

Socioeconomic Status, Intergroup Daily Contact and Identity Strategies: The Case of Palestinian Muslim and Christians Citizens of Israel

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Abstract

Our research deals with “intergroup relation” and relates to the way individuals from specific groups perceive people from the “other” group. Do they tend to separate from them, or to integrate between the two cultures, and how they build social interactions with them (Berry, 1990). Based on a theoretical and research frame of intergroup relations, the relations between two minority groups are studied: Palestinian Muslim and Christian Citizens of Israel—two Palestinian Arab religious groups, living in the state of Israel, where the dominant group is Jews.

The current study examined the relations between socioeconomic status (SES) and identity and acculturation strategies in relations between groups

At first, the research model examined the differences between Muslims and Christians. Then, the relations between SES (independent variable) and the adoption of the strategies (dependent variable) among the two groups. As expected, significant differences were found between Muslims and Christians in most variables. Christians reported higher levels of SES than Muslims. In addition, Christians adopted more social competition, while Muslims tended more to adopt integration.

Possible explanations for the findings are presented in the discussion. Further study could examine whether the findings of the current study were changed by the events occurring in the Arab world from 2011 to 2014: the government coups, civil wars and the horrendous acts of the terrorist organization “ISIS” in various Arab countries.

Keywords

socioeconomic status, identity strategies, acculturation, intergroup contact, sense of coherence, Muslims, Christians, Israel

1. Introduction

The current study examined relations between socioeconomic status of individuals and their identity and acculturation strategies regarding the “other” group. Different concepts and theoretical approaches were employed: social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981) and the acculturation model (Berry, 1990).

The study was carried out among members of two Israeli-Arab minorities, Muslims and Christians, who live in mixed (where various percentages of both Muslims and Christians live, with or without Jews) as well as in separate communities (where only Muslims or only Christians live) in Israel. The two groups share a common national and political background, but differ in their religions. Our main research question relates to identity and acculturation strategies adopted by individuals, reflecting intergroup relations and perception of the “other”, as related to socioeconomic status.

2. Literature Review—The Integrative Model

2.1 Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Research during the past decades has indicated that socioeconomic status (SES) might be related to health, satisfaction and stability in family life (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010). Previous studies described relations between socioeconomic status and feelings of depression or low levels of health (e.g., Evens & Kim, 2010; Roy-Byrne, Joesch, Wang, & Kessler, 2009). In addition, SES was found to be associated with cognitive achievement and cognitive performance throughout life (Hackman & Farah, 2009), with one’s sense of insecurity regarding future prosperity (McEwen & Gianaros, 2010), and with one’s sense of control (Kraus & Keltner, 2009).

A few studies only focus on socioeconomic status, and its relation to perception of the “other” or to identity strategies. Ghorpade, Lackritz and Singh (2004) studied how ethnic groups become acculturated into Anglo-American culture, and found income related to acculturation strategies. Kraus and Keltner (2009) found that SES was an important predictor of how individuals address strangers and behave with them. Intergroup contact and SES were found to be indicators of *prejudice towards out-group members among Chileans, as upper SES participants tended to be more tolerant towards individuals from the “other” group* (González, Sirlopú, & Kessler, 2010).

Relatively little attention has been paid in the literature to the way SES may relate to the adoption of a specific strategy towards the “other” group. Research conducted in China (Yang, Tian, Qudenhoven, Hofstra, & Wang, 2010), examined the impact of urban residents’ SES and their perceptions of rural to urban migrants’ identity strategies. Individuals with low socioeconomic status refrained from contact with other groups, avoided the interaction that might reveal their lower status and, as a result, tended to adopt strategies like separation and social competition rather than integration.

The relations between Muslim and Christian Arabs in Israel between 1967 and 2010 were examined by a recent qualitative research. Analyzing the interviews in this research showed that interfaith relations

between Muslims and Christians were significantly associated with evident social and economic processes in Arab-Israeli society through which conflictual symptoms emerged. The Arab population is a national minority living on the margins of the Jewish state, a fact that has increased tensions in political and economic disputes and interactions within the younger generation, as well as interreligious friction (Shdema, 2012). These social changes have reduced the level of intimacy between Muslims and Christians and increased economic pressures. This has led to social tensions between the two communities. The uncomfortable situation has been associated with the fact that churches held more valuable assets (land, schools, hospitals, religious properties) than did Muslim institutions. Additionally, these Christian institutions employed hundreds of workers, including professionals and academics, a rare resource in the Arab communities. The privatization and commercialization processes have changed the perspective of Muslims toward the owners of these properties and assets. They have become much more aware of the differences and have felt increased jealousy and tension towards Christians over the scarce economic resources (Horenczyk & Munayer, 2007; Shdema, 2012).

