ‘functions’ performed by social representations of the Holocaust in Jewish Israeli identity construction.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

Eleven Israeli-born Jewish participants were recruited. All participants were students from Israel who had arrived in the United Kingdom to work for the summer, having recently completed their mandatory military service in Israel. The study focused solely upon the experiences of Israeli Jews in order to obtain insight into how social representations of the Holocaust within the Israeli national context impacts identity construction.

A snowball sampling strategy was employed, with the initial participants recruited through the first author’s social networks. Of the 11 participants, 2 were descendants of Holocaust survivors. 7 were male and 4 female, with a mean age of 25.7 years (SD: 0.9). Six participants were currently enrolled on a university course in Israel and the remaining five planned to go to university upon their return to Israel. Four of the participants described themselves as Ashkenazi Jews (of Eastern European origin), five self-identified as ‘Mizrahi Jews’ (of Yemenite and Indian origin) and two defined themselves as ‘Sephardic Jews’ (of North African origins). Participants’ ethnic backgrounds are indicated due to their potential relevance to the data analysis.

### **Interview schedule**

Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule consisting of 10 exploratory, open-ended questions. The schedule began with questions regarding self-description and identity, followed by questions regarding knowledge of the Holocaust, the relevance of the Holocaust in their lives, and questions eliciting their views towards relevant ethnic and religious outgroups. Explanatory probes were used where necessary.

All participants were interviewed individually in the interviewer’s home. Six interviews were conducted in Hebrew and the remaining five were conducted in English. Interviews lasted between 45 and 120 minutes. They were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts in Hebrew were translated into English before analysis.

### **Analytic approach**

The data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA: Smith, 1996; Smith & Osborn, 2008), which is a qualitative analytic technique that aims to capture participants’ attempts to make sense of relevant aspects of their personal and social worlds. IPA conceptualises the participant as a ‘cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being’ (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p.54) and assumes a relationship between verbal reports and the cognitions and emotions with which they are concerned. Since IPA focuses upon the meanings that particular lived experiences hold for the individual, it was anticipated that this analytic strategy would shed light upon the subjective perceptual processes associated with participants’ attempts to make sense of their religious and ethnic identities and the role played by knowledge of the Holocaust in the construction of these identities and in perceptions of ethno-religious outgroups. Moreover, IPA’s idiographic mode of enquiry facilitated the in-depth exploration of *each* individual’s account of their experiences (Smith et al., 1995).

### **Analytic procedures**

Turning to the analytic procedures, first the transcripts were read repeatedly in order to become as intimate as possible with the accounts. During each reading, preliminary impressions and interpretations were noted in the left margin. Subsequently, the right margin was used to note emerging theme titles which captured the essential qualities of the accounts. This procedure was repeated with every interview transcript, each of which gave rise to three or four main themes. The first author conducted all analyses, which were subsequently discussed with the second author. The main themes of each transcript were themselves organised into a final set of superordinate themes, although some of the original main themes, which did not directly address the research questions, were discarded. The superordinate themes representing the 10 accounts were then ordered into a logical and coherent narrative structure.

In the quotations from participants that are presented in the next section, three dots within square brackets indicate where material has been excised; other material within square brackets is clarificatory; text in italics indicates words that were stressed by participants; and material in round brackets indicates broad para-linguistic features.

### **ANALYSIS**

This section reports some of the most important themes which elucidate participants' representations of the Holocaust and its perceived role in Jewish Israeli identity construction. The study reports the following three themes: (i) "perceptions of the Holocaust as a personal and shared loss"; (ii) "re-conceptualising the Holocaust and its impact upon intra-/ intergroup relations"; and (iii) "the Holocaust as a heuristic lens for understanding the Israeli-Arab conflict".

#### **Perceptions of the Holocaust as a personal and shared loss**

A central concern in the present study was to explore how participants discussed, understood and conceptualised the Holocaust. There was a consensual representation of the Holocaust in terms of a poignant loss; more specifically, this sense of loss seemed to be construed by those participants who had lost members of their family in the Holocaust as a *personal* loss.

I wasn't around, I wasn't there, it's before my time, you know, but it's still alive for me and for all the people who lost family in the Holocaust [...] My grandparents died, their parents died and my parents were like orphans so it is still alive for me, like it's a personal thing for me, whether they talk about it or not, it's always going to be there because I know (Sonia, female, Ashkenazi)

Despite the temporal distance of the Holocaust from participants (e.g., 'I wasn't around, I wasn't there, it's before my time'), they described its continual psychological presence. The Holocaust was defined by some as being 'still alive', which seemed to highlight the lasting impact of the Holocaust in Jewish Israeli society (Lazar et al., 2008). Sonia, for instance, attributed the persistent 'vitality' of the Holocaust in her meaning-making to the fact that her grandparents and her great-grandparents had perished during the Holocaust, which had direct repercussions for her own parents who 'were like orphans'. Participants constructed the Holocaust as a personal loss insofar as their own family members had been directly affected by the genocide; this was particularly pervasive among Ashkenazi Jewish participants. Interestingly, Sonia constructed the pervasiveness and ubiquity of the Holocaust in her meaning-making as non-context-dependent in the sense that actual invocations of the Holocaust were not a necessary prerequisite for it to

become psychologically salient: ‘whether they talk about it or not, it’s always going to be there’. In short, her *knowledge* of the Holocaust alone was construed as being sufficient in rendering the Holocaust a psychologically salient phenomenon: ‘because I know’. This demonstrates that even a deeply traumatic (collective) phenomenon can come to form an integral part of the identity structure, whose legacy must be maintained in order to safeguard the continuity principle of identity (Breakwell, 1986). In short, the psychological continuity of the Holocaust is essential for the continuity of identity itself. Under close scrutiny, it seemed that familial experience of the Holocaust influenced the extent to which it formed part of the individual’s meaning-making:

Interviewer: How do you know, I mean, like how have you learned most things about it [the Holocaust] though?

