Peace Begins at Home: Toleration, Identity Politics and the Changing Conception of Peacemaking in Israel after Yitzhak Rabin’s Assassination

Nadav Gabay

In a democratizing world, where increasing numbers of protracted conflicts are being addressed via negotiations, governments’ ability to construct ‘toleration policy’—a set of discursive relationships between collective identities, national interests and peacemaking—plays a crucial role in their capacity to elicit popular legitimacy and implement their peace policy. The paper traces the effects of changes in Israel’s toleration policy on changes in its peace policy following Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination. Focusing on the political struggles after the assassination and their effect on public opinion, the paper offers an alternative, socio-cultural, explanation to the breakdown in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Introduction

On Saturday evening, 4 November 1995, tens of thousands of people attended a rally in support of the peace policy being pursued by the left-wing government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin under the Slogan ‘Yes to Peace; No to Violence’. As the event was drawing to a close, a 25 year old religiously observant Jew named Yigal Amir fired three shots at Rabin’s back, killing the Prime Minister. During his interrogation, Amir admitted that after Israel signed the Oslo accords with the Palestinians (in September 1993) he had planned to assassinate the Prime Minister on several occasions. Opposing Rabin’s government policy of trading land for peace, the assassin had one clear goal: to terminate the peace process.

The shock over Rabin’s death was overwhelming and powerfully affected the political situation within Israel. At the time of the assassination, Israeli society was deeply divided. The debate over the peace agreement with the Palestinians was not
just about the future of the territories that were occupied by Israel in 1967. As will be demonstrated below, the debate expressed a much deeper struggle over the definition of Israel's national identity.

In his analysis of the assassination of John Kennedy, Sidney Verba (1965) notes that political assassinations provide a unique lens for observing and deconstructing structures of political cultures and collective identities. As Peri (2000a) observes, political assassination are moments of ‘cultural breaks’ characterized by great flux and the surfacing of long dormant cultural contradictions. These breaks create opportunities for political mobilization, as struggles are being waged over the definition of the nation involving issues fundamental to society—identity, threats and interests—with various groups competing to bestow symbolic meaning on them (see Zald, 1996, p. 268). The social movement literature treats these struggles as strategic framing processes, underscoring their important role in the construction of collective identities and the legitimization of collective action (McAdam et al., 1996, p. 6). From this perspective, identities are seen not simply as pre-formed givens, which explode on the political scene, nor as infinitely malleable, but rather as occupying an intermediate zone in which they are constantly negotiated.

Moreover, as Cynthia Weber (1994) suggests, collective identities are ongoing accomplishments of discursive practices which (re)produce territorial and social boundaries. According to Weber, changing definitions of collective identity that distinguish between ‘self’ and ‘other’ imply a redefinition of threats and interests that have strong effects on peace and security policies. An ongoing (re)definition of the social borders with the ‘Other’ is thus essential for achieving and maintaining peaceful borders.

This cultural approach to peacemaking and security policies is especially instructive where protracted conflicts have a strong ethnonational and/or religious content. Success in peacemaking in such cases depends on the constructions of new political identities that could cut across ethnonational and religious boundaries. As most violent conflicts in the post cold war era answer to this definition, we must pay closer attention to how domestic changes in political identities affects the course of these conflicts and the efforts to resolve them.

Academic scholars have been slow in responding to the challenge posed by identity politics to reconciliation efforts. One reason might be that the reexamination of the core beliefs and values of a particular nation is a complicated affair. At any one time there exists a multiplicity of political actors—motivated by their own distinctive experiences and interests—who seek to establish their understandings as binding for the rest of the society. In order to pursue their agenda, political actors are compelled to enter into debates and competition. For a group to win the debate, its claim-making has to be legitimated in the larger society. Such legitimation often involves a reinterpretation of past events, current conditions, and future goals. In this way, politics is a question not only of ‘who gets what’, but also of ‘who persuades whom’ in an ongoing negotiation of reality (Berger, 1988, p. 44).
Because national identity and interests are shaped by a never-ending and often contentious political process, more attention should be directed towards studying how public opinion is shaped and mobilized through identity politics, and towards analysing the effect of these mobilization efforts on the perception of conflicts and subsequently on the outcome of peace processes. Since social forces are in active competition with one another, it is also necessary to explain why one political agenda rather than another triumphs. Such an explanation depends on analysing the political culture and the historical circumstances within which political groups struggle for dominance (Swidler, 1986).

The Argument

Following the analytical guidelines presented above, I treat the public debate in Israel over Rabin’s assassination as a ‘critical discoursive event’. The debate as a critical event because it stands at the centre of a struggle between actors who compete to frame it because how this event is understood will have important consequences for mobilizing action and furthering their interests. As such it carries constitutive and transformative effects. I treat the debate as a discoursive event because the struggles to define it rearticulate a set of relations between ‘things’ or concepts (i.e. discoursive practices), which govern and change the way actors thinks about them.

I argue that following Rabin’s assassination tolerance was disarticulated from its liberal and democratic content and was rearticulated, instead, with (Jewish) ethnonational values. As a result, tolerance was vastly politicized, framed in terms of Jewish moral unity and was mobilized by the ‘national camp’ as a reconciliation project between Jews. Democracy, by contrast, was decidedly depoliticized, framed as a regulatory system for maintaining order and stability, and was mobilized by the ‘peace camp’ as a ‘top-down’ project concerning law reinforcement aimed at resorting governmental (‘majority rule’) and judicial (‘rule of law’) authority. ‘Tolerance’ and ‘democracy’ were thus conceptualized as separate, mutually exclusive issues, a reconceptualization which led to a major transformation in the Israeli public opinion.

It is often claimed that tolerance is a cardinal virtue or a core principle of democracy, which demand the universal justification of liberal democratic values (e.g., Horton, 1993; Kymlicka, 1995). Liberal Scholars from John Stuart Mill to John Rawls have argued that tolerance and democracy are two interrelated philosophical and political ideas sharing similar principles: the value of the individual, a respect for autonomy, and freedom of choice. Tolerance and democracy are therefore perceived as closely interrelated concepts or liberal institutions and seen as applications of universal principles so that a change in one is assumed to lead directly to a corresponding change in the other.

The article attempts to challenge, on both a conceptual and empirical grounds, the assumption that tolerance necessarily demands the universalistic justification of democratic values. Conceptually, I will argue, tolerance is not a unidimensional, universal principle that can be applied uniformly and unhistorically, as liberalism
claims it to be, but it is rather a multidimensional process (henceforth ‘toleration’) that can have discrete expressions at different times and in different political and cultural contexts (see Galeotti, 2002; Walzer, 1997). As Walzer (1997) points out, whatever theoretical justification it might have, tolerance serves its purpose—peaceful coexistence—only as toleration. In contrast to tolerance, which operates as standards that specify and regulate the proper enactment of an already-defined identity which serves as a static endpoint, toleration operates as a process; it involves a set of practices which are highly dynamic, contingent and political. Walzer’s definition of tolerance as toleration points not to its normative content as a moral imperative or to its limits as a democratic virtue but to the question of how the articulation of tolerance with peaceful coexistence is used, in different historical circumstances and via discursive practices—as an ensemble of ideas, terms, conceptions, reasons, examples, stories, theories, and linkages—to construct a socio-political space for building alliances that are based on mutual interest and a shared conception of the ‘common good’. From this communitarian perspective, different forms of toleration reflect different political traditions and institutional arrangements and allow for different forms of peacemaking.3

Empirically, the article sets out to study the effect of changes in toleration discourse on the reconceptualization of peacemaking in the Israeli public: from an attempt to democratize the relationship between Jews and Arabs to an effort to achieve tolerance (i.e., peaceful coexistence) between Jews only. I analyse the intense public debate over the meanings and implications of Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination, study its impact on Israeli public opinion and offer a sociological exploration of the crucial moment, considered by many as a transitional point in the course of the Oslo process, which contributed to its deterioration to the point of complete breakdown. In particular, I show how the focus of the national camp on a particularistic dimension of tolerance (as a reconciliation project between Jews) and the focus of the peace camp on formal and procedural aspects of democracy, exposed a potential contradiction between tolerance and democracy and enabled the separation of peacemaking from liberal-democratic ideals.

