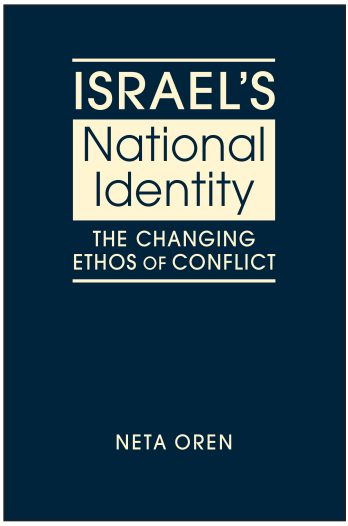
EXCERPTED FROM

Israel's National Identity: The Changing Ethos of Conflict



Neta Oren

ISBN: 978-1-62637-784-4 hc

LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS

1800 30th Street, Suite 314
Boulder, CO 80301 USA
telephone 303.444.6684
fax 303.444.0824

Contents

1

The Israeli Ethos as an Ethos of Conflict

I was working on this book when I traveled from my home in Washington to Israel in 2015, during another tense period in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship. Every Israeli I met during my visit, including peace activists, was pessimistic about the chances of resolving this conflict. They all seemed to agree with Benjamin Netanyahu when he said, during his October 2015 appearance at the Israeli parliament (the Knesset), that Israel will "forever live by the sword"(Ravid 2015a).

This despair is not limited to Israeli and Palestinian societies and to the Israeli-Arab conflict.[1] Bitter and prolonged conflicts have dominated the life of many nations. In this phase of their history, these nations are comprised of generations upon generations who have only known the experience of conflicting with another society and being exposed constantly to violent acts that threaten their lives and the lives of their loved ones. In these nations, the conflict also dominates the discussion in the media and in politics, appears in school textbooks, and leaves its mark on popular cultural products such as literature and cinema. It shapes the way the past and present are presented, as well as affecting aspirations for the future. In other words, the conflict shapes the *ethos* of the society. What are the unique features of the ethos in a society with prolonged exposure to intractable conflict? To what extent do people in such a society embrace the content of the ethos that is transmitted to them from a young age? What are the types of changes typically observed in an ethos during a conflict? To what degree do attempts to resolve the conflict influence this process of change or are influenced by it? My aim in this book is to provide some answers to these questions based on a detailed analysis of the Jewish Israeli ethos.

Previous studies have noted the link between Israeli collective identity and the Israeli-Arab conflict. For example, Sucharov (2005) describes Israel's role identity as "defensive warrior"—a state with an ethical army involved only in self-defense wars. She argues that some major events in the 1980s (e.g., the 1982 Lebanon War and the first intifada—the 1987–1993 Palestinian uprising in the territories captured by Israel in the 1967 War) created a cognitive dissonance between Israel's identity as a defensive warrior and its actions; these events further dredged up "unconscious counternarratives" depicting Israel as an aggressive actor. The fear among Israelis from what they had become in turn pushed Israel to pursue the Oslo Accords. Sucharov uncovers important shared beliefs in Israeli society—regarding security and the image of Israel as a villa in the jungle—which I explore further in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. Sucharov discusses some aspects of Israeli collective memory and the Jewish roots of Israeli identity, but only those aspects that are linked to Israel's role as a defensive warrior, and thus does not cover the full breadth of these components of Israeli identity. My analysis of Israeli identity covers a longer period than Sucharov's analysis; it shows that, for most of the period, Israeli society, by resorting to a variety of mechanisms, was actually more successful than Sucharov argues in coping with the potential dissonance between Israel Defense Forces (IDF) actions during wars and Israel's identity as a moral society. I further show that it was the need to confront the inherent dissonance *within* Israeli identity (e.g., the dissonance between the belief in Israel as a Jewish state and the values of democracy) that played the most significant role in shaping Israel's policy toward the conflict with the Palestinians.

Waxman (2006a) focuses on the way that the debate surrounding Israel's identity shaped Israeli foreign policy. He refers especially to the Jewish component of Israeli identity and to the debate between the "civic" definition of Israeli national identity (*Israeliness*) and "ethnoreligion" definition (*Jewishness*). He is by no means the only scholar to have looked at the diversity of groups that compose the Israeli polity—these issues are the focus of several other important works such as those of Kimmerling (2001).[2] Waxman's accounts that the Israeli-Arab conflict both shaped Israel's national identity and helped to sustain it (2006a, 6) and that identity can complicate peacemaking efforts, not just trigger such attempts (Waxman 2014), most closely resemble some of the arguments I advance in this book. However, the importance he assigns to controversies regarding Israeli identity and the divisions within Israeli society as animating factors underestimates the counterbalancing power of the ethos that these groups share. This ethos has helped Israel survive and prosper against what appeared at times to be great odds. It allows Israeli society to cope effectively with the stressful conditions produced by conflict, and for many years motivated Israelis to sacrifice on behalf of the state, including risking their lives.

Other studies have examined subsets of the components of the Israeli identity such as siege beliefs and the effect of the Holocaust on Israel's national identity (Zertal 2005; Amir 2011), or the belief in the existential threats faced by Israel and security beliefs more broadly (Abulof 2015; Ben-Eliezer and Al Haj 2003; Bar-Tal, Jacobson, and Klieman 1998). None of these studies, however, provides a broad depiction of Israeli identity, with its multitude of (potentially contradictory) shared beliefs. Using the framework of ethos of conflict, in this book I provide that much-needed comprehensive and updated account of the shared beliefs comprising the Israeli collective self, the complex relationship between those beliefs, and their effect on Israel's policies. As an Israeli-born woman, who has lived most of her life in Israel, I have a deep familiarity with Israeli society and its ethos. But most of all, this analysis is based on what I believe to be one of the most comprehensive studies ever undertaken of the Israeli ethos and its evolution since 1967.

The Concept of Ethos

This book relies on a definition of *ethos* developed by Bar-Tal (2013, 174): "a particular configuration of central societal beliefs that are enduring and shared by most members of society." Societal beliefs, then, are the building blocks of an ethos, defined as cognitions shared by and of interest to members of a society and contributing to their sense of uniqueness. While not every member of a society will agree with these beliefs, they do have to recognize their importance and role as a characteristic of their society. Not every societal belief is included in a society's ethos. The three main criteria for evaluating whether a societal belief is part of a particular societal ethos are (1) a majority of society members share the belief for long periods; (2) the belief is often invoked as part of justifications, explanations, and arguments in political debate, and it influences decisions made by leaders of the society;[3] and (3) it is imparted to the younger generation and to new members of the society (Bar-Tal 2013, 175). In the methodological section of this chapter I further elaborate on ways to measure and determine when an expression of societal belief in political rhetoric and public polls indicates that it is part of an ethos.