Sonia: Everyone in Israel knows it, every proper Jewish person does and should know it [...] My parents told me what they went through though, that makes it even more painful.

On the one hand, the Holocaust is constructed as a socio-culturally ubiquitous phenomenon in Jewish Israeli society since ‘everyone in Israel knows it’ and ‘every Jewish person does and should know it’. This is coterminous with the notion that the Holocaust represents a *cultural* trauma (Lazar et al., 2008). It is noteworthy that knowledge of the Holocaust is depicted as an important self-aspect associated with Jewish Israeli identity (Simon, 2004). Crucially, it is defined as a *prerequisite* for authenticity as an ingroup member, which is indicated by the qualifier ‘*proper* Jewish person’; this seems to imply that the lack of knowledge concerning the Holocaust constitutes a marker of inauthenticity. It has been found in other research that groups may prioritise or attach particular importance to self-aspects which are collectively perceived as constituting ‘true’ markers of authenticity (Jaspal & Coyle, 2009, in press). This could be interpreted as a means of safeguarding a sense of belonging, which constitutes an important identity motive (Vignoles et al., 2006). In order to be considered an authentic ingroup member and to derive a sense of acceptance and inclusion from other ingroup members, Holocaust knowledge is vital.

However, on the other hand, for Sonia, knowledge of the Holocaust is not the sole factor which contributes to its vividness and psychological meaningfulness at the intrapsychic level. The more specific social representations of the Holocaust experience, disseminated by members of her own family circle, which Moscovici (1988) would refer to as emancipated representations, seem to be anchored to hegemonic social representations of the Holocaust (Moscovici, 1988). The anchoring of emancipated representations, which may be open to debate and contestation due to their association with a subgroup within the larger collective, to hegemonic representations possibly serves to ‘upgrade’ the emancipated representations to hegemonic ‘status’. Moreover, the process of anchoring what one has learnt in a more specific social context (in the familial home) to what one has learnt in the national context (e.g. at school, in the media) perhaps enables individuals to make sense of the Holocaust and to attribute further meaning to the event. In Sonia’s account, the anchoring process seemed to render the personal, though not first-hand, experience of the Holocaust ‘even more painful’. This process of optimising meaning-making vis-à-vis the Holocaust is likely to benefit the meaning principle of identity, which seeks purpose and significance in the existence of one’s group, in that it perhaps positions the specific subgroup’s experiences within the dominant matrix of the national ingroup (see Baumeister, 1991; Vignoles et al., 2006).



It was predicted that the Holocaust would be conceptualised differently according to the ethno-national background of the participant. This seemed a plausible hypothesis given that Mizrahi Jews, for instance, would be unlikely to have lost close family members in the Holocaust due to these ethnic groups' geo-political distance from Nazi-occupied Europe at the time. However, it is acknowledged that many Sephardic Jews living in Nazi-occupied North Africa faced anti-Semitic discrimination, violence and dehumanisation from the Nazis and their collaborators (Gilbert, 1982). The analysis revealed that all participants, regardless of ethnic background, seemed to construct the Holocaust in terms of a loss. However, among many Mizrahi Jews this was constructed, more specifically, as a *shared* loss, echoing the conceptualisation of the Holocaust as a cultural trauma (Lazar et al., 2008).

You know, my parents they came from India and so, you know, the Holocaust it didn't reach us, thank God, like I mean we didn't have any relatives killed in the Holocaust and, yeah, the Jews were fine in India, respected, high class, like in the government so we were liked there so the Holocaust it wasn't like a personal thing for me (Moshe, male, Mizrahi)

In his account, Moshe appears to accept and reproduce the social representation that Jews in India enjoyed high social status ('respected', 'high class', 'we were liked') and a degree of institutional support ('in the government'), and that they were not personally threatened in the Indian context (Sachar, 1985). Similarly, Boaz, who laid claim to Jewish Indian ethnic origins, refuted the social representation that Jews are 'hated all over the world' and provided India as an example of one national context in which 'Jews were a part of the community':

It's not true that Jews are hated all over the world though [...] My parents came from Bombay and they miss it so much. Jews were a part of the community there (Boaz, male, Mizrahi)

In terms of identity processes, the social representation that one's ethno-religious group is universally and consensually regarded with hostility is likely to be threatening for self-esteem (Breakwell, 1986). Within IPT, the self-esteem principle refers to 'the motivation to maintain and enhance a positive conception of oneself' (Gecas, 1982, p.20) and, thus, it is reasonable to predict that low self-esteem would jeopardise psychological well-being. Given that group membership is believed to form an important part of the self, the self-esteem principle might plausibly be said to encompass the motivation to maintain and enhance a positive conception of one's group membership, which is coherent with theorising within the social identity tradition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). To accept social representations of one's ingroup as loathsome would be unlikely to enhance self-esteem and thus it is deflected from the identity structure (Breakwell, 1986). One strategy to eschew threats to identity is to accept and to reproduce social representations which help to enhance the identity principles (Breakwell, 2001; Jaspal & Coyle, 2009). This may explain why some individuals employed the identity-enhancing strategy of internalising and reproducing social representations with positive outcomes for self-esteem.