To develop my arguments, I briefly present a theoretical background. I begin by discussing the relation between toleration and identity politics and then set the ideas of democracy and tolerance in the context of Israel’s political culture. Next, I discuss the effort made by Rabin’s left-wing government to liberalize and democratize, within the framework of the Oslo agreement, the discoursive relationship between identity politics and reconciliation in the Israeli society. I then provide evidence that Rabin’s assassination was indeed a transformative historical event, which produced durable effects which changed the course of the Oslo process. Following William Sewell’s definition of ‘transformative historical event’, I demonstrate that Rabin’s assassination was part of a ‘ramified sequence of occurrences’, that it created a ‘local rupture’, i.e., a disturbance ‘characterized by heightened emotion’ and that it was ‘recognized as notable by contemporaries’ (1996, p. 844).4
Subsequently, I show that one of the main durable transformations produced by the public debate, which took place after Rabin’s assassination, was a redefinition of tolerance and the consequent reconceptualization of peace. This change in toleration was a result of disarticulating tolerance from democracy and rearticulating it with Jewishness. It is through this rearticulation that ‘peace’ was redefined as tolerance between Jews. Tolerance provided a political space for expressing a particular collective identity that served, under the auspice of a new peacemaking discourse, as an apparatus for advancing a particular ‘common good’ based on Jewish ethnonational codes. This dynamic, I argue, stood in contrast to Rabin’s effort to democratize and liberalize the relations between Jews and Arabs by using the Oslo process to advance a liberal agenda that would cross-cut ethnonational and religious identities based on political partnership between Israeli and Palestinian civic-secular forces.

**Toleration, Identity Politics and Peacemaking**

The common definition of tolerance as respect for people, practices or beliefs we dislike, has the problem of explaining why people should put up with what they oppose. Liberal discourse, which understands tolerance in terms of disagreement produced by differences which ultimately pertain to individual choice, typically tries to solve this problem by resorting to such ideas as freedom, autonomy, rights, justice, fairness, neutrality and utility which dictates the necessity of tolerance in maintaining peace and harmony (Mendus, 1989). Yet, most types of conflicts which give rise to contemporary issues of toleration are communitarian in character in that they involve differences between groups rather then between individuals (e.g., Kymlicka, 1995). Group differences normally have an ascriptive quality and do not necessarily involve individual choice. Within the pluralism of groups, cultures and collective identities, it is not disagreement between individuals’ beliefs but the exclusion of various groups which sharpen cultural differences (Galeotti, 2002). According to this communitarian approach, people’s identities are understood as malleable but nevertheless given. People do not choose their identities in any straightforward way; their identities occupy an intermediate zone in which toleration becomes an important strategy of creating alliances within which people can identify their own good with the good of the others.

If what is really at stake is peaceful coexistence between groups rather than equal liberties for individuals, then the issue of toleration must be addressed not simply in terms of neutrality or the compatibility between pre-given, universal liberal values or institutions and various cultures or practices, but in terms of an active contests over the inclusion or exclusion of distinct collective identities. Collective identities are fundamentally socio-political and relational, defined by interaction with and relationship to others. Collective identity, Connolly argues, ‘is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized’; it therefore ‘requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty’ (1991, p. 64). No identity can be an identity without excluding...
something, i.e. what is different from itself. Collective identity is thus seen as a contingent category in constant dispute, as it is commonly institutionalized and crystallized at points of inclusion and exclusion.

Identity, however, does not directly cause action but rather makes some action legitimate and intelligible and others not so, through the practice of toleration. Understood as a part of an active politics of identity, toleration can be more specifically theorized as a ‘practice of difference’ (Connolly, 1998) or an ‘active form of recognition’ (Galeotti, 2002), which suggests that toleration provides an ‘identity-shift mechanism’ through which people constantly negotiate their collective identities via various forms of inclusion and exclusion (McAdam et al., 1996, pp. 27–28). The study of toleration should therefore focus on general contentious processes and specific mechanisms of drawing boundaries. To practice toleration in this sense is to practice vis-à-vis what is different, and the principle of toleration suggests prescriptions by which people decide the differences they ought to include within their ethical framework that structures their collective identity as well as those they have to exclude (Connolly, 1998).

This negotiation process, which shapes the politics toleration, has an important inclusionary role in building a new collective point of view and setting up new collective interests that can help people, who view themselves in radically different ways, to build relations of peace and justice, and to avoid violence and communal resentment in the long run. At the same time, however, toleration as an active form of identity politics is always-already an exclusionary mechanism, converting relations of differences into modes of otherness, while advancing a particular ‘common good’ either to secure already existing ascriptive identities or to ensure that the newly formed identities and alliances will be consistently and securely pursued.

Because different political traditions entail different forms of toleration, or different understandings of ‘peaceful coexistence’, they could lead to competing strategies for making which might clash, as they involve different inclusionary frameworks and different conceptions of reconciliation. In this respect, two general competing strategies of toleration, within the Communitarian tradition, have become especially important for achieving peaceful coexistence in contemporary democracies with protracted communitarian conflicts (or ‘civil wars’):

1. ‘Pragmatic Communitarianism’ (or Liberal Communitarianism). This peacemaking strategy applies democratic principles of tolerance to build pragmatic alliances. These alliances are built around recognized moral frameworks in order to maintain rational cooperation based on mutual interests. In this type of peacemaking, toleration directly constructs new ‘bridging identities’ as forms of mutuality that cut across more ‘typical’ or primordial collective markers such as ethnicity, nationality and religion.

2. ‘Conservative Communitarianism’ (or Non-Liberal Communitarianism). In this strategy of peacemaking, toleration policies are aimed at the preservation of ascriptive communal memberships. Toleration here negates universal principles of
peacemaking and applies instead primordial collective markers such as ethnicity, nationality and religion as a framework for mutuality between competing forces and as the basis for communal alliance.

Before turning to discuss how these competing communitarian forms of toleration were played out in the construction of the Oslo peace process and in the debates that followed Rabin’s assassination, it is important to provide a short background of Israel political tradition and to discuss the ways in which these competing conceptions of toleration are embedded in Israel’s political culture.

**Toleration and the Pre-Oslo Political Culture in Israel**

Political traditions are complex bundles of beliefs and practices, which imply that a given community holds particular beliefs and behaves in particular ways because of its common history and institutions which constitutes its ‘political culture’. By both enabling and constraining people’s understanding and negotiation of power and authority, political cultures serve as ‘road maps’ or ‘tool-kits’ that provide ideational resources for framing, constructing and organizing different mobilization strategies and thus allow political actors to maximize their interest.

In the liberal tradition, the state is perceived as officially neutral with respect to the ethnic, religious or other ascriptive identities of its citizens, so that members of all ethnic groups enjoy the same citizenship rights. The principle of tolerance, in the liberal paradigm, is considered intrinsic to democracy because it promotes the image of the state as a universalistic entity and secures its neutrality by enjoining citizens to view each other as having political equality vis-à-vis the state. Tolerance ensures that no party is entitled to demand that the state reflects its particular value-system or that it promotes its particular interests at the expense of the interests of other parties. By ensuring a democratic display of neutrality, tolerance plays an important rule in protecting the legitimacy and stability of democracy. This demand for neutrality-based tolerance does not just rule out the coercive imposition of a conception of the good and its associated way of life. It also rules out as wrong or unjust governments encouraging or supporting some ways of life at the expense of others (Gray, 2000). The political culture officially espoused by liberal democracies is therefore that of civic nationalism (Yael Tamir, 1993) or constitutional patriotism (Habermas, 1992), unencumbered by association with any specific religious or ethnic identity.

In contrast to the liberal paradigm, Communitarians do not see the state as merely neutral arena. Communitarians emphasize the interdependence between people and their sense of belongingness to a wider community. This provides a new justification for tolerance that is not readily available in liberalism. Communitarians justify tolerance only as toleration: a historically, socially and politically embedded process aimed at promoting a sense of citizenship based on a communal solidarity or shared identity. In the communitarian tradition toleration takes a proactive form of state-policy which is strongly connected to political identities. In conservative Commu-
nitarianism, this identity politics serves to preserve the basis for pre-political collective markers through ‘thick’, primordial collective markers. In pragmatic Communitarianism, by contrast, toleration is a process of building new alliances and other forms of cooperation, mutuality and engagement based on ‘thin’, rationally based, civic and modern identities, often employed as bridging identities that cut across the ‘thicker’ more ascriptive collective markers, thus allowing policy makers more room to manoeuvre domestically and internationally.