The definition of *societal beliefs* that are part of the ethos is broad and includes attitudes (positive or negative feelings about some object) and values (a perception of how things should be), as well as what people consciously understand about an object or action (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Societal beliefs also include narratives—plots with a clear beginning and end that provide the sequence and cause of an event or a set of events (Bruner 1991). As I emphasize again and again throughout the book, narratives are

usually grounded in reality but present one interpretation of that reality. Narratives about a collective shared past, for example, may present the collective as continuous through time, marginalizing any changes to its membership or rules (Hamilton, Levine, and Thurston 2014). The strategies of narrative construction, such as structures of time sequence (e.g., linear, circular, zigzag), separation of periods from one another, and selection of the historical starting point of the narrative, legitimize claims and acts in the past and in the present (E. Zerubavel 2003). For example, narratives about the beginning of a confrontation between the rivals ("who fired the first shot") might support beliefs about the rival side as the aggressor and one's own side as a victim. Setting a historical starting point for the narrative might play a vital role in establishing territorial rights ("We are the original inhabitants of this land"). From here on, unless otherwise specified, the term *societal beliefs* refers to all elements of an ethos: beliefs, attitudes, values, and narratives.

Another special case of societal beliefs is collective memory, which relates to the history of the society (Paez and Liu 2011; Wertsch 2002; Y. Zerubavel 1995). Often it conforms to a generic story about a golden age, a fall and decline, and then a process of rebirth and redemption. Such a narrative constitutes the Israeli collective memory—as I show in the next chapter. In addition, collective memory focuses on specific major events that become symbolic, commemorated events for the group. They often include "chosen traumas" and "chosen glories" (Volkan 1997, 48). In the following chapter I discuss in more detail the notion of the Holocaust as a chosen trauma in Israeli collective memory and its manifestation in how Israelis perceive the Israeli-Arab conflict—even though the Holocaust took place in Europe with no direct Arab involvement.

In his later work, Bar-Tal distinguished between ethos and collective memory, explaining that *collective memory* includes societal beliefs about the past while *ethos* refers to societal beliefs about the present and future. Regardless of this distinction, he notes that the main themes of collective memory and ethos are similar. In conflict, for example, both ethos and collective memory include themes regarding goals in the conflict, delegitimization of rivals, glorifying one's own society, and self-victimization (Bar-Tal 2013, 148–149). Likewise, ethos and collective memory of conflict have similar roles: providing an ideology through which to interpret the reality, encouraging sacrifices on behalf of the society, and allowing people to maintain a positive self-image. Finally, collective memory and ethos are highly connected and inseparable. Collective memory often justifies society's claims and actions in the present and provides guidance for the future. It follows, then, that a comprehensive understanding of a society must include a study of its collective memory as well as common beliefs about its present and future. Thus, in this book I analyze both the Israeli ethos and relevant narratives of its collective memory.

According to Bar-Tal (2013), a society that engages in a long intractable conflict with another society develops an ethos that is affected by the conflict. This ethos of conflict may include eight themes: beliefs about the goals in the conflict, security, one's own victimization, a negative image of the opponent, positive self-images, national unity, patriotism, and peace. Bar-Tal provides examples for these themes of ethos of conflict from societies as varied as the Catholic and Protestant societies in Northern Ireland, the Tutsi and Hutus in Rwanda, and the Greek and Turkish societies in Cyprus. The first goal of this book is to reveal the extent to which the themes of ethos of conflict identified by Bar-Tal serve as the pillars of the Israeli ethos. I refer to the following themes: the goal of establishing a Jewish state (which corresponds to beliefs about goals in the conflict in Bar-Tal's framework), security beliefs, Israeli victimization and siege beliefs, the perception of Israel as a villa in the jungle (which corresponds to a negative image of the opponent and positive self-image beliefs), Israeli patriotism and the belief in the need to maintain national unity, and beliefs about the value of peace.

My analysis of the Israeli ethos in this book, however, goes beyond a mere description of Bar-Tal's (2013) eight themes of ethos of conflict as they manifest in Israeli society. It adds ideas about the structure of an ethos (e.g., how these themes interact with each other), and about types of ethos changes that enrich the theoretical discussion about the concept of ethos and allow us to systematically compare the Israeli ethos *as a whole* across time. First, my analysis explores the hierarchy of the societal beliefs within the Israeli ethos—which themes are more and less central. Indeed, some themes may be more prominent in the ethos of a society, such that they are shared by more people than those who hold other themes of the ethos, they are subject to less public debate and challenges over the years, and they are mentioned in the nation's most cherished documents. Central beliefs in the ethos may also be perceived as *sacred goals or values*—a goal or value with "transcendental significance that precludes comparisons or trade-offs" (Tetlock 2003, 320). People ascribe to these goals and values importance above and beyond all others and, hence, refuse to compromise over them regardless of the costs or benefits (Sheikh, Ginges, and Atran 2013; Ginges et al. 2007). In the Israeli case, the theme about Israel as a Jewish state is a central theme of the ethos: the agreement with this theme in public polls was higher than for any other theme of the ethos over most of the study period, and few if any Jewish Israeli leaders ever opposed the goal of establishing a Jewish state and the collective memory that justified it. As I show in Chapter 2, this theme of the Israeli ethos is also the main idea in Israel's Declaration of Independence. Some aspects of this theme (e.g., the goal of maintaining a Jewish majority) were also portrayed in leaders' rhetoric and public polls as sacred values. Other themes in the Israeli ethos, such as siege beliefs, are not as central: their support in polls has been

inconsistent, they did not figure prominently in the Declaration of Independence, and on occasion they were refuted by major political leaders.