Moshe's accentuation of the social status of Jews in India perhaps serves to distance the Holocaust from his Indian Jewish ethnic ingroup and, by extension, from himself. This leads him to conclude that 'it [the Holocaust] wasn't like a personal thing for me'. This seems to echo recent findings that young Israeli Jews who are not the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors may attribute little *personal* relevance to the Holocaust in their lives (Lazar et al., 2008). In relation to his ethnic identity as an *Indian* Jew, the Holocaust was not deemed to be of personal

relevance, although in Jewish Israeli social contexts (e.g. the school environment) it came to be conceptualised in terms of a shared loss. This echoes the intergroup strategy of switching between one's various group memberships in order to enhance the principled operation of identity processes and thus psychological well-being, which is outlined in identity process theory (IPT; Breakwell, 1986). However, some contexts seem to require self-construal in terms of one's national identity:

[...] when you're in the class with all your friends and then they [the teachers] are telling you about the Holocaust there is something that makes you want to just cry, I tell you, not just crying but like a real heartfelt kind of crying. I cried after my classes thinking about how much we have lost. So many Jews died and so I realised that actually, yes, I have lost something too even if my parents were safe in India. We lost so much in the Holocaust" (Moshe, male, Mizrahi)

Moshe identifies the communal context of the class environment as conducive to the perception of the Holocaust as a *shared* loss. Being 'with all your friends' in the collective, communal context of Holocaust learning seems to be conducive to the collective perception of 'how much *we* (the ethno-national group) have lost'. Thus, it seems that by occupying a collective space, in which all members' ethno-national identities as Israeli Jews are invoked and rendered salient in the socio-psychological context, the Holocaust comes to be perceived as a shared phenomenon. While in the extract above, Moshe anchored his perceptions of the Holocaust to social representations of Indian Jews, which served to distance the phenomenon psychologically from his personal meaning-making, here he anchors these perceptions to social representations associated with the ethno-national category 'Israeli Jew'. This leads to a distinct psychological reaction to the Holocaust, which reflects social representations of loss, death and *personal* pain. This personal pain may be attributed to his self-identification with and self-inclusion in the ethno-religious group, despite the social representation that Indian Jews 'were safe in India'. This perhaps demonstrates the utility of paying special attention to contextual factors in Jewish Israeli individuals' meaning-making vis-à-vis the Holocaust; while the Holocaust may not necessarily be perceived as having personal relevance in some contexts (Lazar et al., 2008), here it is argued that collective contexts (e.g. the school environment) can induce feelings of personal involvement in a collective cultural trauma associated with the Jewish nation. This response may be a by-product of the human motivation for a sense of belonging, accounted for by IPT (Vignoles et al., 2006).

Moshe's membership in the Jewish ethno-religious group, which was rendered salient in the school environment, led him to construe the Holocaust in terms of a shared loss. This seemed to induce negative emotions observable at the individual-level: 'there is something that makes you want to cry'. This acute emotion is differentiated from the weaker, more detached emotions such as interpersonal sympathy: 'not just crying but like a real heartfelt kind of crying'. The distinction between weak, detached, sympathetic emotions (e.g. in response to negative events associated with outgroups) and strong and personal emotions (e.g. in response to events associated with the ingroup) has been observed in other research contexts (see Jaspal & Coyle, 2010). In short, the implication is that these emotions are provoked by the perception that the Holocaust constitutes a tragedy against the ethno-national ingroup with negative *personal* consequences for ingroup members.

The perception of the Holocaust as a shared loss was echoed in accounts from other participants. Sarit's account, below, highlights additional important factors underlying the collective perception of the Holocaust in these terms:

Talking about it like at home, yes, it's sad for us and you feel scared that this could happen in the world because we know that in the world a lot of people have, how do you say, tried to kill the Jews" (Sarit, female, Mizrahi)

Like Moshe and Sonia, Sarit perceives the Holocaust as 'sad for us', Israeli Jews. Crucially, she highlights the notion of *fear* underlying her meaning-making vis-à-vis the Holocaust 'that this could happen in the world because [...] a lot of people have [...] tried to kill the Jews'. Sarit seems to anchor social representations of the position of Jews in the world to consensually shared hegemonic representations of the Holocaust. This may induce fear of genocide, destruction and annihilation, threatening one's sense of ingroup security (Bar-On, 2008; Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Wistrich, 1999a). The Holocaust is employed psychologically as evidence that, after centuries of repeated persecution, the Jews were most destructively targeted by outgroups in the Holocaust and that a repetition of the Holocaust is not entirely impossible. It seems that the frequent discussion of the Holocaust in various social contexts such as in the home, in the school environment, and in other national contexts (Lazar et al., 2008) renders this a psychologically salient socio-cultural phenomenon. Consequently, this serves as a heuristic lens through which other intergroup conflicts may be regarded. Moreover, by anchoring conflict to the Holocaust, the threatening nature of antagonistic outgroups (i.e. Arabs) may be increased (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). In short, the *security* of the ingroup seemed to be perceived as being subject to threat, a feeling which was aggravated by the salience of social representations of the Holocaust.