Israel, while broadly considered a democracy, cannot however be fully fitted into the liberal type of democracy (Peled, 1992; Smooha, 1997). As constitutionally defined ‘state of the Jewish people’, that nonetheless has a substantial (about 20 per cent) non-Jewish citizen-Palestinian minority; Israel is not neutral with respect to the ethnic or religious identity of its citizens. Rather, it actively and openly fosters the interests of Jews. The nationalism of the Israeli state is not a civic Israeli-nationalism but Jewish nationalism (Peled, 1992). Ethnicity, and not citizenship, is therefore the main logic shaping many of the public policies and discourses in Israel’s political culture (Shafir & Peled, 2002).

The Israeli political culture is thus communitarian in essence, rooted in Zionist definition of Israel as a Jewish nation-state. Indeed, the Israeli society was made captive from the beginning by its choice of a target-territory for immigration and a place for its nation building. Zionist ideology mobilized Jews to political sovereignty by reconstructing Judaism from a religion to a national movement. This Zionist hegemony is thus expressed in the taken-for-granted equivalence between the Jewish religion and nation, and between Jewish identity and civic identity which shape the ‘moral commonsense’ of public life in Israel (Kimmerling, 1995).

To maintain the control and dominant position of the Jewish ethno-class, the Israeli elites and officialdom often make use of a ‘statist’ modern-secular discourse, commonly termed as mamlakhtiut (‘statehood’), to claim cultural superiority so as to legitimatize and protect their economic and social privileges. Through the mamlakhtiut discourse the Jewish elites in Israel to further their dominance by representing themselves and the state of Israel as‘western’, ‘modern’ ‘secular’ and ‘liberal’, thus excluding Arbas as ‘backward’ and ‘inferior’ (unmodernized and unliberal). In addition, mamlakhtiut discourse enables the Israeli state to depoliticize and ease Intra-Jewish conflicts. It helps the Israeli elites to secure their dominant position by translating intra-Jewish political conflicts and social tensions, which might clash with the communitarian principle of Jewish unity, to managerial and administrative problems, while policymaking and political decisions are practiced as technical solutions.

An inevitable result of these processes is the reduction of democracy to an instrumental, formal, and conjectural status of the ‘rule of law’ and ‘majority rule’ (Shenhav & Gabay, 2001). To be sure, the Jewish public in Israel consistently expresses a much stronger affinity and preference to the principle of Israel as a Jewish state and the value of Jewish unity, than a preference towards democratic values. Democratic values and norms are commonly perceived by the majority of the Israeli Jewish public
as secondary and instrumental to the principle of the Jewishness character of the state, without necessarily having any intrinsic value or importance in themselves (Arian, 1995).

Clearly, then, the pragmatic and liberal-like civic-modernist discourse of mam-lakhtiut is not set as an alternative to Zionist Communitarianism but is embedded within its ideology as a form of liberal (modern-secular) communitarianism. Thus, at the same time as it advances a modern-liberal discourse, the Israeli state mobilizes powerful sentiments of Jewish unity and belonging, based on Jewish ethnonational identity. In fact, Israeli citizens are subjected to two cultural, as well as legal and judicial systems that operate according to different and even opposing principles within the Zionist communitarian paradigm. One system is secular and liberal-like, based on democratic and civic values and norms; the other is religious and based on Jewish primordial values and norms that are mostly derived from Orthodox interpretation of the halakhah (Kimmerling, 1995).

The tension between the civic (liberal-like) and ethnonational (non-liberal) aspects of Israel’s communitarian political culture is represented in the two main dimensions of public debates and electoral competition in Israel: (1) the relation with Israel’s Arab neighbors and the question of territorial boundaries, and (2) the nature of the Jewish state and the collective identity of the Israeli Society (Who is a Jew? What it means to be an Israeli? What is the role of Jewish religion? What is the basis for citizenship?). The overlap between these two dimensions has increased since 1967, when religion became closely intertwined with nationalism, as religious authorities provided the main legitimization for keeping the territories taken in the war of that year (Kimmerling, 1995). Hence, since 1967 and especially after the signing of the Oslo accords, public debates between left-wing (peace camp) and right-wing (national camp) over the territories has been the primary vehicle for political struggles over the nation’s collective identity. This struggle enmeshes both ‘issue politics’ and ‘identity politics’, as it is often defined in collective identity terms of religious versus secular, primordial versus civil, or ‘Jewishness’ versus ‘Israeliness’ (Shamir & Arian, 1999). It is against this particular background that we need to understand the construction of the Oslo Process as a revolutionary practice.

The Oslo Peace Process and Israel’s new Identity Politics

The end of Cold War and the Gulf War created a geopolitical situation in the Middle East that not only increased the incentives and reduced the risks for peace but, most crucially, found the Israeli public increasingly willing to take such risks. From the mid-1980s, Israeli society was going through a rapid process of liberalization. This process completely changed the face of the economy while affecting many other spheres of social life, including Israel’s relations with its Arab neighbors (Shafir & Peled, 2000; 2002). The 1992 election, in which the left-wing parties that presented peaceful negotiations with the Palestinians expanded their power, underscored this process of liberalization and sharpened the distinction between conservative and
liberal discourse within Zionist Communitarianism. For the first time in the history of Israeli parliament, a coalition with Arab parties was formed, enabling the left parties to form their own majority government headed by Yitzhak Rabin.

The new peace agenda of Rabin’s government (hereafter: the Oslo Process), was driven by a new policy of toleration with ambitious goals: to transform the common view of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict by articulating a new set of relationships between Israel’s collective identity, its national interests and peacemaking. This rearticulation directly challenged the old ascriptive views which underlined Israel’s national security and defined the conflict. Traditionally, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict was viewed through the ethnonational axiom of Jewish unity as a set of political problems centred on injustices or inequities driven by communal membership and ethnonational identification. Rabin’s new toleration policy assumed, in contrast, that it will never be sufficient for people to pursue peace from within their own particular Jewish or Palestinian communities, even if they focus on collective problem solving. The Oslo process thus entailed more than simply peacemaking between two national-cohesive entities—Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians—i.e., between overarching solidarities, which encompass every aspect of their member’s experience.

In this respect the Oslo process demanded a new process of identification that was nothing short of a groundbreaking movement within the Zionist paradigm (Barnett, 1999). The underlying logic of the Oslo process was to build an alliance between moderate and pragmatic forces within the Palestinian and Israeli communities. This pragmatic alliance essentially legitimized secular, progressive and moderate Palestinians, giving them a new identity as ‘peace supporters’, which led to the dramatic decision to recognize the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinians. At the same time, the architects of the Oslo agreement strove to de-legitimize Jewish and Palestinian nationalists or religious extremists by depicting them as the ‘enemies of peace’. Recognizing that politically they have substantially more in common with the modern, pragmatic and secular leadership of the PLO than with Jewish religious and national extremists, Rabin’s government presented the Oslo process as a partnership whose axis crossed the ethnonational boundary between ‘Jewish’ and ‘Palestinians’ to link moderate elements from both sides (Lustik, 1997; Beilin, 1999).

This sociological understanding of Oslo process, which focuses on its cultural politics, should be set against the background of a more common and much narrower perspective of Rabin’s peace policy. According to the latter, the underlying logic behind the Oslo peace plan was the separation of the two nations—Jewish and Palestinian—under the format of ‘two states for the two people’, driven by the rising cost of the occupation and the need to secure Jewish majority within national and sovereign borders. Within the Oslo framework these aims were to be achieved by putting an end to the occupation, while attaining the Arab world recognition of Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state within secure borders. My wish is not to dispute this understanding of the Oslo framework but to offer broader and deeper understanding of the significance of Oslo as a political process. Indeed, as mentioned before, the Oslo peace policy was constructed not as an alternative to, but in accord
with, the Zionist communitarian paradigm and Rabin’s motivation for pursuing the two states solution was communitarian in essence. Nonetheless, while the end goal of the Oslo accords was undeniably a ‘two state solution’, according to the formula of ‘land for peace’, focusing only on the end goals of the peace accords represents a limited understanding of Oslo as a political process—as a method for achieving this end goals—in which the principles of cooperation and partnership were crucial in achieving the goal of national separation.