Following these studies regarding the Arab society, and based on combined approaches and theoretical concepts: Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981), the acculturation model (Berry, 1990), in the current research we hypothesized that higher socioeconomic status is related to willingness to approach the other religious group members integratively. In addition, we hypothesized that having a lower status is related to the tendency to separate from and/or compete with the 'other'.

2.2 Strategies towards the "Other" Group

Perceptions of the "other" among the two groups, were examined by measures of social identity and acculturation strategies. Berry (1990) presented the acculturation tendencies model in order to explain how non-dominant groups (mainly immigrants) perceive their original culture and wish to preserve their identities, in addition to or instead of establishing social interactions with the dominant group culture (usually the local culture). According to Berry's acculturation model (Berry, 1990; 1997), acculturation relates to social interaction and communication styles that individuals adopt when interacting with individuals and groups from another culture (Berry & Garner, 2001).

Previous acculturation research has mainly focused on relations between groups such as immigrants and other groups who were moved from their original culture to another, where an out-group is dominant as a majority (Berry, 1990; 1997; 2003; 2005; 2006).

The culture in which people live plays an important role in shaping their sense of self. Indeed, one facet of people's self-identity is that they belong to a certain cultural group (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). When an individual moves from one culture to another or is exposed to two or more cultures in his/her daily social life, many aspects of self-identity are modified to accommodate information about and experiences within the other culture. This process, generally referred to as acculturation, involves interactions and changes that take place as a result of continuous and direct contact between individuals having different cultural origins (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936).

These interactions usually take place through sharing daily social life and culture. Assuming that individuals are free to choose their own acculturation patterns, Berry (1990; 2003) has defined four types of identity strategies and attitudes which minority or in-group members may adopt: **Integration**—combining both the original and the “other” dominant cultures, **Separation**—maintaining only the original group’s culture, and avoiding interaction with the “other” group, **Assimilation**—adopting the “other” culture and giving up the original, and **Marginalization**—giving up the original culture without adopting the “other” culture (Berry, 1990; 1997; 2003; Berry & Sabatier, 2010). Worldwide research on intergroup relations suggests that integration, which is related to psychological adaptation and low levels of stress, is often the preferred mode of acculturation (e.g., Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Liebkind, 1996). Thus, as they are relevant and frequent in studies on intergroup relations (Orr & Daud, 2009; Mana, Orr, & Mana, 2009), and as they are relevant to our studied minority religious groups, our study used the first two strategies only: integration and separation.

While Berry’s acculturation model relates to communication styles that individuals adopt while interacting with the “other”, social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981) deals with improving “in group” social status and individuals’ self-esteem by adopting identity strategies. Thus, the “in-group” individuals need a relevant “out-group” in order to be positively distinguished and to feel superior to the other group in some dimensions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This process is closely linked to the alleged universal desire for positive self-esteem (Finell & Liebkind, 2010). Thus, SIT underlines that groups seek positive distinctiveness, which is usually achieved by favourable social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). “In-group” members are motivated to improve their social status by adopting different strategies (Tajfel, 1981). As it is relevant to our context, one of these strategies will be used in the current research: the strategy of **social competition**—through which individuals may compete with the out-group, make an effort to emphasize the merit of their culture and perceive other groups as inferior.

In national contexts, where boundaries are usually fixed between the groups, individuals from the lower status groups were found to be mainly using the strategy of social competition in order to receive a favorable group identity and to avoid interaction which may reveal their low status. (Finell & Liebkind, 2010). The current study integrates the strategy of social competition with two acculturation strategies based on Berry’s model.

3. Palestinian Muslim and Christian Citizens of Israel

These two religious minority groups, belonging to the Arab national minority, live together with the dominant majority group of Jews. As a part of a national minority, Christians and Muslims in Israel have shared common traditions and backgrounds and have together undergone many historical experiences, like the rise of the Zionist movement, the British Mandate rule, the refugee issue, and the

establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, which have affected the two religious groups similarly (Raheb, 2000; Ghanadry, 2009). Therefore, throughout modern history the two groups have worked together against the “Muslim” Ottoman rule, against the “Christian” British Mandate, as well as the “Jewish” Israeli occupation (Raheb, 2002). Moreover, the two religious groups are minorities who feel deprived in Israeli society and fight together for equal civil rights from the government (Ghanadry, 2009). Yet despite sharing these experiences, Muslim and Christian citizens of Israel experience complicated interactions including conflictual elements, especially because of the social, economic and political changes that have taken place throughout the last decades (Raheb, 2002; Horenczyk & Munayer, 2007; Shdema, 2012). These conflictual elements peaked with the weakening of nationalistic movements and the rise of fundamental Islamic movements, beginning in the late 1980s, and leading the Christian minority to feel threatened (Ma’oz, 1999). In other words, many Christians feel uncertain as a religious minority who are part of a national minority, and who perceive political, social, economic and religious instability. This has led many of them to emigrate (Sabra, 2006). According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (270/2010; 306/2010), Palestinian-Arab citizens, Muslims and Christians, constitute about 20% of the population in Israel. It should be noted that, through the course of time, Christians have become a recognized religious minority within the Arab national minority, and today Christians comprise about 10% of the Arab minority, while 82% are Muslims and about 8% are Druze. Today, approximately 60% of the Palestinian Arab citizens live in mixed cities and villages (including both Muslims and Christians, no matter whose percentage is larger), and roughly 40% live in separate towns (only Muslim or Christian).

The Christian minority in Israel is considered economically and socially established and has contributed to Israeli Arab society in different respects (Raheb, 2002). According to socioeconomic indicators, Christians in Israel are more established than Muslims. They are more highly educated, they have higher incomes and smaller families (Central Bureau of Statistics, 270/2010; The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2006). According to formal statistical reports (270/2010; 306/2010), Christian participation in the civilian labor force is 57.8% (66.2% males and 33.8% females) while Muslims constitute only 39.8% (81% males and 19% females). In addition, approximately 5% of the Muslim population has completed some sort of academic degree as compared to 9% of Christians. Furthermore, one can see a gap in occupations: 12% of Muslims work in academic professions, while 32% of Christians do so. Moreover, 40% of Muslims are employed in manufacturing and construction, while only 26% of Christians are employed in these fields. Gross average income among Muslim families 9300 shekels and 11900 shekels among Christians. These data may explain the high percentage of household poverty among Muslims (57%, including Bedouins) as compared with 23% among all Christians (Central Bureau of Statistics, 270/2010; 306/2010).

These socioeconomic gaps relate to the fact that historically, Christians lived in towns where they had access to education through missionary and church schools, as well as taking major roles in national

leadership (Ganadry, 2009). By contrast, most Muslims lived in villages where the access to educational institutions was limited, and only a few families could afford good schools because of the low Muslim socioeconomic level (Ganadry, 2009).

To the best of our knowledge, very few studies have been conducted to analyze the identity strategies of Palestinian Muslims and Christians, most of them related to the context of the relations between Israeli Arabs and Jews (e.g., Ayalon & Sagy 2011; Kurman, Eshel, & Sbeit, 2005; Suleiman, 2002; Sagiv & Schwartz, 1998). Horenczyk and Munayer (2009) have examined the acculturation attitudes of Arab Palestinian Christian adolescents in Israel and their perceptions of the expectations held by majority peers regarding their preferred model of acculturation towards two majority groups: Israeli Jews and Muslim Arabs. Their findings suggest that when asking about the attitude towards Muslim Arabs, Christians wish to maintain their group identity (separation strategy); yet integration was the strongest attitude with regard to Israeli Jews. In addition, Christians expressed more willingness to adopt elements of Jewish society than did Muslims. These tendencies were explained as a desire of Christians to engage in social and cultural contact with Israeli Jews, in order to gain more access to important resources such as education and work, which are primarily in the hands of the majority, as well as gaining higher exposure to and adoption of Western culture and norms. These tendencies may also be a result of more contact with the Jewish majority who deliver the educational and occupational goods. Moreover, some Christians feel more threatened by Muslims than by Israeli Jews (Horenczyk & Munayer, 2009).

Shdema (2012) found that the interrelations are favorable among older Christians and Muslims (especially native families who worked together, had personal friendships, struggled for decades sharing ideological issues against the discrimination, and lived together before the 1948 internal refugees and other immigrants joined their communities) and are less favorable among the younger generations who grew up at a time of social, economic and political changes in Arab society (limited friendship that usually does not continue beyond school, a shift from rural to urban municipalities, the switch to a private economy, the reduction of political power of the Communist party while Islamist movements strongly emerged). These changes have led to problematic vulnerable relations, full of tension, jealousy, violence, prejudice and social competition for scarce resources (Arab communities already suffer from discrimination and limited resources). (Shdema, 2012).