These *collective* feelings of threat and loss were reportedly experienced and encouraged within the school context:

[In school] I feel like it's my family that died, like my people and my brothers and sisters. Because in the class some people have relatives who died and some don't but we all know each other and like your friend he's Ashkenazi, but he's lost someone and so you feel you lost someone too in the Holocaust. We all feel it. As Jews, we all feel it, we must (Sarit, female, Mizrahi)

Sarit's account of discussing the Holocaust in the familial context indicates that this practice may be conducive to feelings of sadness ('it's sad for us') and fear ('you feel scared'), which seems to undermine psychological well-being. In the school environment the Holocaust is construed primarily in terms of a shared loss. The sharedness of the loss is constructed through the psychological rapprochement of the victims of the Holocaust and of Sarit's generation as a whole; they are constructed in terms of 'my family'. It is not fellow members of her ethno-national group who are constructed as having perished during the Holocaust, but rather 'my people and my brothers and sisters'. This perception of personal loss, which ensues from collective loss, is explicated through reference to the notion that 'in the class some people have relatives who died [...] but we all know each other'. Thus, it seems to be friendship and the positive interpersonal relations between class fellows which facilitate the perception of collective loss. Moreover, these interpersonal relations appear to override the diversity of ethnic categories in the class: 'like your friend he's Ashkenazi, but he's lost someone and so you feel you lost someone too in the Holocaust'. Being an Israeli Jew comes to constitute a superordinate identity category.

This echoes the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), which postulates that ingroup and outgroup categorisation may be shifted to a superordinate level which in turn encourages members of two or more groups to see themselves as belonging to a common

ingroup (see also Jaspal & Coyle, 2010). In terms of identity processes, this shift to self- and other-categorisation at the superordinate level as Israeli Jews is perhaps beneficial for the belonging principle since this encourages feelings of closeness to and acceptance by others within the ingroup (Vignoles et al., 2006). In short, it seems to be exposure to Holocaust education and discussion which induces a sense of ‘oneness’, commonality and, fundamentally, shared loss. Moreover, Sarit’s account echoes that of Sonia in that ‘as Jews, we all feel it [the Holocaust], we must’. This suggests that the perception of the Holocaust as a personal loss by virtue of its negative impact upon the Jewish people is perceived as a pivotal, central self-aspect of Jewish identity, without which one’s identity may not be ‘authenticated’ by others (Simon, 2004). While the Holocaust was frequently construed in terms of loss, there was an observable tendency among some participants to re-conceptualise the Holocaust and, more specifically, to broaden its meanings to encompass other acts of anti-Semitism.

### **Re-conceptualising the Holocaust and its impact upon intra-/ intergroup relations**

There is some evidence that the Jewish identity of some recent immigrants to Israel, such as Russian Jews and Ethiopian Jews, may be repudiated by the ‘Sabra’ (Israeli-born Jews) (Bar-On, 2008; see also Levin-Rozalis, 2000). Several participants in the sample highlighted the differences between non-Israeli-born Jews and the Sabra:

The Africans they are the very traditional ones who have some things which we don’t really do anymore in Israel – in a way I guess they are better Jews (laughs) but not really like us because we moved on (Yiftach, male, Ashkenazi)

Although Yiftach does not repudiate the Jewish identity of immigrants from Ethiopia, he does appear to perceive fundamental cultural differences between the Beta Israel (the historical name for the Jewish Ethiopian community) and the ‘Sabra’. They are depicted as ‘very traditional’ and as engaging in practices ‘which we don’t really do anymore in Israel’; this highlights the modernity of the ‘Sabra’ vis-à-vis the ‘traditional’ character of the Beta Israel (Bar-On, 2008). Thus, this could be interpreted as a means of constructing the Beta Israel as ‘Other’ to the dominant national ingroup. Moreover, this construction of group dynamics possibly enhances the distinctiveness of the ingroup (Breakwell, 1986; Vignoles et al., 2000). In short, the social representation that the Beta Israel do not entirely belong in the State of Israel due to their allegedly alien and antiquated practices was reproduced by some participants in the general context of ‘inter-ethnic relations in Israel’. However, when the topic of inter-ethnic relations was discussed specifically within the context of the Holocaust, a fundamentally different account was offered by the same participant Yiftach:

Well these people [Beta Israel] are Israelis too, they should be. People did nothing for the Jews in Europe but now we built our country we can bring Jews back here from everywhere and we should do this.