By the same token, while it is not disputed that Rabin saw the Oslo accords as a way for maintaining Israel’s character as a Jewish and democratic state by securing a Jewish majority within its sovereign borders, the pragmatic structure of the Oslo process advanced liberal democratic values, which emphasized equal citizenship based on universal human rights over ethnonational sentiments of Jewish unity. Through building a pro-peace alliance, the dynamic of the Oslo process established a growing democratized space where Jews and Palestinians could negotiate, cooperate, make further alliances and foster solidarities based on a post-conflict agenda that could be built around their new identity as peace-supporters. This newly formed civic-liberal collective identity could then potentially cut across ethnonational and religious differences, deconstructing, privatizing and diffusing the old primordial identities which informed the conflict. The hope was that this new policy of toleration would eventually lead to an actual movement out of old frozen positions and towards an ongoing active process of engagement and mutual accommodation.

Imagined through the Oslo process, democracy was no longer an instrumental principle secondary to that of Jewish unity. Instead, democratic values and norms were mobilized as a substantive political agenda against the old ethnonational identity politics of Jewish unity. Thus, as the peace process moved forward it was not just the possibility of giving up land to the Palestinians which loomed ever larger, but also the prospect of establishing a democratic space for new civic-liberal identities and institutions (Grinberg, 2000).

The propagation of this new toleration policy was one of Rabin’s main political efforts. Rabin was aware of his historical responsibility in leading the Oslo process and constructing its legitimacy from the very beginning. In his first Statement after the elections he declared that he would be a solo leader, and that only he would decide the path, the rhythm and the terms of the process (newspapers, 23 June 1992; see Barnett, 1999; Grinberg, 2000). The articulation of Rabin’s new toleration policy entailed both inclusionary and exclusionary practices. Rabin’s inclusionary agenda included immense political efforts to change the image of Palestinians from a dangerous enemy into an actual partner. Rabin did so by claiming in a series of highly visible speeches and interviews that PLO leadership were honest, moderate and fair colleagues, genuinely seeking peace, and making them part of a new collective identity of ‘peace supporters’ which Rabin associated with modern liberal values of democracy, progress, secularism and economic prosperity. In addition, Rabin advocated the right of the Palestinian citizens of Israel to be part of the internal
political process of decision making, offering them a partnership in the coalition and making them important supporters of his government.

At the same time, the successes of Rabin's new toleration in democratizing the peace process was crucially dependent on the ability of both the PLO and the Israeli leadership to expunge the maximalist and extremist voices from their midst. To accomplish this goal, Rabin used rhetorical offensive to marginalize the national camp as the 'enemies of peace'. One effective way to achieve this goal was by comparing religious extremists to the terrorist Islamic organization of Hamas and accused the national camp of collaboration with the Hamas against the Oslo process (Barnett, 1999; Jones, 1997; Grinberg, 2000). This harsh rhetoric was backed up by action when in February 1994, after Baruch Goldstein attacked Muslim prayers in Hebron, Rabin ordered his government to outlaw the extreme right wing parties 'Kach' and 'Kahana Hay' and label them as terrorist organizations who pose a major threat to Israel democratic identity (Barnett, 1999).

It is therefore not surprising that from its very inception Rabin's toleration policy was the target of ruthless battering from both Palestinian and Jewish extremists. The national camp was up in arms, frantic and angered by Rabin's frontal assault on their positions and core values. Since early 1995, when Islamic military organizations increased their terrorist attacks against civilian targets inside Israel, the polls have shown a consistent declining support for Rabin and the peace camp parties. Gradually winning the support of public opinion, the national camp adopted a policy of extreme protest. Demonstrations against the Oslo process became significantly more aggressive and violent; rejecting the Government's mandate to negotiate with the Palestinians, calling the Oslo accords a 'national disaster', blaming Rabin's policies for the loss of security and attacking his leadership.

The national camp depicted the Oslo accords a criminal offence and Rabin's government as 'criminals of peace', demanding that they would brought to justice for their crimes. Right Wing leaders were pointing to Rabin's governmental reliance on the support of Palestinian voters to delegitimize its authority to negotiate with the Palestinians and made land concessions. Another strategy was to attack Rabin personally. Rabin was de-legitimized as a leader for failing to serve the interests of the Jewish people, and de-humanized as a traitor, serving Arafat, initially appearing on a poster with an Arab kafia and or with the SS Nazi uniform (Kapeliouk, 1996). The rhetoric used by Jewish religious-extremists leaders was even more ruthless: Rabin was portrayed as a criminal and a traitor who deserved to die. One ruling posted in some synagogues just before the Yom Kippur holiday was the Pulsa De'nura, an extremely rare curse in Jewish tradition, naming someone as deserving of death. Hundreds of Rabbis, both in Israel and abroad, declared, in a ruling published in Israel in June 1995, Rabin deserving of din rodef, the duty to kill a Jew who imperils the life or property of another Jew. A month later, Avraham Hecht, a rabbi from Brooklyn, issued another ruling in June describing Rabin as a moser—a deliverer of Jews into the hands of non-Jews—another crime punishable by death in
the halachah. On 2 October, a month before the assassination, a Pulsa De’nura ceremony was held in front of Rabin’s home (Kapeliouk, 1996).

Yet, Rabin decided to move ahead with the peace process, despite these personal attacks, the national camp gaining public support, and a divided government facing mounting terrorism and electoral drawback. As Lev Grinberg (2000) observed, with fortunes of the Labour party declining, Rabin was deserted by many of his colleagues and left to fight almost alone.

Public Debates following Rabin’s Assassination

Symbolically Rabin was assassinated immediately following a mass demonstration under the slogan ‘Yes to Peace, No to violence’, which supported peace and condemned the violent attacks of its opponents, both Jewish extremists and Islamic terrorists. In his very last speech, moments before his assassination by one of the ‘enemies of peace’ to which he referred, Rabin, addressed the peace rally in Tel-Aviv and identified both his partners and his adversaries:

There are enemies of peace who are trying to hurt us, in order to torpedo the peace process. I want to say bluntly, that we have found a partner for peace among the Palestinians as well: the PLO, which was an enemy and has ceased to engage in terrorism. Without partners for peace there can be no peace.9

The shock at Rabin’s death was overwhelming. National mourning was declared for three days but continued for a full week. Eight heads of state from around the world attended the funeral including three Arab leaders. In his eulogy the US President Bill Clinton declared Rabin as a ‘martyr of peace’ invoking America’s ‘litany of loss from Abraham Lincoln to President Kennedy to Martin Luther King’,10 and senator Edward Kennedy brought handfuls of earth from the graves of his two assassinated brothers, John F. and Robert, to scatter on the grave of Mr Rabin (Zelizer, 2000).

Both left and right unequivocally condemned the assassination. Different speakers from the left and the right stressed the importance of the event, perceiving it as a major crisis of the Israeli state and the Jewish people and as an ending or a turning point in Israeli history. Benjamin Netanyahu, the head of the Likud party and the right-wing opposition leader declared, ‘this is one of the worst tragedies in the history of the state and of the Jewish people’ (Haaretz, 11 September 1995, a4). Likud USA President Howard Barbanel said

murder and political violence cannot be condoned or excused and has no legitimate place in Zionist discourse . . . Every Likud member and supporter in the United States is shocked and disgusted by the tragic murder of Mr. Rabin.

The chairman of the Israeli Parliament (Knesset), Shevakh Weiss, emphasized that ‘the Hebrew language is too poor to express the shock and the heavy fear for the future of democracy in Israel’. Yossi Sarid, a left-wing leader, said that ‘as of tonight [the night of the assassination] the state of Israel is no longer the same state’, and
elaborated his fears for the future and the prospect of a possible civil war. Ran Cohen, a left wing Knesset member, described the assassination as ‘the most shocking political disaster in Israeli history’ (The Jewish Post of New York, January 1996). These comments, and many more like them, testify to the importance that contemporaries bestowed on the assassination.