Second, my analysis shows how the core themes of the Israeli ethos relate to each other and to other systems of beliefs and values in the society. Ethos themes may coexist in harmony, clash, or result in some combination thereof. Issues or events may reveal a conflict among the different themes of the ethos and other societal beliefs. In the Israeli case, the main tension exists between the societal belief in the value of democracy and the belief that it is necessary to ensure a Jewish nature for the state—a core theme of the ethos. This tension intensifies in the context of Israeli control of the territories captured by Israel in 1967, which are densely populated by Palestinians. Keeping masses of Palestinians under Israeli occupation may strain democratic practices. On the other hand, adding masses of Palestinians as new citizens to the Jewish state threatens the goal of having a Jewish majority and a Jewish state.

Third, my analysis identifies the strategies used to address perceived inconsistencies within ethos beliefs and between ethos and nonethos beliefs. Studies of cognitive imbalance or dissonance suggest that when people are aware of a contradiction between beliefs, the unpleasantness of the experience motivates them to eliminate or otherwise reduce the inconsistency (Festinger 1957). The psychological literature points to five main strategies for dealing with cognitive imbalance: denying the inconsistency, adding new cognitions to bolster one of the clashing beliefs, engaging in cognitive differentiation, changing one of the beliefs, or prioritizing one of the beliefs over the other(s) (Abelson 1968; Heider 1958). Several scholars have started to explore how states—and not just individuals—use strategies such as denial to deal with dissonance concerning their collective identity (Zarakol 2010; S. Cohen 2001). Lupovici (2012) suggests that states use another strategy commonly used by individuals to cope with dissonance—avoidance. Avoidance usually involves mechanisms of selective exposure to information that causes the dissonance. At the state level, this can be achieved by taking actions that self-restrict access to information, foster ambiguity, or create some distance from the source of identity threat. As such, avoidance usually does not eliminate the dissonance—it just makes it more tolerable.

My study continues this trend of exploring the strategies that are applied at the collective level to deal with dissonance between societal beliefs. I identified the use of such strategies in leaders' rhetoric and track the public's receptiveness as reflected in polls. For example, the Israeli public mostly has denied any potential contradiction between the value of Israel as a Jewish state and its ability to maintain a democratic nature. Israelis and their leaders also often have denied wrongdoing by the IDF that may contradict ethos themes presenting a moral self-image of Israel and the Israeli army (the villa in the jungle theme). I identified two additional strategies that were used by

leaders and school textbooks in the latter context: *bolstering* (the claim that Israel is engaged in a type of war that makes some degree of civilian casualties unavoidable) and *cognitive differentiation* (the claim that only a few Israeli soldiers were involved in intentional attacks against Arab civilians and that they do not represent the spirit of the Israeli army). So, this source of potential dissonance was coped with rather successfully by Israeli society. In contrast, coping with the dissonance stemming from Israel's control of the territories proved far more complex, with the strategies significantly changing over time, as detailed later in this chapter.

In sum, in this book I provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing a society's ethos tracking its evolution over time, and comparing it to the ethos of other societies. In accordance with this framework, any study of an ethos must detail the central themes of the ethos, clarify the relationships between those themes and other societal beliefs, and describe strategies used by the society to resolve any inconsistencies. Societies may have similar themes in their ethos but may still differ in the specific content of these themes and their configuration. Societies may also diverge in the strategies they use at a given time to resolve inconsistencies among their central beliefs, ranging from total denial to changing their ethos. The framework of ethos that I present in this book also allows us to compare the ethos of the same society over time and to track the main changes in its identity. But before we can embark on this application of the framework, we need to discuss the issue of construction and transmission of an ethos.

The Transmission of Ethos and Collective Memory

As I emphasize throughout the book, the beliefs of the Israeli ethos are based on the reality of the conflict. In other words, by using the term *beliefs,* I do not mean to imply that their content is false or "invented" by the Israeli authorities. Neither am I suggesting that they represent an accurate and unbiased reflection of reality. Rather, like any other worldview, they present a prism through which to interpret that harsh and bloody reality. Any ethos or collective memory highlights some events, marginalizes others, and connects them in its own way. For example, societies tend to focus on their own suffering, brought about by acts of aggression by their opponents, and to marginalize or ignore the suffering of their rivals caused by their own actions. In this regard, H. Cohen (2015) shows that, while the killing of 133 Jews during the 1929 clashes between Palestinians and Jews is a central event in the Israeli collective memory of the Israeli-Arab conflict, it is mostly ignored in the Palestinian collective memory of the same conflict. Shapira (2000, 52) describes the way the Israeli society attempted to cope with the issue of expulsion of some of Palestine's Arabs by the

IDF in the 1948 War as "partial forgetting" or "memory dimming." Furthermore, even when focused on the same specific event, people can arrive at different conclusions, see numerous meanings, and interpret it in different ways. Consider, for example, the numerous meanings of the Holocaust and its potential learned lessons for the Jewish people. Some meanings and learned lessons were emphasized in different societies, and even by the same society at different times, while others were ignored or marginalized.[4] Therefore, my focus is on which main beliefs were adopted by the Israeli society and what purpose(s) they served, rather than the historical and factual accuracy of these beliefs.

Seen from this angle, the concept of ethos also helps us avoid a simplistic account of ethos construction—as content solely constructed by authorities for their own purposes. Indeed, societal beliefs are transmitted to the public by various channels such as leaders' speeches, school textbooks, and official symbols (e.g., the flag and anthem). An analysis of the production process of such official symbols and texts often reveals the intent of authorities in their effort to construct an ethos that would serve as a tool for the leadership to mobilize the masses (this by itself, however, does not necessarily imply that these beliefs are not valid). For example, Young (1990), who analyzed the debate among Israeli policymakers regarding the Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day, which was first established in a 1951 parliamentary resolution and then in a 1959 law, shows how they intentionally tried to engender a particular meaning for this memorial day—Israel as the only safe place for the Jews—by choosing a specific date and a specific title for it. But leadership is not a monolith; there always may be voices in the periphery of the political elite who resist the ethos or try to present an alternative ethos. In addition, some of the channels that participate in the construction and transmission of ethos themes, such as media, art products, and academic publications, are not fully controlled or directed by the leadership of the state (especially in a democracy).