Here the Beta Israel ethnic group members are depicted unambiguously as Israelis, that is, as co-members of the ethno-national ingroup. Thus, social representations of their ethno-cultural ‘Otherness’ become dormant (Cinnirella, 1997), and can no longer impede inclusion and acceptance in the ethno-national group. Yiftach seems to anchor the inclusion of Beta Israel in the ethno-national group to social representations regarding the historical persecution of the Jews and the inaction of outgroups, echoing the notion of siege mentality (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992). The rescue and repatriation of Jews to the Land of Israel is perceived as constituting an

important element of Jewish Israeli national identity ('we should do this') given that 'we have built our country'. Having built the Jewish nation, the Israeli Jews are perceived as possessing the national obligation to protect world Jewry including the Beta Israel. Other participants shared the perception that 'Black Jews' could also legitimately lay claim to the Jewish nation:

Black Jews they belong here like we do, they are just as Israeli as us because they are Jews like us, they are hated by some other people who want to kill them, they want another Holocaust, so yes they are part of our nation and we stand for them (Liad, female, Mizrahi)

The Beta Israel are categorised in terms of 'race' as 'Black Jews', which of course constitutes one of the primary markers of difference between 'them' and most other Israeli Jews. However, despite this, they are perceived as possessing a right to settle in Israel due to their 'belonging'. Moreover, an extreme case formulation is employed by the participant in order to reiterate their ethno-national ingroup membership: 'they are *just* as Israeli as us'. Any ethno-racial difference is over-ridden by the ethno-religious superordinate identity: 'they are Jews like us' (see Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). This sense of ethno-religious togetherness appears to stem from the social representation that world Jewry is threatened by ethno-religious outgroups, which is accepted and reproduced by Liad and others (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992). The perception that one's ingroup is threatened physically and symbolically by outgroups is likely to violate perceptions of ingroup security. When security perceptions are threatened, it is possible that the belonging principle becomes active, since group mobilisation is likely to be most effective as a collective strategy when there is co-operation, closeness and acceptance within the ingroup (Jaspal & Sitaridou, 2010). Consequently, the 'otherisation' of individuals on the basis of ethno-racial background is eschewed, since a 'monolithic' Jewish Israeli identity is constructed in opposition to an external 'enemy' (Bar-On, 2008; see also Triandafyllidou, 2001).

As highlighted by Liad's account, perceived threats to ingroup security are depicted as 'another Holocaust'. Other participants were more overt in their re-conceptualisation of the Holocaust as demonstrated by the following account:

The Holocaust was not just in Europe or in the concentration camps but there's been a Holocaust for a long time for the Jews, even my grandma when she tells me in Morocco they [Muslims] did a curfew [...] and my uncle was forced to sleep in the cow shit and they degraded him and beat him so badly this is the same thing [...] the Jews were abused by the whole world at different times (Gilad, male, Sephardic)

Most scholars agree that the Holocaust refers to the specific act of genocide against European Jewry, which was perpetrated by the Nazis and their collaborators (Gilbert, 1982; Salmons, 2003). However, Gilad appears to conceptualise the Holocaust in much broader terms to encompass anti-Semitic persecution, in general. This intrapsychic strategy of re-conceptualisation possibly allows him to position his (Sephardic) ethnic group in relation to the Holocaust, which enhances the meaning principle of identity. More specifically, he refers to persecution against members of his extended family in North Africa perpetrated by Muslim Moroccans, an ethno-religious outgroup. The centrality of the Holocaust in Gilad's meaning-making vis-à-vis anti-Semitism perhaps leads him to anchor examples of persecution of this kind to social representations of the Holocaust. He compares anti-Semitic persecution to the existing stock of familiar and socio-culturally accessible representations associated with the Holocaust, which permeates Jewish Israeli society (Moscovici, 1988). On the one hand, this constitutes a

way to recognise, understand and evaluate anti-Semitism but, on the other hand, this perhaps induces fear about the perceived possibility of future repetitions of genocide. In short, Gilad appears to perceive his ethno-religious ingroup as facing perpetual (security) threats from 'the whole world', which he explains by indicating that various ethno-national groups have engaged in persecutory behaviour against the Jews 'at different times' in history (see Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992). Since the Holocaust is not temporally isolated, it remains a heuristic device to which novel, uncertain situations of persecution and conflict can be anchored (Moscovici, 1988).

Gilad elaborated his account of anti-Semitism in Morocco:

You know in my classes we are told about the camps in Europe but then when my grandma told me she also suffered and my uncle was beaten I realised it all makes sense to me. All the Jews who have come there [Israel] are really one we have all suffered in the world and been stepped on by people. I hugged my grandmother and really understand her when she says these things.

Israeli Jews are frequently exposed to social representations of the Holocaust through various media (e.g. the Press, television, the school environment, the domestic environment) where they may also be exposed to the accounts of Holocaust survivors, for instance. It seems that the personal, familial experiences of what Gilad describes and perceives as 'a Holocaust' are anchored to hegemonic social representations of the (Nazi) Holocaust disseminated primarily though not exclusively in the school environment. Hegemonic representations from the school environment and emancipated representations from the home environment confer meaning upon one another; accordingly, social representations from both social contexts are reinforced psychologically and come to acquire personal meaning (Breakwell, 2001). It is the perceived correspondence and coherence between the social representations from the school environment and those of the home environment, which enable Gilad to make sense of the Holocaust and to understand the potential repercussions for the ethno-national ingroup.