In sum, this study examined the relations among the factors of SES, intergroup contact, sense of coherence, and strategies towards the “other” on an individually based model, as follows:

4. Research Hypotheses

4.1 Hypothesis 1: Differences between Muslims and Christians

Based on previous findings (e.g. Horenczyk & Munayer 2007; Raheb, 2002) and according to the differences between the two religious groups in number and level of education and social status

(Khoury, 2006; Shdema, 2012), (1) We expect Christians to have higher socioeconomic level than Muslims. Besides, (2) We expect members of both groups to mainly endorse the strategy of integration. (3) In addition, findings from earlier research showed that SES and greater intergroup contact should lead to greater integration in acculturation (Currie, 2009; Myers, 2009). Thus, and as greater SES and contact are characteristic of Christian Arabs, we expect Christians to adopt the strategy of integration more than Muslims.

4.2 Hypothesis 2: Socioeconomic Status and Identity and Acculturation Strategies

a. Based on prior studies (Currie, 2009; Myers, 2009; Robert, Cherepanov, Palta, Dunham, Feeny, & Fryback, 2009; Shdema, 2012), socioeconomic status is expected to be related to the adoption of identity and acculturation strategies. Individuals with lower socioeconomic status are expected to adopt strategies of separation and social competition, more than individuals with higher SES. On the other hand, higher SES individuals are expected to adopt the strategy of integration more than lower SES (Yang et al., 2010) .

b. Differences in adopting identity strategies between SES levels: Following previous studies on SES (Currie, 2009; Robert, Cherepanov, Palta, Dunham, Feeny, & Fryback, 2009), we expect to find the largest differences/gaps in adopting strategies, between the highest and lowest levels of SES (we had four levels of SES: low, middle, middle – high, and high). Individuals from high level are expected to adopt more the strategy of integration, whereas lower status individuals are expected to adopt more the avoidance strategies of separation and competition

5. Methodology

5.1 Participants

The sample of the study included Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel living in 27 cities and villages from all over the country: 1130 Muslims (731 live in mixed communities) and 798 Christians (651 live in mixed communities), aged 18 and up.

Three criteria were taken into account when selecting the following cities and the villages: (1) mixed vs. separate communities, (2) a city vs. a village (3) location (north, center or south of Israel).

Table 1. Sample Description (1928 participants)

Variable	Muslims (N=1130)				Christians (N=798)			
	N	%	M	SD	N	%	M	SD
SES level*			2.57	0.98			2.83	0.94
Low	226	20			96	12		
Middle	313	28			195	24		
Middle-high	270	24			214	27		
High	320	28			292	37		

Type of community							
Mixed	731	65			651	82	
Separate	399	35			147	18	
Gender							
Male	485	43			417	52	
Female	645	57			381	48	
Age (18-85)			33	12.80			35 14.17
Young (18-29)	550	49			349	44	
Middle-aged (30-55)	528	47			362	45	
Old (56-85)	50	4			85	11	
Work							
Yes	772	68			580	73	
Not recently	142	13			100	13	
“No”—For long time	216	19			118	14	

*SES = (education + job level) /2

5.2 Procedure

This research is a part of a comprehensive research funded by the DFG German fund and conducted by Ben Gurion University and Gottingen University in Germany. For the research goals, a questionnaire was developed in two versions (one for the Muslim respondents and another for the Christians), adjusting the theoretical categories to the local contents and contexts, based on focus groups and established by the research team which includes Muslims, Christians and Jews (Mana, Sagy, Srour, & Mjally-Knani, 2012). The questionnaire was distributed between July 2010 and September 2010 among the participants by 23 local surveyors who approached a wide variety of neighborhoods, institutions, and organizations in the cities and villages, so as to maximize the variation of SES (response rate was around 92%).

The questionnaire consisted of four parts: Part 1 contained six questions to check contact level with the other group. Part 2 contained 36 questions of a five item scale to measure the adoption of acculturation strategies. Part 3 contained 13 questions to measure sense of coherence (SOC). Part 4 was designed to collect demographic information: gender, age, religious group, place of residence, personal data including religion, educational and occupational levels (SES).

5.3 Measures

Socioeconomic status is assessed through two often used indicators: educational level and occupation (Gilbert & Kahl, 1993). **The educational level** was recoded into four categories: (1) elementary and junior high school, (2) high school, (3) up to three years of technical college, (4) academic degrees.

Occupation is assessed by relying on the division designed by Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel. According to this division, occupations can be categorized into ten groups. In data analysis, we had the items reversalized and then accordingly recoded the ten occupational groups into four occupational levels: (1) low level, (2) middle, (3) middle-high, (4) high. The occupational level was treated as an ordinal scale as well.

Considering the strong relation between education and occupational level ($r=0.64$, $p<0.001$), a composite SES score was then created by averaging (mean) the two variables.