Regardless of the sources that define and transmit societal beliefs of ethos in a given society, it is important to note a fact that is often ignored in studies that analyze these products—that people are not necessarily passive "recipients" of such content. The public may accept some ethos content. They may internalize the ethos beliefs—that is, transform them into personal beliefs and personal narratives (Hammack 2009). But these are not the only options: people may doubt the ethos of their society, parody it,[5] or resist it altogether. In totalitarian societies, people resist the official ethos and collective memory in mostly latent ways.[6] In democratic societies, a resistance to the official ethos can take more visible or direct forms—people may avoid or ignore official events or memorial days, thereby refusing to adopt the beliefs and values that these events represent.[7] People may express disagreement with ethos beliefs or express their agreement with

alternative beliefs in protests, demonstrations, and public polls. It must be noted, however, that the leadership (even in democratic societies) often makes efforts to maintain the dominance of the ethos and to prevent, or at least to minimize, dissemination of a competing ethos (see elaborate discussions about this trend in Bar-Tal, Oren, and Nets-Zehngut 2014; Oren, Nets-Zehngut, and Bar-Tal 2015).

The construction and transmission of an ethos, in other words, may be driven by top-down efforts by the leadership to transmit specific beliefs, but also may be shaped by bottom-up pressures—a change in public opinion that eventually forces the leadership to adjust its rhetoric and policy. A specific belief becomes part of the ethos only if these processes succeed—if beliefs that are transmitted by the authorities are embraced by the public, or if ideas shared by a majority of society members become part of leaders' rhetoric and influence their decisions.

It follows that analyzing only the content of official texts, such as speeches and school textbooks, is not sufficient for understanding the ethos of a society. It is essential to complement this analysis with a study of the level of agreement with it among the public. Unfortunately, most previous works focused on only one of the two aspects—usually the former[8]—and there are only a few comprehensive studies that compare the content of an ethos as it appears in formal texts with the way the public accepts it.[9] This study, then, is also unique in this regard: in each chapter, I compare the Israeli ethos as it appears in official products to data from public polls.

Change of Ethos

This book presents an original conception of changes in societal beliefs, including those that make up an ethos. According to this framework, these changes take one of two major forms. The first form involves changes in the *content* of beliefs over the years. For example, beliefs about Jewish rights to the land (which are part of the Jewish state theme discussed in the next chapter) changed during the 1980s and 1990s such that they no longer asserted *exclusive* rights for the Jews but recognized that Palestinians also had justified claims to the same land. Another example is the change in content of the belief about the nature of the threats to Israel (which is part of the security theme discussed in Chapter 3). The focus moved from the threat of conventional war and the danger posed by a Palestinian state to the threat of unconventional weapons in the hands of Muslim states and nontraditional security threats (the threat to the Jewish and democratic nature of the state).

The second form is a change in the extent of confidence in a societal belief. That is, people may lessen or increase their confidence in the

belief—the belief may accordingly weaken or strengthen. When people increase or decrease their confidence in the bulk of the beliefs in the ethos, the ethos *as a whole* will strengthen or weaken (Oren 2004, 2005, 2016). In the case of the Israeli ethos of conflict, during the 1990s most of the component beliefs weakened, resulting in a weaker ethos. A weak ethos may be replaced by a new ethos. In the Israeli case, as I show in this book, an attempt was made during the 1990s to replace the ethos of conflict with a new ethos, but this attempt failed—its beliefs were not shared by more than 60 percent of the public and it was not imparted to the younger generation. Eventually, in the period after 2000 the Israeli ethos of conflict as a whole strengthened again, although it was not as strong as it was in the 1960s and 1970s.

The ethos as a whole can change in other ways over time: the hierarchy between the themes may change as a result of weakening of some themes along with strengthening of others, a change in content of specific beliefs in the ethos may create new contradictions with other beliefs, and a society may develop new strategies to deal with existing or new contradictions within the ethos beliefs or between the ethos and other societal beliefs. My study identifies changes over time in the strategies that were used to deal with the dissonance between core themes of the Israeli ethos and other societal beliefs, in the context of Israeli control of the territories. Initially, the main dovish party—Labor—denied any inconsistency between Israeli control of the territories and the value of democracy because, according to its 1969 platform, Israel's humane policy in the territories encourages the establishment of "democratic foundations" in the Palestinian society. The main hawkish party—Likud—used the bolstering strategy to cope with inconsistency between its belief in the need to maintain all territories under Israeli control (the value of Greater Israel) and the goal of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. For example, its 1969 platform added the cognition that large Jewish immigration to Israel would enable Israel to preserve its Jewish majority while annexing the territories. But over time, both parties changed the way that they coped with the potential contradiction between core Israeli values in the context of Israeli control of the territories. Since the 1970s, Labor platforms have acknowledged a clash between Israeli control of the territories and main themes in the Israeli ethos such as the goal of security. They also have argued that in the context of permanent Israeli rule over the territories, or Israeli annexation, the values of a Jewish state and democracy could not coexist. As a result, a new strategy was advocated by the Labor party to cope with this inconsistency—changing the context within which the perceived inconsistency arises—for example, advocating giving up Israeli control of the territories that were captured in 1967 to resolve the clash that it creates between the values. As for the Likud party, in 1988 its platform stopped using any strategy to deal with the

potential inconsistency between its goal of Greater Israel and the goal of a Jewish and democratic state and left the inconsistency unresolved. Since 1996, Likud platforms have not mentioned the goal of Israeli control of all the territories. That does not mean that the party no longer believes in Israel's right to the territories or that it completely abandoned its wish to keep it under Israeli control. But the failure to appeal to this goal in the platform does suggest that its salience had declined, and other goals had become more important at that time. Indeed, hawkish leaders like Ehud Olmert and Ariel Sharon applied a new strategy to cope with the inconsistency between the value of Greater Israel and the values of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state in their rhetoric and in the platform of their new party Kadima—they explicitly prioritized the value of a Jewish state over the value of Greater Israel.

Finally, in the period after 2000, following the collapse of the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians and a failure to achieve agreement regarding the status of the territories, another strategy was used to cope with Israel's continuing control of the territories—avoidance. This was triggered by the building of a barrier that separates the territories from Israel while keeping Israeli settlements and IDF control of parts of the territories. The difference between avoidance and the previous strategy of changing the context within which the perceived inconsistency exists is that, in the latter, Israel's action aimed to solve the inconsistency while, in the former, the aim was only to make the inconsistency more tolerable.

As is typically the case in complex systems, multiple factors combined to bring about the above changes, and it is difficult to gauge the extent of the impact that each individual factor had on the ethos. My focus in this book is on changes in public opinion and the different factors that help explain how they came about. Changes in the society's configuration—for example, following mass waves of immigrations or intergenerational population replacement—may lead to changes of societal beliefs (Inglehart 1997). Specifically, the different experiences and socialization processes of new society members may lead them to embrace beliefs at odds with those of the older generation. In the Israeli case, I argue that the arrival of approximately 1 million Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s, as well as the increase in the number of ultra-Orthodox Jews as a proportion of the total population in Israel, explain some of the changes in the Israeli ethos.