Gilad strategically engages in the anchoring process in order to endow upon his familial experiences a familiar, recognisable meaning structure, which is perhaps explicable in terms of the universal need for human beings to attribute *meaning* to traumatic life events (see Harmand et al., 1993; Golsworthy & Coyle, 1999). Indeed, this is essential for the meaning principle of identity (Vignoles et al., 2006). Unlike Sonia, who was exposed to the first-hand accounts of family members having experienced the devastating consequences of the Nazi Holocaust, Gilad has no close familial contact with the Nazi Holocaust. Nonetheless, by virtue of his family's personal experiences of discrimination and persecution, albeit in another national, geopolitical context, he is able to personalise social representations of the Holocaust and to understand the plight of other ethno-religious and ethno-national ingroup members for whom the Nazi Holocaust was a personal first-hand experience. Moreover, given the social significance of the Holocaust within Jewish Israeli society, Gilad perhaps positions himself, as an Israeli Jew, in relation to the Holocaust.

The analysis revealed that the re-construal of the Holocaust seemed to impact intergroup and interpersonal relations. For instance, it is noteworthy that Gilad perceives all Jews who have made 'aliya' (immigrated) to Israel as 'really one', that is, in terms of a unified ethno-national group. This group is perceived as being united in its common experience of discrimination and persecution from ethno-religious outgroups and, more specifically, in their suffering: 'we have all suffered in the world'. For Gilad, the Holocaust appears to symbolise the common suffering, discrimination and persecution having befallen his ethno-national ingroup. Accordingly, it

acquires a metaphorical meaning for some participants to encompass this suffering, which echoes the figuration process whereby knowledge is transformed into a social representation (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983; see also Stein, 1978). This has interesting implications for intergroup relations as it appears that ethno-national self-identification as Jews who have demonstrated their commitment to the Jewish nation by making 'aliya', overrides more specific identity subcategories such as 'race' or ethnicity, as discussed. Gilad's self-positioning in relation to the Holocaust and his construal of all Israeli Jews as ingroup members on the basis of a common suffering perhaps enable him to enhance the belonging principle of identity (Vignoles et al., 2006).

### **The Holocaust as a heuristic lens for understanding the Israeli-Arab conflict**

It has been observed that Israeli politicians frequently invoke the Holocaust in order to justify and to rationalise Israel's military activities in the Israeli-Arab conflict (Segev, 1992). On a similar note, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has explicitly highlighted similarities between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Nazi Germany, which perhaps encourages individuals to anchor representations of Iran to those of Nazi Germany (Netanyahu, 2009). The objectification of 'Iranian danger' through its comparison with the perpetrators of the Holocaust serves to construe Iran as a concrete, tangible danger, with which Israeli Jews can identify. This rhetorical strategy was observable among several participants, who invoked the Holocaust in their accounts of the Israeli-Arab conflict:

I just care about security and if it means to give them [Palestinians] their state then it's good for me [...] We built our country to avoid things like the Holocaust and so we need to keep our country safe to keep Jews safe (Sara, female, Ashkenazi)

Sara appeared to endorse the existence of an independent Palestinian state primarily on the basis that this would enhance national security, which was presented as her sole concern. Use of the category 'we' indicates acceptance of the social representation that the foundation of Israel constituted a collective ingroup endeavour to ensure that there could be no future repetitions of 'things like the Holocaust'. Indeed, it has been observed that many Israeli Jews regard the existence of a sovereign Jewish state as essential for the security and survival of Jews in the world (Lazar et al., 2008). The Holocaust seems to function as a heuristic device for understanding the potential consequences of failing to ensure the safety of 'our country', whose primary aim is 'to keep Jews safe'. This is illustrated by the widespread attribution of the Holocaust to the absence of a Jewish sovereign state (see also Lazar et al., 2008). Social representations of current ethno-national ingroup security seem to be anchored to representations of the Holocaust, which perhaps function psychologically as a symbolic warning of the potential consequences of failing to ensure ethno-national ingroup safety. The Holocaust is employed as a tool for understanding and explaining why the establishment of an independent Palestinian state is necessary for ingroup continuity. This demonstrates the pervasiveness of the Holocaust in Jewish Israeli society regardless of political context or belief.

Given the diversity of political orientations exhibited even in this small sample of participants, opinions regarding the Palestinian right to an independent state differed greatly, although the heuristic device employed to understand the intergroup conflict remained the same, namely national security:

Arabs they try to crush us again and again and again and they won't stop [...] Once you give them their country they want more and then more and then they finish by killing all of us. Hitler did it in Auschwitz but they'll do it in Israel [...] So to stop this we have to do these things the world criticises us for. People they don't remember the Holocaust but we do [...] Israel is a loving freedom (sic) nation (Shimon, male, Sephardic)

Shimon is averse to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Like Sara, he invokes the threat to national ingroup security as the primary cause for this opinion. In order to justify this personal representation, he constructs Arabs' intentions in emotive terms: they allegedly seek to 'crush' the ethno-national ingroup 'again and again and again and they won't stop'. This depicts the allegedly malevolent intentions of Arabs as repetitive and incessant, which is a personal representation possibly modelled upon negative social representations of Arabs as a result of the various Israeli-Arab confrontations since 1948 (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). 'Arabs' are essentialised as individuals who lack reason and who will not cease to attack the ethno-national ingroup until 'they finish by killing all of us'. In his account, Shimon invokes images of genocide and of annihilation; this heralds his reproduction of social representations of the Holocaust (e.g. Hitler, Auschwitz). As in Sarit's account, the Holocaust is not perceived as being isolated in time, but rather an act of genocide, which may be repeated, if measures are not taken to ensure ethno-national ingroup security (see also Bar-Tal, 1991). Shimon invokes Auschwitz, the Nazi concentration camp in which most Jews were murdered, possibly to depict the potential extremities of genocide, which would allegedly be perpetrated by Arabs if they were in a position to do so. By anchoring social representations of the Israeli-Arab conflict to the Holocaust, individuals are able to anticipate possible developments of behavioural patterns attributed to Arabs. In short, Shimon's desire for national security enables him to justify his opinion that Israel should not grant Palestinian independence.