Identity strategies: We developed a 36-item questionnaire with responses along a five point Likert-style scale (1 = totally disagree to 5 = completely agree). The questionnaire development was based on several focus groups. Analysis of the group encounters was used in order to allocate relevant themes regarding identity and acculturation strategies. The questionnaire included three acculturation tendencies: integration, separation and assimilation, derived from the acculturation model (Berry, 1990) and two identity management strategies: social competition and superordinate recategorization, derived from social identity theory (Tajfel 1981). The items reflected the specific social context of Muslim and Christian Palestinian relations in several areas (education, friendship, neighborhood, work, and others). Each participant was asked to estimate if the behavior/feeling/attitude described, reflected his/her own. For example: Integration (related to neighbors' relations): "I prefer to live in a mixed neighborhood where Muslims and Christians live together". Separation (related to education): "I prefer that my children be educated in (Muslim/Christian in-group) schools and not Christian/Muslim (out-group) schools. Assimilation (related to work relations): I prefer to buy only from Muslims/Christians (in-group) and not from Christians/Muslims (out-group). Social competition (related to friendships): Muslims/Christians (in-group) are more loyal to their friends than Christians/Muslims (out-group). Super-ordinate re-categorization (related to neighbors' relations): "I don't care if my neighbors are Christians or Muslims, as long as they are not Jews". We computed scores for each strategy (7 items for integration; 5 items for separation; 7 items for assimilation; 9 items for social competition and 3 items for super-ordinate re-categorization) by averaging the respondents' answers to all statements representing the strategy (Mana, Sagy, Srour, & Mjally-Knani, 2012). Reliability of the scales was found to be satisfactory [Alpha values ranged from 0.72 to 0.91 (see Table 2)].

Due to the new context of the current research, and following previous research that used the strategies in a similar way (Orr, Mana, & Mana, 2003; Mana et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2010; Mana, Sagy, Srour, & Mjally-Knani, 2012), we prefer relying on face validity with satisfying alpha Cronbach rather than using factor analysis which emphasizes structure validity. The phrasing of the questionnaire items was strongly affected by the concept of identity and acculturation strategies.

6. Results

6.1 Hypothesis 1: Differences between Muslims and Christians, and Community Type

An independent sample t-test in addition to Two way Manova analysis, were conducted to examine the differences between the two religious groups in SES and in each of the three strategies: integration, separation and social competition. As shown in Table 2, and supporting our hypothesis, (1) Christians were found to have a higher level of socioeconomic status. This result suits previous findings (Raheb, 2002) and official data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (2009). (2) As we expected, members of both groups mostly endorsed integration strategy. (3) As opposite to our hypothesis, Christians reported a weaker tendency to adopt the strategy of integration than Muslims. In addition, they tended more to adopt social competition than Muslim participants. Yet, no differences were found between the groups in the strategy of separation.

Our findings suit previous research about Christians who try to be closer to the dominant group of Jews rather than Muslims, and tend to adopt competition as they try to maintain their identity (Horenczyk & Munayer 2007; Raheb, 2002). While Muslims tend to be closer to Christians rather than Jews, they tend to adopt strategy of integration, and show less tendency to be competent (Horenczyk & Munayer 2007; Shdema, 2012; Mana et al., 2012; Srouf et al., 2013).

To sum up, results partially supported our hypothesis and differences between the two religious groups were significant in all variables, except separation.

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviations, SES, SOC, Contact Levels and Identity and Acculturation Strategies' Scores, T Values, F Values, and Reliability for Muslims and Christians

Variables	Muslims		Christians		T-value	F-value	Alpha Cronbach
	N=1122		N=791				
	M	SD	M	SD			
SES level (1-4)	2.57	0.98	2.83	0.94	-5.63**	62.92**	0.77
Strategy of integration(1-5)	3.90	0.75	3.76	0.73	4.29**	17.86**	0.83
Strategy of separation(1-5)	2.53	0.91	2.55	0.87	-0.54n.s	0.016n.s	0.87
Strategy of social competition(1-5)	2.63	0.83	2.94	0.88	-7.69**	28.51**	0.91

*p≤0.05, **p≤0.01

6.2 Hypothesis 2: Socioeconomic Status and Identity and Acculturation Strategies

In order to examine the differences between the four groups, a One-way Anova test was conducted. Findings presented in Table 6 show significant differences among all variables. Yet a POST-HOC Tukey test showed that the differences were mainly between the lowest level and highest level groups. In other words, low level groups reported a lower level of sense of coherence and contact compared to

all the other SES groups. In addition, higher SES individuals tended more to adopt the strategy of integration, and less the avoiding strategies of separation and social competition, compared to individuals from lower SES.