But the reality may influence the ethos of the society even in the absence of major changes to the society's demography. New information (not necessarily directly related to the conflict) may cause people to reevaluate and adjust their current societal beliefs. In this vein, major wars and peace initiatives may play a vital role in changing societal beliefs (Deutsch and Merritt 1965; Sears 2002). The impact that an event may have has to

do, in part, with the nature of the event itself—its duration, its threatening nature, whether it has a negative or positive meaning for the society, its ambiguity, and so forth (for an extended discussion about the characteristics of a major event that may enhance its potential for driving change in ethos of conflict, see Oren 2005). But the effect of major events is also determined by the way that the information regarding the events is presented by the media or by an *epistemic authority* (i.e., a source that exerts determinative influence on the formation of an individual's knowledge) (Kruglanski 1989). Throughout this book, I highlight the effect of major events in the Israeli-Arab conflict on the ethos. In the concluding chapter, I take a closer look at the factors that influenced changes in public opinion following the three most influential major events—the first intifada, the Oslo process, and the second intifada.

Ethos of Conflict and Conflict Resolution

My aim is not only to describe the changes in the Israeli ethos but also to explore the potential role they played in the efforts to resolve the Israeli-Arab conflict. In this analysis, I also rely on Zartman's (2000) ripeness theory and Rumelili's (2015) framework linking peace and ontological insecurity.

According to ripeness theory, resolution of a conflict usually follows a long process of searching for a formula that will satisfy both parties' aspirations (Pruitt and Kim 2004). The theory argues that "if the parties to a conflict (a) perceive themselves to be in a detrimental stalemate and (b) perceive the possibility of a negotiated solution (a way out), the conflict is ripe for resolution" (Zartman 2000, 228–229). Focusing only on material conditions that may bring the parties to perceive themselves to be in detrimental stalemate neglects to account for cases such as the Oslo Accords, when the stronger side in an asymmetrical conflict agreed to enter a peace process with its weaker adversary. This book elaborates on the sociopsychological price that brings a society to the perception of stalemate. I argue that one of the factors that made the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ripe for resolution in the early 1990s from the Israeli side was the perception of this conflict among some Israeli leaders and the public as being too costly in psychological terms; that is, because of the threat to the Israeli ethos that in turn threatened Israeli identity. In addition, changes to specific constituent beliefs of the ethos contributed to the perception that there was a formula to end the conflict. In particular, a decline in the belief denying Palestinian nationhood and in the belief that a Palestinian state would endanger Israel contributed to the shift of Israeli public opinion toward the option of a Palestinian state as a way out of the conflict. Thus, in this book I explore the potential impact of the ethos on motivation to solve a conflict (the first

condition for ripeness) and optimism about the prospects of peace (the second condition); by doing so, I highlight some important and fundamental processes that set the stage for ripeness.

This book also joins a recent and ongoing scholarly effort to investigate the link between ontological security and peace. Studies in this scholarly field concern not just the conditions that encourage the parties to start negotiations but also those that move the parties from conflict resolution to peace and reconciliation. *Ontological security* refers to security of identity (of *being* rather than *surviving* or merely physical security) (Rumelili 2015; Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008). Rumelili (2015) argues that in societies that live under the conditions of intractable conflict, ontological security is achieved by establishing concrete objects of fear that help to cope with existential anxieties (unlike fear that is a response to a specific threat, one which can be faced and endured, the threats causing anxiety are unknown), and producing a system of meaning that provides a sense of self and differentiates friends from foes. As a result, "all conflicts, over time, become increasingly entrenched in narratives and conceptions of Self and the Other, and the maintenance of these narratives becomes critical for ontological security" (Rumelili and Çelik 2017, 2).

In recent years, the concept of ontological security has been applied to analyze specific cases of societies under conditions of intractable conflict such as Northern Ireland, Cyprus, and Israel (Lupovici 2015; Loizides 2015). Yet many of these scholars have used a vague definition of identity (if they used any definition at all) and there is a need to further theorize the link between identity construction and functions and ontological (in)security. Ethos of conflict, as I present in this book, can provide this needed link, in the sense that ethos is a major component of identity. More specifically, the security theme of the ethos may establish a definite object of fear and the means to cope with it. The creation of a clear differentiation between self and Others and between friend and foe is supported by themes such as beliefs about self, delegitimization of the enemy, siege, and society's goals. Furthermore, the ethos as a whole serves as a meaning system through which the conflict can be viewed and understood (Bar-Tal 2013, 211). Finally, the ethos of conflict, as I demonstrate in Chapter 2 and in sections that analyze school commemoration ceremonies on Memorial Days for fallen soldiers and the Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies, establishes routines that according to Mitzen (2006) are important in establishing ontological security. So, while the conflict may produce high levels of fear (in the personal and the national sense), the ethos of conflict as a whole can provide ontological security to the society. Rumelili (2015, 22–23) calls this situation a "stable conflict."

A threat to the ethos—a vital component of national identity—can produce ontological insecurity. Rumelili (2015, 23–24) defines a state of high levels of both fear and ontological insecurity as an "unstable conflict." She

notes that ontological insecurity could have a positive potential for conflict resolution and that this anxiety may make a conflict ripe for resolution. This is because it may "pave the way for reconstruction of identity in a way that reverses the process that established the rival in the conflict as an object of fear" (Rumelili 2015, 24)—and this desecuritization of the rival transforms unstable conflicts into a "conflict in resolution" state that is characterized by high levels of ontological anxiety but low levels of fear. The high level of anxiety at this stage may be caused by the peace process itself since a peace process may "unleash high levels of ontological anxiety that were previously suppressed and generates ambiguities in the system of meanings" (Rumelili 2015, 24). Scholars have just started to study this aspect of a peace process and its implications for peace practice. Yet "further research is needed to trace precisely how ontological security needs hinder the advancement of the peace" (Lupovici 2015, 34). The study of ethos of conflict—in particular, the way that a peace process threatens the ethos—can contribute to this theoretical and empirical task by exposing the specific mechanisms that produce ontological insecurity during a peace process and the conditions under which peace can fail or succeed. I discuss these issues further in Chapters 7 and 9.