Shimon exhibits awareness and understanding of the negative social representations surrounding Israeli policies concerning the Palestinians. He accepts representations that Israel's military actions are negative but adds that they are necessary, nonetheless: 'we have to do this'. Given that he perceives Israel as a freedom-loving and peaceful nation, the simultaneous awareness of negative social representations regarding Israeli military policy could pose potential threats to the psychological coherence principle (Jaspal & Coyle, 2009; Jaspal & Cinnirella, in press, a). Shimon attempts to reconcile these social representations by justifying the need for such military action in order to ensure ingroup security and continuity. He claims that ethno-national outgroup members 'don't remember the Holocaust' and, by extension, highlights the possibility of a repetition of genocide against the Jews. By anchoring social representations of Arabs to those of the perpetrators of the Holocaust, Shimon constructs Arabs as a threatening group, which explicates his scepticism for negotiation with the Palestinians. Furthermore, his acceptance and reproduction of social representations, which may dictate similarity between Arab and Nazi intentions, compromise his sense of ingroup security. This enables him to justify and to rationalise the actions of his ingroup towards the Palestinian outgroup.

## DISCUSSION

This study makes a contribution to the existing literature on Israeli Jews' psychosocial relationship with the Holocaust by exploring the role of social representations concerning the Holocaust in the construction of Jewish Israeli identity. In particular, the study demonstrates



how thinking about the Holocaust in a variety of social contexts impinges upon the principled operation of identity processes as defined in IPT (Breakwell, 1986).

IPT provides a novel and insightful perspective on the Holocaust and Jewish Israeli identity construction, primarily as it demonstrates the importance of Holocaust knowledge in safeguarding a sense of temporal continuity and belonging, although other identity principles are also said to be affected, albeit to a lesser extent. The data suggest that Holocaust knowledge performs specific functions for Jewish Israeli identity construction, which are elucidated by IPT.

The socio-psychological sources of the siege mentality, which is said to be associated with Jewish Israeli identity, are clear; centuries of persecution, the perceived inaction of 'neutral' outgroups and the Nazi Holocaust, the most destructive act of genocide against the Jews, collectively contribute to social representations of siege (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). This means that the Holocaust has come to represent a hegemonic social representation in Jewish Israeli society and possibly even a metaphor for Jewish history (see Stein, 1978). Thus, its centrality in individuals' meaning-making regarding issues pertaining to security may be essential for the continuity principle of identity (Breakwell, 1986), which is applicable to both individual and collective identities (Chen et al., 2004). Given that the Holocaust has come to constitute an important aspect of the Jewish Israeli 'collective narrative', its maintenance may be considered essential by ingroup members. Indeed, ruptures in a sense of (collective) continuity have been said to be conducive to reductions in group identification, group schisms and other group-related problems (Chandler et al., 2003).

This leads to a related point, namely that Holocaust knowledge may also be construed by individuals as a fundamental self-aspect associated with Jewish Israeli identity (Simon, 2004). This was illustrated by some participants' conceptualisation of the Holocaust as a phenomenon which Israelis 'should' remain aware of. IPT allows us to affirm that this self-aspect possibly enhances the belonging principle of identity, which refers to the need to maintain acceptance from other group members and a sense of inclusion within the group (Vignoles et al., 2006). Israel is a multi-cultural society, composed of an ethno-culturally diverse immigrant population; in the present study the Holocaust was frequently employed as a self-aspect which was perceived as uniting all Israeli Jews. This was due to the pervasively accepted social representation that the Holocaust was not temporally isolated but could possibly be repeated, in other temporal and situational contexts, by external 'enemies', such as the Palestinians (see Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005).

The 'monolithic' Jewish Israeli identity is constructed vis-à-vis the Arab outgroup (Bar-On, 2008; Triandafyllidou, 2001). Psychologically, the Holocaust seems to symbolise the unifying plight of all Jews regardless of ethnic background, provided that it is conceptualised in sufficiently broad terms, as exemplified in the present study. For some, it also symbolises the perceived intentions of external 'enemies'. Some non-Ashkenazi participants appeared to construct their specific ethnic groups as having suffered the Holocaust by re-conceptualising it in sufficiently broad terms to include other acts of anti-Semitism, such as the persecution of Jews in Morocco. Given that social representations of the Holocaust are pervasively salient in Jewish Israeli society, it is reasonable to assume that, psychologically, Israeli Jews would be required to position themselves or to take a stance in relation to these representations (see Breakwell & Millward, 1997). Participants' attempts to 'lay claim' to the Holocaust in this way could be tentatively interpreted as a means of enhancing the meaning principle of identity, since individuals of distinct ethnic backgrounds were able to position themselves within the social matrix in relation to the Holocaust. In addition, the belonging principle may be enhanced

through individuals' self-positioning alongside those Israelis who had lost family members in the Nazi Holocaust. Paradoxically, belonging may be enhanced through the perception of collective suffering.