While both sides shared the same ‘diagnostic’ frame of the event, their ‘prognostic’ frames, nonetheless, were very different. The national and religious right wing leadership perceived the assassination as an injury to Jewish moral unity and thus promoted a political agenda emphasizing tolerance and reconciliation among Jews as means of restoring Jewish national unity. The peace camp, on the other hand, saw the assassination as an injury to the ‘rule of law’ which seriously challenged the legitimacy of the ‘majority vote’. Thus, rather then adhering to Rabin’s new toleration policy which underlined the liberalized logic of the Oslo process, the peace camp promoted a statehood agenda, carried out by *mamlakhti* discourse, which emphasized democracy as an instrument of restoring the political and social order.

As I will show below, this debate reproduced the civic/ethnic polarization of the old political culture that Rabin’s government courageously worked to deconstruct and which eventually led to Rabin’s assassination. By disarticulating tolerance from democracy and rearticulating it with Jewishness, ‘peace’ was reconceptualized as reconciliation (or toleration) among Jews only and thus the political struggle was once again just between the Jews, about the proper national leadership for rebuilding the Jewish consensus, aiming to prevent further deterioration of internal relations between the Jews. The long term result of this dynamic was the deterioration the Oslo peace process, as its democratization and de-colonization agendas of the process were marginalized, leading eventually to a total breakdown in negotiations.

The Peace Camp Response: Democracy as the ‘Rule of Law’

The ‘peace camp’ in Israel saw the assassination as a well-planned act to sabotage the ability of a democratic elected government to carry out its policy. The assassination was perceived, therefore, mainly as an act in defiance of the democratic principles of majority rule and as a criminal offence against the rule of law. Left leaders did not see the assassin Yigal Amir as a lone gunman. They claim that he was influenced by his religious nationalist education and by the climate of incitement instigated by right-wing and religious extremists leaders against Rabin and his government. The view of the assassination as a religious crusade against Israeli statehood (*mamlakhtiut*), against the state’s procedural instruments and secular laws for maintaining social order and stability, led to the following paradox. On the one hand, the assassination was explained as a crisis between religious and modern Jewish state and thus constructed as an internal Jewish predicament, excluding non-Jewish pro-peace as well as anti-peace forces from the discourse about Rabin’s policies. On the other hand, by blaming religious nationalists as responsible for the assassination the peace camp failed to present any ethnonational basis for solidarity and reconciliation.
among Jews.\textsuperscript{12} As a result, the peace camp fight against Jewish religious extremism ironically eschewed the political dimensions of the assassination. Instead of advocating Rabin’s new politics of toleration—i.e., seeing the assassination as another terrorist attack directed against the effort to put an end to the Israeli occupation in the territories and achieving peace between Jews and Palestinians—the peace camp saw the assassination as an internal Jewish problem, where Israeli citizens committed a criminal act against their state laws. It therefore offered a technocratic solution of obedience to state’s law as a formula for unity.\textsuperscript{13} Subsequently, the peace camp demanded the intensification of police methods as an answer to the ‘disobedience’ of the religious right by reinforcing the state laws and increasing state surveillance on the right-wing and religious extremists. To the extent that the assassination was conceived as act of ‘disturbing the peace’, peace was synonymous with the policing and securing public order and social stability.

Many well-known Israeli left-wing intellectuals had commented in this spirit immediately following the Rabin assassination. Professor of history Anita Shapira wrote:

The concept that there is a higher authority than the law, in the name of which one may perpetrate any criminal deed and obtain immediate expiation . . . shakes the foundations of the national consensus. (\textit{Yedioth Ahronoth}, 11 November, 1995, p. 27)

Professor of political science Shlomo Avineri tells an interviewer:

There are circles in Israel . . . who consider themselves subordinate to supreme laws of religion and nation alone . . . They undermine the legitimacy of Israeli democracy and the laws of the state. (\textit{Yedioth Ahronoth}, 11 November, 1995, p. 22)

Professor of philosophy Asa Kasher said:

We have here a large disharmonious chorus of the representatives of God on earth . . . Because of this, there is a need for something stronger that will obligate everyone and that something is the law. (\textit{Ma’ariv} weekly magazine, 11 November 1995, p. 8)

And the novelist Amos Oz wrote ‘Fundamentally, the bastard that assassinated Rabin did not act on the basis of his approach to the problem of peace and the return of the territories’. Oz maintains that the assassin’s primary motive was to perpetrate an ‘attack on the rule of law’ (\textit{Ha’aretz} weekly magazine, 11 November 1995, p. 12).

Echoing this message, numerous peace camp activists rejected the national camp campaign of Intra-Jewish reconciliation, claiming the religious right-wing extremist would not change its strategies and tactics without the state policing and the enforcement of the rule of law. Janet Aviad, one of the leaders of the left-wing ‘Peace Now’ movement said:

When push comes to shove, the extreme right will resort to the same violence it resorted to in the past . . . If the peace process continues on to the final-status talks,
we will probably see the same kind of demonstrations, illegal and violent, against soldiers, police and citizens. (*Los Angeles Times*, 25 October 1996)

Shulamit Aloni, a longtime left-wing leader, recently expressed these ideas in even greater pessimism, mourning the breakdown of the Oslo liberalizing agenda:

They won… the assassin and his senders… The assassination, the violent demonstration which preceded it, the incitement in the streets… all of these protested not only the Oslo accords… they primarily turned against democracy and the judicial and governmental order… Taking advantage of the idea of Jewish solidarity… they aimed to challenge the rule of law… They are calling us ‘brothers’ so we’ll be willing to spill blood for their crazy whims… Facing them is a weak, wounded and mourning state who yearn for democracy and enlightened governance, who strives for a dignified entrance to the twenty-first century while cheering for science, progress and peace. (*Ynet*, 2 November 2000)

By perceiving the assassination as an internal Jewish problem (frequently terming it as ‘religious intolerance’), and offering ‘law-enforcement’ as a paramount solution for ills that the assassination reflected, the peace camp response to Rabin’s assassination fell back on the old ethnocentric logic of Israel’s political culture, thus failing to adopt Rabin’s toleration policy and its new and democratic identity politics as the underlying logic of the Oslo process. In its exclusive focus on law enforcement as the necessary solution of protecting Israeli democracy against religious extremism, the peace camp disarticulated democracy from toleration, in either its ethnonational (Intra-Jewish) or pragmatic (Arab-Jewish) forms.

Following the assassination the New Israeli Fund, an American liberal-left sponsor organization of cultural activities in Israel, decided to launch a ‘campaign for democracy’, as pronounced by Norman Rosenberg, the Fund’s Executive Director:

Rabin’s murder highlighted the extent to which democratic norms cannot be taken for granted in Israel, but must be constantly nurtured. We know no better way to honor the Prime Minister’s legacy than to rededicate ourselves to strengthening the mechanisms, attitudes, and expectations that are needed to make democracy work… It is clear that much more work is needed to make that vision live, and the Campaign is our response. The Campaign’s goal is to foster better understanding and greater acceptance of democracy’s core values—civility, majority rule and unwavering commitment to the rule of law—even in the face of fundamental disagreements.

The new Israel fund also helped to finance the development of high-school curricula initiated by the ‘Adam Institute for Democracy and Peace’, an organization of the ‘peace now’ movement, in order ‘to combat political and religious intolerance’, and to ‘help students differentiate between legitimate opposition to government positions and efforts to undermine government authority.’
The National Camp Response: Tolerance as Jewish Unity

While the national camp in Israel harshly condemned the assassination, its leadership denied any connection between the assassin and the national camp. The majority of national camp leaders saw the assassination not as a political attack against the peace policy of the Rabin’s left-wing government but as the individual act of a lone madman. Even the minority who did emphasize the political content of the assassination joined the majority in the national camp in putting the blame for the assassination partly on the side of the peace camp, claiming that it was largely the fault of Rabin and his peace policy who, by dividing the Jewish people, ‘brought it on himself’. Thus, although the national camp by and large denounced the assassination, the assassin was said to be just acting upon a polarization which was created by the peace process.

Moreover, the national camp accused the peace camp of ‘exploiting Rabin’s assassination for political purposes’, turning it into ‘a club with which to brow-beat the right wing into guilt and submission’, which served to ‘further divide the nation, not unify it’ (Jerusalem Post, 9 November 1996). By creating symmetry between Rabin’s dividing peace policy and his assassination, the national camp was able to advance an alternative toleration policy based on ethnonational sentiments and the feeling that all Jews bore equal responsibility for the assassination. The assassination was perceived as an act of political intolerance between Jews, and the main lesson which was promoted by the right-wing was that a Jew must not kill another Jew because they disagree. The national camp thus pointed to the urgent need of bridging the political and religious chasms between Jews so as to prevent a ‘war between brothers’. Zevulun Hammer, a former education minister and leader of the right-wing National Religious Party (Mafdal), said shortly after the assassination: ‘The struggle for the Land of Israel must not lead to civil war. The unity of Israel is as much a value as the Land of Israel’ (Jerusalem Post, 9 November 1996).