Ethos, Ideology, Culture, and National Identity

As noted above, ethos is a key component of national identity and, hence, the study of ethos of conflict contributes to our understanding of the link between identity and conflict resolution. Before proceeding, I want to clarify the relationships between ethos and national identity and other related concepts such as ideology and political culture. National identity is a popular concept that, like ethos, was for years vaguely defined. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) even went so far as to suggest that the concept of national identity is too ambiguous to serve the needs of social analysis and, thus, should be abandoned or restricted. More recently, David and Bar-Tal (2009) proposed a model for national identity that incorporates ethos as one of its components, along with other components such as language and customs. *National identity* can be seen, even under this more concrete definition to be too broad a concept for the purposes of conflict analysis and resolution. More so than other components of identity, much (although not all) of the ethos of conflict content is directly shaped by the conflict and, therefore, it provides a useful way to look at the link between identity and conflict. The ethos component of identity is also more dynamic than other components (e.g., language) and, thus, is especially important in explaining changes in the state's actions and policy regarding the conflict (Oren, Bar-Tal, and David 2004; Oren 2010; Oren and Bar-Tal 2006, 2014).

Another way to look at the societal beliefs of ethos is as "building blocks of the content that characterize culture" (Bar-Tal 2013, 175). Inglehart (1997, 52) defines *culture* as a coherent system of beliefs, values, attitudes, norms, and skills that are widely shared and deeply held within a given society. Others argue that ethos is a part of cultural knowledge (Bar-Tal and Oren 2000, 7; McClosky and Zaller 1984, 16). However, the culture of a society may also include societal beliefs that are not central enough to be part of the ethos. These beliefs are not widely shared as the themes of ethos, and are not systematically imparted to the younger generation as the ethos beliefs. For example, according to a 2001 survey that employed questions from Inglehart's World Values Survey, Israel was found to have a moderately postmaterialist culture (Yuchtman-Ya'Ar 2002). Democracy, tolerance, and multiculturalism are core postmaterial values and are associated with sensitivity to minority and women's rights and to the environment. Most of these cultural values are not part of the Israeli ethos. Indeed, postmaterialism in Israel is embraced mainly by younger, more secular, higher-income individuals who identify with the political left (Yuchtman-Ya'Ar 2002). It is also widely assumed that culture either experiences no change over time or changes slowly in response to long-term trends. This means that, in contrast to ethos, the concept of culture is not dynamic enough to explain changes in policy preferences.

A common definition of *ideology* as a highly consistent set of ideas (in the form of attitudes, values, and even ideological narratives) that provides an interpretation and a prescription as to how the order of society should be structured (Maynard and Mildenberger 2018; Jost, Federico, and Napier 2009; Haidt, Graham, and Joseph 2009) is close to Bar-Tal's definition of ethos. And indeed, according to Bar-Tal et al. (2009), ethos is a variant of ideology that influences perceptions and interpretations of social reality. Maynard and Mildenberger (2018, 567) point to a lacunae in current writing about ideology regarding the question of ideology's *scale*—the relationship between ideology and subideology phenomena and superideology phenomena. In this regard, ethos of a society is a superideology in the sense that it functions as a framework that overrides the various separate subideologies in the society. As I show in the following chapters, for most of the period that is covered in this book, the core themes of the ethos of conflict were shared by the main ideological subgroups in Israel (e.g., the political right and political left).[10] My analysis of the way that each group dealt with the contradiction between its ideology and the national ethos contributes empirically and theoretically to our understanding of the relationship between superideologies and subideologies in a society. It follows that changes in a society's ethos are more fundamental than are changes in any of its subideologies and, hence, may have a larger impact on that society's policies (e.g., toward conflict resolution).

In sum, rather than replacing the use of concepts such as national culture, ideology, and national identity, my goal is to contribute to the study of these concepts in the sense that ethos is an important component, albeit not the only one, of these constructs. Ethos can explain policy choices of a society, including those related to conflict resolution. However, I do not claim that ethos is the only factor shaping policy choices. It obviously is only one piece of the grand puzzle of politics.

Methodology

At this point, it would be useful to further elaborate on the methodology behind this study. As noted, my goal was to uncover the extent to which themes of ethos of conflict identified by Bar-Tal (2013) serve as the pillars of the Israeli ethos, the relationship between these themes, and the change in the ethos over time. Among the many types of sources that contribute to the construction of the content of the Israeli ethos or serve as reliable barometers, I decided to focus on the following:

1. Political leaders' speeches, interviews with the press, and writing;
2. School curricula;
3. Election platforms; and
4. Public polls.

In addition, anecdotal examples from Israeli popular songs and published opinion writing are used as illustrations to the themes of the ethos and as complements to the systematic analysis of the principal sources listed above. Since the transmission and change of the beliefs that construct the ethos could be top down or come from below, official sources such as leaders' rhetoric may shape and give expression to the ethos. Leaders can influence people's beliefs and groups' identity with their rhetoric, but leadership is also influenced and constrained by collective identity (Hogg, Knippenberg, and Rast 2012; S. A. Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2010; Rhodes and Hart 2016). Changes in positions of specific leaders and political parties within the society can be explained by leaders' personality traits, personal beliefs systems, and the "evolutionary-dynamic" explanation for changes in core beliefs of nationalist movements (see a more extensive discussion in Chapter 8) (Aronoff 2014; Shelef 2010). One should keep in mind, however, that leaders and parties have to gain public approval and, therefore, need to be responsive to shifts in public opinion. Leaders often monitor public polls and adapt their rhetoric and policy to surveys' data (Auerbach and Greenbaum 2000). Furthermore, leaders can influence the society's identity, but only up to some point. They "can be ahead of the group, but never so far

ahead that they are out there on their own" (S. A. Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2010, 106). Thus, a change in rhetoric of the leaders, especially when analyzed within a broader context of changes in public polls, could be an indication of a decline or strengthening in the idea's hegemonic status in the society. That is also why I am less concerned with the authenticity of political rhetoric. True, politicians are not always honest but, even in this context, appeals to themes of the ethos matter since they convey the relevance of these themes to political discourse and, at the same time, can influence the public's preferences. Politicians from peripheral and tiny parties are less constrained by hegemonic ideas and often target only specific sectors within the society. Thus, my analysis focuses only on mainstream politicians and excludes leaders of groups on the periphery of the Israeli political system. Due to space limitations, I included the rhetoric only of leaders that served as prime ministers (with one exception—Yair Lapid, Netanyahu's current main political competitor, is included to get some insight into future trends).[11] These individuals obviously do not exhaust the variety of mainstream Israeli politicians, but we can assume that they played the most significant role in expressing and shaping the beliefs of the public.[12]