Table 3 presents the differences between the four SES groups in the adoption of the strategies. In addition, it elaborates on these differences by showing where the main gaps are.

Table 3. Differences between SES Groups and the Adoption of Identity and Acculturation Strategies

Variables	Low SES level(a)		Middle SES		Middle-high SES		High SES level (d)		F-values Gaps btw. groups
	N=322 (17%)		level(b) N=713 (37%)		level(c) N=433 (22%)		N=455 (24%)		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Strategy of integration(1-5)	3.66	0.82	3.83	0.78	3.92	0.66	3.95	0.65	6.145*** a-b/a-c/a-d
Strategy of separation(1-5)	2.87	0.96	2.58	0.91	2.43	0.79	2.27	0.80	16.982*** a-b/a-c/ a-d/b-d/c-d
Strategy of social competition(1-5)	3.05	0.90	2.80	0.87	2.70	0.83	2.52	0.76	13.242*** a-b/a-c/ a-d/b-d/c-d

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$

In sum, the main differences between low and high levels in all variables are evident. Thus, our hypothesis was supported by these findings.

7. Discussion

The current study examined the relations between socioeconomic status and the adoption of identity and acculturation strategies. Our study has suggested an integrated model in order to understand inter-group relations of two minority groups in Israel. Generally, our findings supported our hypotheses about the relations between socioeconomic status and strategies towards the “other” group. Thus, adopting an acculturation or identity strategy was found to be significantly related to the individuals’ SES. Yet it is worth mentioning that some of the significant correlations were not relatively very strong. Although socioeconomic status was found to play a potential role in explaining the adoption of one strategy rather than another, we should not ignore the level of contact one has with members of the “other” group, his/her religion nor the type of community s/he lives in, as factors which can contribute or disturb the process of approaching individuals from the “other” group.

There is few research on Palestinian Muslims and Christians, citizens of Israel. Hence, the uniqueness of the relations between the two religious groups is concealed in their being minority religious groups, who share a Palestinian national identity. Our findings indicated that both groups are interested in having integrative relations, in spite of their different interests.

Regarding differences between the two religious groups (Hypothesis 1), our findings showed significant differences in their level of SES and contact. In general, Christians had higher SES and reported higher levels of contact than Muslims.

Both Muslim and Christian participants endorsed integration strategy, this can be easily explained as a “survivable need” to define one’s group and to be defined by the out-groups as a strong and united “we-group” in facing the Israeli-Jewish majority (Sagy, Ayalon, & Diab, 2011; Shdema, 2012). This need “to be united” seems to have deep roots in the historical background of both Muslims and Christians in this area, as they have had to struggle against other “rulers” through history (Ottomans, Crusaders and the British Mandate) (Mi’ari 2009; Raheb 2002; Sabra 2006). However, despite this tendency to be united, moving the frame from the perspective of the “triangular relations” between Muslims–Christians–Jews in Israel into the “dyadic relations” of Muslim and Christian Palestinians in Israel, the inner conflict between the groups is clearly revealed. Therefore, this “need to be united”, seems to be less crucial among Christians who consider themselves elite and view themselves as a minority within the Arab-Israeli minority, and they may want to maintain their uniqueness and superiority over the Muslim group. In addition, this desire of Christians to enhance their own uniqueness may perhaps be explained by the fact that they are “struggling” between two worlds or civilizations: being a part of the Islamic world and sharing its national, political and social history and traditions (Raheb, 2002), while simultaneously belonging to the church and the Western world, along with a Western disposition and a modern way of life (Sabra, 2006). In addition, Christians have also traditionally enjoyed the encouragement, and economic and educational support of foreign and local Christian institutions, churches and missionaries (Mi’ari, 2009). Yet in recent decades, the Christian population has been percentage-wise due to immigration and a lower birth (Shdema, 2012; Srouf et al., 2013).

Mean differences indicated that Muslims tended more to adopt the strategy of integration, while Christians tended more to adopt the strategy of social competition.

It may be concluded that relations between members of the two religious groups exist in daily life and these affect the way that each group perceives the “other” especially in mixed communities. Muslims seem to behave more like a majority which is “ready” to include the minority in their identity according to their shared culture and history (Mana et al., 2012).

Despite these explanations, our data also reflect the communality between the groups and the strong tendency for integration among both group members. Thus, it seems that both Muslims and Christians in Israel have a “multiple social categorization” (Phinney, & Alipuria, 2006) as they simultaneously

experience being (and identifying with) social groups of different kinds, according to the social contexts: In the context of the “triangular relations” (Muslims–Christians–Israeli Jews) both Muslims and Christians try to gain social power through integration and shared identity (Mi’ari 2009; Raheb 2002; Sabra 2006).