This toleration discourse—based on conservative ethnonational identity politics—‘making peace between Jews’—was mobilized by the national camp as an alternative peacemaking strategy to that of the Oslo peace process and its toleration policy. Through the articulation of toleration with Jewish moral unity, and under the banner ‘peace begins at home’, the national camp reconciliation campaign aimed at closing the space opened by the Oslo process, for the creation of new pragmatic identities by focusing on the existing ascriptive identities which nurtured the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Nowhere was this message articulated more clearly than in the speeches of the national camp leader Benjamin Netanyahu. In his first speech after Rabin’s assassination, at the Knesset Memorial Session on 13 November 1995, Netanyahu fired the first shot in the national camp ‘ethnonational reconciliation’ campaign:

Here there are no enemies of the people, no enemies of peace. Here are no enemies! And we shall not allow anyone to take advantage of the dispute between us and turn us into enemies. We must put an end to incitement, to hatred, to
delegitimation of the political opponent. We shall conduct the most stringent debates with mutual respect and tolerance. And, above all, we shall remember: we are part of the same house, the same family, the same people. 'A House divided cannot stand', said Lincoln. This is especially true for our people... The feeling of unity—of one family—is a basic requirement for our existence, and we must now make every effort to restore and strengthen it... May we all have the strength and wisdom to choose the path of conciliation and understanding. This is what the entire nation expects from us... This is what the memory of Yitzhak Rabin mandates... We should all remember: Peace begins at home.15

In his following speeches and at many different occasions Netanyahu repeated this message of toleration as Jewish unity relentlessly.16 He continued to do even after he was elected as Prime Minister. In his inauguration speech in the Knesset on 2 June 1996, Netanyahu opened with the following statement:

The State of Israel is embarking on a new path today, a path of hope and of unity, a path of security and of peace. And the first and foremost peace we must make is peace at home, amongst ourselves. This is our most important task because in recent years the polarization in Israeli society has deepened, the gaps have become larger, and the tension has increased... I see my first task as prime minister to mend the rifts, to reduce the tensions and to strengthen the unity and the sense of partnership, which is the basis of our existence. And I want to tell you: the first peace is peace at home. Our unity... is expressed by nurturing tolerance.17

In a speech on the first anniversary of Rabin’s assassination (of the Jewish calendar) Netanyahu said:

The murder of Yitzhak Rabin must remind us of a basic truth: peace begins at home. The choice before us today is to seal the rift and unite or widen the division and disintegrate. (Los Angeles Times, 25 October 1996)

This new ‘peace begins at home’ message was echoed right from the start by the religious leadership in Israel. Immediately after the assassination the Chief Rabbis of Israel sent the following statement to the Associated Press: ‘He who shot Rabin shot all of us, he wounded Jewish tradition, he wounded the Jewish character, he wounded the unity of the Jewish people’. The Ashkenazi chief rabbi, Israel Lau, told The Associated Press: ‘This is the most tragic incident to afflict the Jewish people since Gedalia was murdered’.18

On the thirtieth day of mourning for Rabin, the national-religious Bar-Ilan University, where Rabin’s assassin Yigal Amir was studying for his law degree, announced its intention to establish the Yitzhak Rabin Mega-Centre for the Advancement of Jewish Unity, Democracy and Tolerance. The mission of the centre was stated as follows:

In light of the great national tragedy that has befallen Israeli society and polity, Bar-Ilan University seeks to redouble its efforts to teach tolerance, moderation and
Jewish unity in the State of Israel’. Bar-Ilan seeks to affirm the truth that these values are inherent in, and not in conflict with, our Jewish heritage.

Accordingly, the centre’s goal were formulated to

1. Foster communication between religious and secular Jews
2. Elevate the level of public discourse in Israeli society through deeper insight into such complex issues as the nature of Jewish character and Jewish continuity.

In his speech at the campus memorial assembly for Yitzhak Rabin on 24 October 1996, Professor Moshe Kaveh, the president of Bar-Ilan University reiterated the university mission under what he termed ‘a new social contract’:

The conclusion and result [of Rabin’s assassination] are one: a new social contract is called for, a covenant that will lay down a code of mutual coexistence, based on tolerance, and based on the wish to live, despite everything, together. Tolerance is a term that requires definition; it must be filled with content. ‘Tolerance’ does not mean that one is open-minded to any ideal, outlook or ideology, nor does it mean that one accepts all opinions as commensurate or of equal worth. I say that a person can be tolerant only if grounded in values… The values of our tradition… the values we draw from our age-old sources, which stand immortal, do not contradict modern life in an egalitarian society based on pluralism, incorporating varied cultural approaches and beliefs. Dialogue between religious and secular, and between right and left, is a prerequisite for the formation of a wide-ranging Israeli cultural identity that will encompass all, without crumbling.

The vast amount of Israelis, who shortly after the assassination, plastered bumper stickers on their cars calling for the ‘Unity of Israel’, testified to the sweeping impact and massive successes of the national camp campaign. The renewed spirit of Jewish unity dramatically increased the number of non-profit NGOs seeking to promote reconciliation between secular and religious Jews. The Tzav Pius (‘reconciliation warrant’) foundation, established shortly after the assassination by the orthodox foundation Avi Khai under the slogan ‘honoring Jewish tradition’, declares its mission as

promoting reconciliation… understanding and dialogue between opposing views in Israeli society, with the main emphasis on mutual respect between religious, traditional and secular Israeli Jews.

The Elul study centre (Bet Midrash) has been promoting since the assassination a weekly series of joint religious-text study sessions for youth from HaShomer HaTzair (left-wing youth movement), B’nai Akiva (nationalist Orthodox youth movement), and the Israeli Scouts. The Bet Morasha Centre for Advanced Jewish Studies, supported by NIF, has been focusing efforts to develop a curriculum on Judaism and tolerance to assist teachers and students in state religious schools to elucidate the tolerant, pluralistic aspects of Jewish theology and tradition. At different locations in Jerusalem, groups of secular and religious college students participate annually in
the 'Tent of Study and Prayer’ to commemorate Rabin, in which people listen to lectures about ‘Jewish history and tradition’ given by non-partisan figures like high army officers, Chief Rabbis and Supreme Court Justice. As reported by one enthusiastic journalist:

A populist revolution is blossoming. Thousands of people, in hundreds of organized and private frameworks, religious and secular, are studying Jewish tradition and culture together, yearning with palpable hunger for a new common ground, perhaps even a collective identity. There is no doubt in my mind that this is a phenomenon consequent upon Rabin’s murder and its psychological impact on the public... I have visited dozens of similar ‘encounter groups’ for secular-religious dialogue, across the country. This activity carries the great white hope for our fissured society. The grassroots is pulling back from the precipice of civil war—a prospect starkly made evident by the assassination—and seeking mutual understanding. (D. Weinberg, Jerusalem Post, 9 November 1996)

One of the most salient NGOs promoting the national camp agenda of Intra-Jewish toleration has been Gesher (‘Bridge’), a US-Israeli Organization, founded by Rabbi Daniel Tropper in 1970 ‘to foster understanding between religious and secular Jews’. Ever since the assassination, Gesher has been especially active. Gesher reports spending millions of dollars annually for advertisement campaigns in the Israeli mass media under the message of ‘Jewish unity’ and holding workshops and seminars on a weekly basis, ‘directly involving 90,000 Israelis’ each year. The purpose of these workshops as stated by Rabbi Benjamin Levine, assistant director of the foundation, is to help secular students to learn about the religious. For months after the murder, we received many, many calls from young adults post-army age, who want to heal society’s wounds. We usually host school groups, but these people called on their own. (Los Angeles Times, 25 October 1996)

On its website, Gesher presents the ‘main problem facing the Israeli society’ in the following way: ‘Being Jewish has always united our people. But today it is dividing us’. Accordingly, Gesher’s describes its mission to bring into being an Israeli society in which Jewish identity forms the bond that unites, rather than a wall that divides... We seek to promote tolerance and alleviate the severe secular religious polarization.