The curricula taught in schools can be seen as an institutionalization of the ethos—as attempts by the leadership to construct an ethos and transmit it to the students, especially in Israel where the state is highly involved in determining the curricula and in monitoring the content of school textbooks (Podeh 2002, 8). Indeed, changes in school curricula are often associated with a change in the identity (and political affiliation) of the minister of education, when the new ministers attempt to promote different ideological goals than their predecessors. Given that the person appointed to this position is usually a leading member of one of the parties that comprise the ruling coalition, the new priorities can be seen as a reflection of the leadership priorities and not just the minister's beliefs.

Since I focus on the hegemonic discourse, I excluded from my analysis the curricula of independent ultra-Orthodox schools and of the schools in the Arab sector because they are on the periphery of the Israeli education system and have their own ethos.[13] Note also that under the term *curriculum* I include both the "intended" curriculum, also known as the "official," "formal," or "explicit" curriculum (Cuban 1992) as well as the actual content of textbooks and extracurricular activities at school. The intended curriculum is expressed in official documents published by the Ministry of Education that conceptualize goals for teaching a given subject matter in schools. In Israel, one can find about three to four generations of curriculum documents for most school subjects, beginning with the foundation of the state in 1948 up to contemporary times (Hofman, Alpert, and Schnell 2007). As I show throughout the chapters in this book, the actual content of textbooks may or may not match the declared goals of the intended curriculum. The occasional

discrepancies can provide some insight into which themes are central to the ethos—and, hence, are declared as explicit goals for education—and themes that are less central but still may be common in textbooks, even if implicitly.[14]

As noted, a theme is part of the Israeli ethos of conflict if it appeared in leaders' rhetoric, if it was transmitted to students in school curricula, and if most people in public polls agreed with it. I utilized an extensive database of Israeli public polls to determine the extent to which the Israeli Jewish public has embraced the ethos beliefs and to evaluate how those beliefs have changed over time (see the Appendix for more information about the main surveys used in this study, institutions that conducted these polls, polling frequency, and type and size of samples).[15] In keeping with the spirit of Bar-Tal's (2013) criteria of a belief deserving to be considered part of an ethos if shared by a majority of society members for "long periods," I set a benchmark in my analysis of at least 60 percent support for at least a decade. It must be noted that fluctuations in public opinion are common; hence, a one-time decline below the 60 percent threshold did not disqualify a belief from being part of the ethos since it could indicate a measurement error or an immediate reaction to an extreme event that occurred shortly before the survey was conducted.

Relying on public polls that were conducted in the past has some limitations. First, there is little polling data for the period before 1967, so my analysis of Israeli public opinion is limited to the period after 1967. Second, there is a lack of polling data regarding some of the beliefs of the ethos; for example, there are few time series questions that refer to victimization beliefs in Israeli society even though these are central beliefs in school curricula.[16] In addition, some questions were worded in such a way that it may have influenced their results. Yet if repeatedly asked over time, even questions with problematic wording can provide some indication regarding ethos changes. Despite the above limitations, then, the database of public polls provided valuable insight into the general agreement with the ethos beliefs within the Israeli Jewish public. Unless otherwise indicated, all public polling data presented in this book pertains to only the Israeli Jewish population. I chose to focus on the Israeli Jewish public and exclude the attitudes among the Israeli Palestinians for several reasons. The main reason is technical; another limitation of public polls prior to the late 1990s is that questions relevant to ethos beliefs were asked in surveys that were conducted among only the Israeli Jewish population. Comparing results from later surveys that included Israeli Palestinian respondents to earlier survey results that did not include them would give a misleading picture of changes over time. In addition, the core of the Israeli ethos (Israel as a Jewish state) addresses the Jewish population of the country and, for obvious reasons, is not shared by the majority of Arab citizens of Israel. The way that Israeli Palestinians deal with this ethos and their

attempt to change the main ethos of the Israeli society is an important issue that should be studied; it is, however, beyond the scope of this book.

Structure of the Book

The first part of the book provides detailed analysis of specific themes of the ethos of conflict in Israeli Jewish society. It is important to note here that, while each chapter in this part focuses on an individual theme, the themes remain inseparable parts of a complex whole, and I refer to the ways they relate to each other throughout the book and especially in the last two chapters. In Chapter 2, I explore the theme of establishing a Jewish state in the historical land of Israel as well as the collective memory relating to the roots of the Israeli-Arab conflict and the justness of each party's goals in the conflict. In Chapter 3, I look at security beliefs—the perception of Israel as a small country that is under existential threat, the centrality of national security, and the public trust in the Israeli army. In Chapter 4, I present the dichotomy in the Israeli ethos between the positive self-image of Israel as an advanced, moral, and peace-loving country and the negative image of Arabs as backward, untruthful, and seeking Israel's destruction. The focus of Chapter 5 is siege and victimhood beliefs: Israel's self-image as a society that stands alone against a hostile world and how this theme relates to the Holocaust. In Chapter 6 I turn to the theme of Israeli patriotism, examining the extent of pride that Israelis feel for their country and their willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice on its behalf. I also discuss beliefs about the need for and extent of national unity. Then, in Chapter 7 I investigate the centrality of the value of peace in Israeli society, how achievable it was considered to be in different eras, and the nature of the perceived peace.

The second part of the book goes beyond study of each theme separately to elaborate on the relationship among these themes and the implications of changes in the ethos as a whole for policy preferences. In Chapter 8, I present the ethos of conflict as it was reflected in the election platforms of the two main Israeli parties (Labor and Likud) during the years 1969–2009, analyzing the relationship between the themes in the ethos and how those themes feed and sustain each other. I also discuss the extent to which there was acknowledgment of contradictions among the ethos themes and other core beliefs in society, and how the political parties dealt with such contradictions. Finally, I explore the connection between the ethos beliefs and policy preferences of the parties regarding the conflict with the Arabs. I offer specific conclusions in Chapter 9 regarding the Israeli ethos and its effect on future trends in the Israeli-Arab conflict. I also underscore the theoretical merit of this study and its potential contribution to other topics such as conflict resolution and leadership and social change in intractable conflicts.