However, in the context of “dyadic relations”, Muslims try to gain social power as the majority by establishing the Palestinian-Arab “we-group” with Christians. They tend to be closer to them, trying to deny the differences and possible conflicts between the two groups by adopting strategy of integration, and show less tendency to be competent (Horenczyk & Munayer 2007; Shdema, 2012; Mana et al., 2012; Srour et al., 2013).

Christians try to be closer to the dominant group of Jews rather than Muslims, and tend to adopt competition as they try to maintain their identity. These findings can be understood considering the historical background of the Christians’ relations with Muslims in the Middle East through history.

A deeper investigation of Christian’s attitudes, as a minority within a minority, even some of those who have higher SES and greater possibility of contact with the dominant majority of Jews, may lead to another possible explanation; they might want to be separate from Muslims, who this majority regards as the lower status. In this case, it might be precisely higher SES and greater intergroup contact that lead to less adoption of integration and more adoption of social competition when the theoretical model of relationship between SES and contact would predict the opposite.

Moreover, Christians might feel marginalized because Muslims are becoming more and more dominant in public institutions. Thus, it might explain their weaker tendency to integrate compared to Muslims.

This finding would be an important theoretical contribution in relation to our model. That is because it would say something about the use of the acculturation construct with regard to minorities. In other words, our findings suggest an additional aspect of acculturation and identity strategies, which was not emerged among immigrants (regarding whom the original acculturation model was developed).

Our findings indicated that individuals with higher SES, tended to adopt more the strategy of integration, while others with lower SES tended to adopt separation, social competition (Hypothesis 2). One possible explanation for our findings may be that individuals, who have higher SES, feel more secure and less threatened by individuals from the “other” groups. As a result, they show more willingness to share an identity and an interactive daily life. Apparently, these individuals have more ability to maintain close, reasonable and positive relations on the basis of sharing a common status, culture, education, careers and collaboration. In other words, it seems that having a higher SES status might increase feelings of satisfaction, tolerance, self-confidence and well-being (Currie, 2009; Myers, 2009). As a result, the influence of religious group, social and political conflicts is reduced, enabling calm, reasonable and cooperative relations.

Lower status Christians were found to be the group most inclined to compete and separate from Muslims. This may indicate that they want to avoid interaction which may reveal their low status.

Moreover, they are aware that they are most marginalized in their local society on the one hand, and beyond the Israeli arena, in the Islamic Middle East where Christians in general experience more difficulties (Shdema, 2012).

As the clear majority of the Palestinian national minority in Israel, there may be several reasons why Muslims who have a higher socioeconomic status, tend to adopt the strategy of integration towards Christians. This can perhaps be seen as a pattern of “the need to be united and strong” when facing the Israeli-Jewish majority (Shdema, 2012). Another possible explanation might be that Muslims in general, and especially those with a higher SES, may attempt to gain self-confidence and social power by integration with Christians who are often more socially, educationally and economically privileged. Contrastingly, in mixed communities, many Muslims who have higher status may have studied at Christian private schools. This also may account for the stronger willingness of these Muslims to be integrated with Christians in daily, academic and work life.

The very fact that Muslims are a majority in terms of the Arab minority in Israeli society gives them a certain advantage. Governmental programs to improve the Arab education system and to integrate Arabs into academic life and in government jobs have benefitted the Muslim population, reducing the gaps between the two religious groups and decreasing the institutional and educational advantages once held by Christians. Thus, Christians may feel less secure these days with respect to their economic status and social-political power. However, more and more Christians still choose to gain higher education and to integrate into Israeli governmental institutions, perhaps to be closer to the resources and sources of control (Shdema, 2012).

The findings of this research may be viewed against the backdrop of research examining additional aspects of the two religious groups which have not been investigated in this study. Two studies have found that Muslims and Christians differ in their order of priorities (Sabra, 2006; Shdema, 2012). While Muslims usually focus on the importance of being a collective, and tend to express more extreme political views and opinions, Christians tend to focus on individual concerns, investing their efforts in their families and career and focusing on their own achievements. This may provide an additional explanation for our findings regarding the stronger tendency of Muslims towards integration, and stronger tendency of Christians towards social competition and separation. Moreover, this may partially explain the academic, educational and social gaps between the two religious groups. These gaps may be also related to another possible difference between the two religious groups: Muslims are more affected by political and social difficulties, while Christians tend more to espouse pluralism and adaptation through political and social change (Shdema, 2012).