Under the motto ‘Gesher speaks to everyone, because Gesher listens to everyone’, ‘everyone’ is defined to include ‘secular Jews, religious Jews, right-wing Jews and left-wing Jews’, and the message says: ‘we must know and accept and respect one another because we are all Jews, because we are all family’. Gesher typically ends its publications with the slogan ‘It’s time we made peace with our worst enemy—ourselves’.23

On the official Memorial Day for Yitzhak Rabin Gesher holds a ‘Day of Dialogue’ between religious and secular Jews under the banner ‘Friend, Let’s Talk’. During the
evening thousands of adults and students from religious and secular schools gather under huge tents set up in more than 70 community centres throughout Israel, including the city Square where Rabin was assassinated and Mount Herzl where Rabin is buried. Divided to small groups and led by trained Gesher facilitators (mostly national-orthodox Jews), they focus on themes like ‘tolerance and unity’ ‘shared faith’ and ‘shared vision’. One of Gesher’s discussion facilitators explained the guidelines for these activities in an interview:

We definitely do not want to target one group of the population and say that they were responsible for what led up to the tragedy, or to tell them that they must apologize and do their soul-searching before they can join us. That is not the way it works. Everybody has their own soul-searching to do for the destructiveness and hatred that led to Rabin’s assassination. No one sector of the population was any more responsible for the assassination than another. There were also statements on the Left, including from Rabin himself, that showed a disdain for people and opinions from the opposing political camp. (Larry Derfner, Jerusalem Post, 22 October 1999)

Changes in Tolerance and Support for Democracy in the Israeli Public

To give my thesis additional support, I measured the effect of the peace and national camps’ election campaign on public opinion by comparing the results of public opinion polls on democracy and tolerance that were taken before and after Rabin’s assassination. The comparative analysis of the surveys’ data tests the hypothesis that the toleration policy advanced by the national camp successfully disarticulated democracy from peace, thus rejecting the new identity politics which was initiated by Rabin’s government through the Oslo peace process.

Data and Variables

Two telephone surveys of the adult Jewish population (18+) in Israel were analysed. The first sample was polled on February 1995 and included 509 respondents. The second sample was polled on November 1996 and included 645 respondents. Two indexes were composed as measurement of the dependent variables: tolerance and democracy.

Degree of Political Tolerance. Following Sullivan et al. (1979) standard measurement of political tolerance, respondents were asked to name their most disliked Israeli political group. Next, the respondents were asked on a five point scale whether they agree or disagree with granting the disliked group the following five political rights (1) the right to speak in the mass media; (2) the right to arrange public demonstrations; (3) the right to vote for parliament; (4) the right to be elected to parliament; (5) the right to serve in government. An index of tolerance was created by averaging the scores for each item. As the index scale goes up, tolerance increases.
Support for Democracy. Two items, measured on a five-point scale, determined respondents’ support of democracy. The first item measured support of the idea that Israel needs ‘a strong leader that will make order in the country without being dependent on election or on parliament’. The second question measured support of the idea that ‘even a minor threat on national security justifies major constrains on democratic rights’. A Support for Democracy index was created by averaging the two items. As the index scale goes up, support for democracy increases.

Seven independent variables were analysed. All variables appeared in both survey periods and were worded and coded in the same way.

Socio-Demographic Variables

The Respondent Gender was coded ‘0’ for Men and ‘1’ for women. The Age of the respondents was coded on a six-unit scale (18–24; 24–35; 35–44; 45–54; 55–64; 65+). Education was measured on a five-unit scale according to the respondents’ last study institution (elementary, high school without diploma, high school diploma, non-academic diploma and academic diploma). Degree of Jewish Religiosity was measured on a four-unit scale from lowest to highest (secular, traditional, Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox).

Attitudinal Variables

Respondents Political Alignments was measured on a five-point scale ranging from identification with extreme right-wing (1) to identification with extreme left-wing (5). Two additional five-point scale items, measured the respondents’ perceived threat by the group they dislike. In the first item, respondents were asked to what degree they think the political group they dislike is a threat to democracy. On the second item respondents were asked to what degree they think the political group they dislike poses a threat to the Jewish character of Israel. As the scales go up the perceived threats increases.

Results

Table 1 shows that the Jewish public in Israel became more tolerant after the assassination while no corresponding change occurred in its support for democracy. The increase in political tolerance occurred in all five measurements that compose the tolerance index. No differences were observed in the socio-demographic characteristic of the two samples, indicating that the two surveys were drawn from the same population.

Analysing trends in political tolerance according to the respondents’ most disliked Israeli political group (categorized into three groups: Jewish national camp; Jewish peace camp and Arabs) further confirms our hypothesis that the national camp was successful in influencing public opinion through its toleration policy of peacemaking.
among Jews. As shown in Table 2, the increase in tolerance after Rabin’s assassination was significant only for disliked Jewish groups (either from the national camp or from the peace camp). By contrast, political tolerance towards disliked Israeli-Arab groups did not change after the assassination. These findings suggest that the overall increase in tolerance was a result of increase in tolerance exclusively in reference to Jewish groups, regardless of their political affiliations.26

Although, as shown in Table 1, no overall change was observed in the public perception of threat to either the democratic or the Jewish character of the Israeli state of Israel by the group they dislike, Table 3 tells a different story. The table shows that when we examine the perceived threat to the Israel’s Jewishness according to the ethno-political affiliation of disliked group, we find a significant decrease in threat

Table 1  \(t\)-test for variables before and after Rabin’s assassination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean SD</td>
<td>Mean SD</td>
<td>Mean SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of women</td>
<td>0.508 0.500</td>
<td>0.506 0.500</td>
<td>0.070 p &gt; 0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>3.52 1.692</td>
<td>3.51 1.704</td>
<td>0.073 p &gt; 0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2.711 1.368</td>
<td>2.823 1.444</td>
<td>-1.402 p &gt; 0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>1.693 0.810</td>
<td>1.668 0.814</td>
<td>0.545 p &gt; 0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political alignment</td>
<td>2.990 0.890</td>
<td>3.020 1.350</td>
<td>-0.422 p &gt; 0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat to democracy</td>
<td>3.744 1.250</td>
<td>3.703 1.251</td>
<td>0.579 p &gt; 0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat to Jewishness</td>
<td>3.579 1.323</td>
<td>3.489 1.410</td>
<td>1.174 p &gt; 0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support of democracy</td>
<td>3.085 1.137</td>
<td>3.152 1.077</td>
<td>-1.085 p &gt; 0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for strong leader</td>
<td>2.934 1.407</td>
<td>2.997 0.322</td>
<td>-0.820 p &gt; 0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricting democracy</td>
<td>3.231 1.232</td>
<td>3.311 1.211</td>
<td>-1.155 p &gt; 0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance (index)</td>
<td>3.019 1.183</td>
<td>3.359 1.102</td>
<td>-4.997 p &gt; 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote for Parliament</td>
<td>3.330 1.449</td>
<td>3.633 1.277</td>
<td>-3.916 p &gt; 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be elected to Parliament</td>
<td>2.81 1.484</td>
<td>3.226 1.418</td>
<td>-5.049 p &gt; 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest</td>
<td>3.187 1.399</td>
<td>3.537 1.270</td>
<td>-4.617 p &gt; 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewed in media</td>
<td>3.296 1.378</td>
<td>3.583 1.265</td>
<td>-3.834 p &gt; 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected for Government</td>
<td>2.422 1.426</td>
<td>2.797 1.434</td>
<td>-4.638 p &gt; 0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Means of tolerance before and after Rabin’s assassination by disliked group\(^a\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disliked political group</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean SD</td>
<td>Mean SD</td>
<td>Mean SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N[%]</td>
<td>N[%]</td>
<td>t-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish groups (national camp)</td>
<td>0.166 p &gt; 0.760</td>
<td>3.386 1.444</td>
<td>-2.282 p &lt; 0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>248 [50.8]</td>
<td>328 [55.1]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish groups (peace camp)</td>
<td>2.781 1.115</td>
<td>3.360 1.021</td>
<td>-4.563 p &lt; 0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>148 [30.2]</td>
<td>139 [23.4]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli-Arab groups</td>
<td>2.655 1.368</td>
<td>2.623 1.444</td>
<td>0.166 p &gt; 0.760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>94 [19.2]</td>
<td>128 [21.5]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)using Index of Tolerance.
when it is associated with peace camp group and a significant increase when the threat is associated with Israeli-Arab groups. By contrast, we find no change in threat to Israel’s Jewishness that is associated with national camp group. These findings confirms the hypothesis that the intra-Jewish increase in tolerance (see Table 2) was largely achieved by transferring the threat to Jewish ethnonational identity from within the Jewish community to Arab groups thus preserving ascriptive collective identity through the exclusion of non-Jews from the process of toleration.