Holocaust knowledge clearly plays an important role in the construction of the monolithic Jewish Israeli identity (Bar-On, 2008). Belonging was enhanced as individuals appeared to perceive a sense of collective identity when the Holocaust was invoked. This was a reciprocal process, since even those participants who, in some contexts, constructed the Beta Israel as 'Other' came to regard them as 'Jews like us'. Intragroup disunity seemed to be anchored to social representations of the Holocaust, which in turn highlighted the importance of maintaining intragroup solidarity against outgroup aggressors. This suggests that the Holocaust may facilitate the construction of an *inclusive* superordinate Jewish Israeli identity, which transcends more specific ethno-racial divisions (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). This would be expected to enhance the belonging principle of Jewish Israeli identity, regardless of ethno-racial background.

The hegemonic nature of social representations concerning the Holocaust was exemplified by participants' pervasive tendency to consider the Arab-Israeli conflict through the interpretive lens of the Holocaust. This provided a meaningful 'anchor' for making sense of the potential consequences of not resolving this conflict, either by allowing Palestinian independence or by retaining control of the Occupied Territories. Independent of participants' political stance, the Holocaust seemed to permeate thinking in relation to political issues associated with the intergroup conflict. An over-arching concern of most participants was the *security* of the national ingroup, which is highlighted in previous literature (Arian, 1995; Bar-Tal, 1991; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Stone, 1982). Indeed, the need for security was sufficiently potent to induce participants to re-construct the Beta Israel as ingroup members. It is argued that the maintenance of ingroup security constitutes a *source of (group) continuity*, since social representations indicate that enemy outgroups seek the annihilation of the Jews (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Bar-On, 2008). Clearly, this poses a threat to the ingroup's survival and continuity over time. This highlights an important theoretical point, namely that individuals may derive a sense of continuity from the perceived survival of their group over time (Jaspal & Cinnirella, in press, b). Although continuity is usually conceived in terms of the subjective perception of a unifying thread connecting past, present and future within identity (Breakwell, 1986, 1988), it is contended that the continuity principle may also be enhanced through the perceived continuity of one's ingroup as a functioning, distinctive social entity. This supports the hypothesis that while security concerns may lead Israeli Jews to perceive their ingroup as facing 'realistic' threats (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), they may also pose threats to individual identity in the IPT sense (see Jaspal & Cinnirella, in press, b). Clearly, generalisable quantitative methods are required to ascertain whether there exists a sufficiently strong correlation between security and the continuity principle in order to validate this theoretical point. However, *prima facie*, this proposed theoretical point elucidates the potential applicability of IPT to issues such as national identity construction, in which both security and temporal continuity are of particular psychological relevance (Kelman, 1997).

It is reasonable to assume that IPT research may have important mental health implications. It is argued that participants attempt to maintain temporal continuity and belonging within their ingroup in order to maximise psychological well-being, as the experience of identity threat is aversive (Breakwell, 1986). Indeed, deficiencies in the continuity and belonging principles, which were particularly relevant to the present study, have been associated with negative affect (Chandler et al., 2003; Leary et al., 1995). Moreover, the perceived threats to

national ingroup security and, thus, group continuity are likely to have negative implications for psychological well-being. Breakwell (1986) is explicit in her recognition of the negative psychological impact of perceiving identity to be threatened: 'threats are aversive and the individual will seek to reinstitute the principled operation of identity processes' (p. 192). While some may regard the self-esteem principle as the primary component of IPT, which predicts mental health, this may not necessarily be the case (Vignoles et al., 2002). IPT does not prioritise the self-esteem principle but accords equal status to all of the principles. Threats to any of the identity principles will, in their capacity to threaten the identity structure, jeopardise psychological well-being. It seems that individuals in the present study employed social representations of the Holocaust in ways which would enhance identity and general psychological well-being, although some representations were simply too pervasive to reconstrue (Breakwell, 2001; Jaspal & Coyle, 2009). While social representations of the Holocaust could be invoked to enhance belonging and continuity, the pervasiveness of hegemonic social representations of the Holocaust seemed to lead participants to employ them as heuristic lenses for interpreting independent social issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, which, conversely, could threaten (group) continuity. In this vein, some participants entertained the possibility that the Holocaust might re-occur if national ingroup security were neglected.

Social memories of the Holocaust must be maintained, partly to educate society about the dangers of general racist extremism and other social evils conducive to genocide (Salmons, 2003). Moreover, Holocaust knowledge does appear to perform positive psychological functions, such as the facilitation of a sense of belonging across diverse ethnic groups within Israel. However, hegemonic social representations of the Holocaust may also induce fear and uneasiness among some Israeli Jews, who regard a repetition of the Holocaust as a future possibility. Indeed, this may lead some individuals to accept uncritically any political stance or military course of action. It is suggested that social representations of the Holocaust be managed in ways, which are conducive to enhanced psychological well-being. The continued dissemination of social representations of the Holocaust is necessary for continuity and belonging, but this should not be conducted in ways, which induce fear among Israeli Jews, as this may, conversely, threaten (group) continuity. Social representations of historical events should be reproduced and encouraged with the aim of educating members of society and enhancing their psychological well-being.

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