Notes

1. I chose to use the term *Israeli-Arab conflict* rather than *Israeli-Palestinian conflict* since it more accurately reflects the wider historical context (in its earlier phases, including the early part of the period covered in this book, there were other Arab parties—Egypt, Syria, Jordan, etc.—actively involved in the conflict. To a lesser degree this is still true today). This term also reflects the way the conflict is framed within the Israeli ethos: viewing the entire Arab world as implacably hostile to Israel has been a relatively stable tenet of the Israeli ethos as I discuss further in this book.

2. Kimmerling (2001) wrote about the civil versus the primordial identity of Israel, and he also identified several subdivisions of the Israeli polity (traditionalists, Arab citizens of Israel, Russian-speaking immigrants, Ethiopians, noncitizen workers).

3. These two categories are used by McClosky and Zaller (1984, 4) to explain why capitalism and democracy are the two values that define the American ethos.

4. For the meanings of the Holocaust in Israel and the United States, see Novick (2000); Gorny (2003); Navon (2015); Klar, Schori-Eyal, and Klar (2013); and Lustick (2017).

5. Y. Zerubavel (1995), for example, shows how jokes that became popular among Israeli Jews during the 1970s and 1980s about the historic Tel Hai battle defied the myth about this battle in Israeli collective memory.

6. For example, Wertsch (2002, 117–128) shows how in the Soviet Union people applied what he calls "internal emigration" as a mechanism to resist the official collective memory. This internal emigration involved questioning official stories in a narrow circle of friends, and consuming underground literature that refuted these narratives.

7. An example for a state-directed ritual that was not adopted by the Israeli public is the Independence Day Haggadah that was circulated by the state to the Israeli public in 1952 to use in their homes during Independence Day. This text substituted God with Israel Defense Forces (IDF) while citing phrases from the traditional Passover Haggadah. In addition, the minister of education at that time offered a detailed proposal for the celebration of Independence Day in Israeli homes (reading of the Declaration of Independence at a family meal, decorating homes with olive branches), but none of these official proposals and texts were adopted by the Israeli public in its Independence Day celebration practices (Liebman and Don-Yihya 1983, 116).

8. For example, Ben-Shaul (1997), Shohat (1989), and Gertz (2000) analyzed Israeli films; Firer (1985) and Podeh (2002) analyzed school textbooks; and Urian (2013) analyzed Israeli theater. Sucharov's (2005) account of Israeli identity is based on examination of cultural symbols such as folk songs, plays, films, and school curricula. Arian (1995) and J. Shamir and Shamir (2000) analyzed Israeli public opinion.

9. Waxman (2006a) and Abulof (2015) use a variety of official and cultural sources such as political rhetoric and op-ed writing in Israeli newspapers, and occasionally cite anecdotal poll data. However, public polls are not their main focus and their analysis of public opinion is less comprehensive and systematic than the one that I present in this book.

10. McClosky and Zaller (1984) make a similar claim about the American ethos of democracy and capitalism that American conservatism and liberalism share.

11. Twelve people served as prime ministers of Israel: David Ben Gurion, Moshe Sharet, Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert, and Benjamin Netanyahu.

12. The analysis of leaders' rhetoric is based on published academic studies about these leaders, a search within the Prime Minister's Office archive of speeches on the internet (http://www.pmo.gov.il/MediaCenter/Speeches/Pages/default.aspx),

the archive of Rabin's speeches at the Rabin Center for Peace (http://www.rabincenter.org.il/Web/He/Archives/Subjects/Default.aspx), the Israeli parliament archive on the internet (http://main.knesset.gov.il/About/Occasion/Pages/BeginSpeeches.aspx), and Israel's Foreign Policy–Historical Documents (http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Pages/Documents_Foreign_Policy_Israel.aspx). For the purposes of this book, a theme is considered to be part of the Israeli ethos of conflict if it was mentioned by at least three leaders who served as prime ministers. Beyond this criterion, the strength of a theme within the ethos may vary on a spectrum ranging from a theme that was infrequently mentioned by only three leaders to a theme that was frequently mentioned by every one of these leaders over the years.

13. The Israeli school system is divided into Jewish and Arab sectors. The Jewish sector is divided into three tracks: state-secular, state-religious, and the independent ultra-Orthodox. The ultra-Orthodox system (with about 24 percent of Jewish pupils) is separate and autonomous and focuses almost exclusively on religious studies (Hofman, Alpert, and Schnell 2007). For many years the curriculum for the Arab sector was supposed to be identical to that of the Jewish sector, but since the 1980s large parts of the curriculum for Arab schools have been adapted to Arab cultural heritage.

14. The sections in this book that describe the content of the ethos themes in the Israeli school curriculum are based mostly on a review of the vast and rich literature devoted to the way that Zionism and the Israeli-Arab conflict have been depicted in the curriculum, much of it written in Hebrew and hence not accessible to non-Hebrew readers. In addition, I have provided my own analysis of the current school curriculum that to my knowledge has not yet been covered by other scholars.

15. This database was originally created by Jacob and Michal Shamir and included surveys on the issues of peace and territories conducted during the years 1967–1991. The database was a product of a systematic process: first, J. Shamir and Shamir conducted an extensive search of the archives of the two major newspapers in Israel at that time for references to public polls; then, they searched all published academic studies for polling data; and, finally, they directly obtained the survey data from major opinion research institutions that were operating during those years (J. Shamir, Ziskind, and Blum-Kulka 1999). I followed this procedure and updated the database with polls that were conducted during the years 1991–2017 as well as earlier polls that referred to issues in the ethos other than territories and peace.

16. There may be several reasons why public polls do not refer to specific beliefs. In some cases, it may indicate that a belief achieved a status of hegemonic belief in the sense that it is considered to be common sense, natural, and obvious (Lustick 1993). But this is not always the case. It also may happen because the topic is politically sensitive and, therefore, difficult to ask in many contexts. Or the reason may be technical; as Stone (1982, 7–8) explains, the questions in the survey reflected shifting interests of survey clients and sponsors as well as considerations regarding space limitations and the cost of interviewers and data processing. The meaning of the absence of a topic from public polls, then, should be determined in the context of other available information on this issue—for example, the way leaders referred to it.