From the Arab perspective, their presence in Israel has brought the two religious groups closer, in their opposition to government policy which tends to perceive of all Israeli-Arabs, Christians and Muslims, as Palestinians and as security threats (Sagy, Ayalon, & Diab, 2011; Shdema, 2012). It seems logical that Muslims should have always wanted to maintain good relations with Christians when facing the

state. However, Christians are in a more complicated position and they may be worried about losing control over social and political resources, because of the increasing Muslim dominance over such resources. That may also play a role in explaining our finding regarding the tendency of Christians to adopt the strategies of separation and social competition to a greater extent than Muslims. This may also be related to the continual reduction in the political power of the Israeli Communist Party which has included both Muslims and Christians and the rise of the Islamic parties in which the Christians cannot maintain equality (Mi'ari, 2009; Shdema, 2012). In addition, the effects of living in close proximity to the majority Jewish population must also have some effect on the attitudes and strategies chosen by the Muslim and Christian populations towards one another on one hand, and toward the dominant majority of Jews on the other, but these questions are outside the framework of this research. On a related context, previous research (Sagy, Ayalon, & Diab, 2011), examined the experience of meeting "the other" among Jews and Arab Palestinians. This research dealt with the perception of the "other" in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, through looking at both collective narratives. Findings showed that getting close to the "other, knowing and understanding his/her narrative, will increase the willing for reconciliation rather than conflict (Ayalon, & Sagy, 2011).

However, in the context of the "dyadic relations", the smaller group of Christians living in mixed communities, try to raise their social status, stressing their unique social-religious identity by competition with the Muslims. That is true also for higher SES individuals, who experience conflictual daily stress with Muslims, and feel a daily threat and even fear of being assimilated with Muslims living with them in the same community.

Although the Palestinian Christians have been an inseparable part of the Arab Islamic world (Mi'ari 2009; Raheb 2002) they have also belonged to the universal church and to the Western world. In times of conflict between these "two civilizations", they have been caught in the middle (Raheb 2002; Tsimhoni 1993). Thus, the history of the Christians in the Middle East appears to explain our data as the attempt of this religious minority to enhance its own identity in the political and social chaos around it and the strong majority of Muslims in the area.

8. Conclusion

Our findings had both the theoretical and empirical contribution, since it applies to the integrative model and focuses on the context of Palestinian Muslims and Christians citizens of Israel, living with the Jewish dominant majority.

It is worth mentioning in the wider context that Israeli Jews reflect an example of success and excellence in the eyes of many Arabs in Israel and internationally even though they have been exposed to major painful and traumatic social and political experiences (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004). Jewish people have shown impressive political, social and economic superiority in general, and in Israel in particular. Some research has cited unique Jewish cultural values that promote success (Fejgin, 1995;

Lynn & Kanazawa, 2008). Looking very carefully at the Jewish experience of successful integration in Europe, the United States and Australia may also teach and motivate Palestinian Muslim and Christian citizens of Israel to be willing to be integrated with individuals of other groups as a means of development and success. In areas where Jews are a minority, they have become business leaders, intellectual elite, university personnel as well as achieving other higher socioeconomic status professions and occupations (Lynn & Kanazawa, 2008).

9. Policy Recommendation

In light of the research findings, it appears that socioeconomic status may play a potential role in the way individuals perceive members of other groups. A higher SES enables more opportunities to meet, get to know and develop relationships with the “other”. Furthermore, a higher SES may be related to one’s behavior with others, sense of security and sense of control; a person may feel less threat from the “other”. This may hint to authorities that empowering younger members of minority groups in order to foster their socioeconomic status, might help them to develop into more tolerant, secure and productive citizens.

Most of researches on intergroup relation, dealt with minority groups and their relation with the majority. Thus, our study has contributed to a deeper understanding of intergroup relations, regarding two minority groups, setting the light on the interaction between them, and on the complicated perception of one the other.

10. Future Research

For the last several years, a number of Arab countries have been living in a conflictual reality as a result of political, social and economic changes. These changes affect relations between Muslims and Christians all over the world, including violent attacks against Christians and the emergence of the extreme Islamic ISIS, which has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United Nations and internationally. It would be important and interesting to examine relations between the two religious groups at present, having a larger sample. In addition, it would be interesting to conduct similar research among other dissimilar groups living together, e.g., secular and religious populations, new immigrants and natives. Another possible research issue would consider level of religiousness as an independent variable, and examine its relations with the identity strategies. In the aspect of living together with a dominant group of Jews, it would be recommended to examine the relation between socioeconomic status and the strategies, among Jews and Arabs citizens of Israel.

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