Moreover, no change in threat to democracy was found in association to any of the three ethnopolitical categories of disliked groups. This finding suggests that the overall increase in toleration was due to the national camp success in disarticulating tolerance from democratic values and rearticulating it instead with the values of Jewish moral unity. The Pearson correlation results, shown in Table 4, give additional support to this hypothesis. The table compares the correlations between the indexes of support for democracy and political tolerance, before and after the assassinations by disliked groups. The table shows that in the period before Rabin’s assassination the Jewish public attitudes towards tolerance and democracy were interrelated across all target groups. After the assassination, however, a correlation between tolerance and democracy is found only in reference to Palestinian groups, where it even increases. We can conclude therefore that, in the public mind, after Rabin’s assassination, tolerance among Jews (i.e. tolerance of Jews in reference to disliked Jewish groups) became disconnected from democratic values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disliked political group</th>
<th>Before Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>After Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jewish groups (national camp)</td>
<td>3.084</td>
<td>1.303</td>
<td>3.106</td>
<td>1.436</td>
<td>−0.189</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish groups (peace camp)</td>
<td>3.987</td>
<td>1.566</td>
<td>3.425</td>
<td>1.847</td>
<td>2.776</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli-Arab groups</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.980</td>
<td>4.540</td>
<td>0.868</td>
<td>−2.637</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Correlation between tolerance and support for democracy by disliked group before and after Rabin’s assassination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disliked political group</th>
<th>Before Pearson correlation</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>After Pearson correlation</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jewish groups (national camp)</td>
<td>0.288</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.001</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>p &gt; 0.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish groups (peace camp)</td>
<td>0.343</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.004</td>
<td>0.117</td>
<td>p &gt; 0.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli-Arab groups</td>
<td>0.362</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.024</td>
<td>0.411</td>
<td>P &lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*ausing Indexes of Tolerance and Democracy.
Concluding Discussion

In the period immediately following Rabin’s assassination, the majority of people in Israel and throughout the world were convinced that the Rabin’s peace policy would continue. The mass mourning and feeling of regret created an atmosphere that Rabin, with his death, had finally defeated the right-wing opposition to peace. Support for peace skyrocketed, shifting some 20 per cent of right wing voters to parties on the left. The assassination and the violent and aggressive content of the national camp appeared as illegitimate and even more threatening and dangerous than a compromise with the Palestinians. The people in the streets and the politicians in the media promised to ‘continue in Rabin’s path’. This trend, however, was quickly reversed. In the May 1996 elections, held only six months after the assassination, the national camp came to power and effectively halted the peace process. The rapidity of this shift was so shocking that it was described by the defeated peace camp as ‘Rabin’s second assassination’ (Peri, 2000b, p. 192).

Thus, while many observers concur that the shock over Rabin’s death was overwhelming, they question the long-term impact of the assassination on the political situation within Israel and on the course of the Oslo process. It is generally agreed that spontaneous expression of national grief only temporarily increased public support for the peace camp but was toppled less than four months later by a series of terrorist attacks by the Hamas (see, e.g., Peri, 2000b; Grinberg, 2000; Lustick, 1997). As concluded by one study

> Although the [Hamas] bombings were clearly the work of a small band of Palestinian extremists, these zealots were able to convince a majority of Israeli citizens to walk away from a peace process most of them strongly supported. (Kydd & Walter, 2002, p. 263)

Indeed, many commentators have chosen to focus on Palestinian terrorism to explain the surprising shift in public opinion back towards the right wing parties only a few months after Rabin’s assassination. Yet, we should not forget that while Palestinian violence is commonly used to explain negative results in the peace process, it is also used extensively in the literature to explain the increase in public support for peace during the Intifada years between 1987 and 1992 and the subsequent coming to power of Rabin’s government (e.g., Arian & Shamir, 1994).

While not wishing to undermine the effect that Palestinian violence has had on the course of the Oslo peace process, my point is that Palestinian violence has always offered the Israeli public and policymakers at least two strategic options concerning conflict and cooperation with its neighbors. Studies which focus exclusively on the influence of Palestinian violence on trends in the Israeli public opinion cannot explain the chosen route. At best, these accounts provide ad hoc explanations that are unable to clarify mechanisms by which political violence influences public opinion in a certain direction. Consequently, they cannot explain why a specific policy was preferred over alternative options.
To be sure, there was nothing in the Hamas attacks that could have prevented the Israeli public from taking a counter road: to ‘continue in Rabin’s path’ by adhering to the peace agenda pursued by Rabin’s government. Clearly, at the time, the attacks were supported only by a minority of Palestinian extremists, while the Palestinian leadership and the majority of Palestinians supported the Oslo accords. There was nothing in the terrorist attacks per se, which can explain why the Israeli public did not adhere to Rabin’s policy to create an alliance between moderate forces of Jews and Palestinians who supported peace, while defeating extremism (as suggested by one of Rabin’s famous dicta ‘to fight terrorism as if there is no peace and pursue peace as if there is no terrorism’). It remains, therefore, to be considered why the Israeli public construed the Hamas bombings, which followed the assassination, in a manner that stalled the peace process.27

The article suggests that identity politics, mobilized through toleration policies, plays an important role in the definition of threats, preferences and interests, and subsequently frames the public perception of political violence (either Rabin’s assassination or the Hamas terrorism). As soon as the initial shock over Rabin’s assassination subsided, a struggle between the peace and the national camps to bestow symbolic meaning on the assassination begun. In this struggle, the peace camp abandoned Rabin’s toleration policy, which stood at the centre of the Oslo process, allowing peacemaking to be rearticulated through a discourse of conservative toleration discourse, which structures the old-fashioned ethnonational identity politics of the Israeli political culture. As a result, Rabin’s assassination was treated as an exclusive-Jewish issue and not as part of the struggle between supporters of peace (Jewish and Palestinians) and its opponents. The public debate was therefore focused on the proper national agenda for rebuilding Jewish consensus to prevent further deterioration of internal relations between the Jews. In this endeavor, the disarticulation of democracy from tolerance and, consequently, from peacemaking, played a crucial part. It enabled the national camp, as our analysis confirms, to successfully shape public opinion by framing peace as tolerance—peaceful coexistence—between Jews and to elicit popular legitimacy for a new toleration policy which translated the Oslo process according to Jewish national interest.

The struggle over the meaning and implications of the Rabin’s assassination carries, therefore, broad and instructive theoretical implications in relation to the nature of peacemaking and its relation to toleration. Toleration, like many other democratic institutions, such as political parties, freedom of organization and association, or civil society is understood to be not only predicated on an inclusionary individual status guaranteed by universal citizenship, but perceived also as communitarian apparatus for expressing a collective identities, a sense of belonging to a particular community. Thus perceived, toleration can serve at times as an exclusionary mechanism, one that promotes a particular ‘common good’. In other words, the effort to construct a partnership based on shared values in which people can identify their good with the good of others is therefore, in itself, a demand for a (communitarian) toleration policy as the basis for peacemaking.
Both the Oslo peace process and the national camp campaign for Jewish unity after Rabin’s assassination were based on communitarian toleration policies. Through the Oslo process, peacemaking was constructed according to a liberal communitarian strategy as a democratic space for an exclusive alliance between progressive forces within the Jewish and Palestinian communities. After Rabin’s assassination, a conservative communitarianism was successfully pursued by the national camp, in which peacemaking was construed as an internal Jewish matter, which pertains only to Jewish national interest. From the point of view of Jewish national interests, the political assassination of Rabin was seen in the public eye not as an act of a minority of peace spoilers, but rather as an expression of ‘intolerance between Jews’. Similarly, the Palestinian terrorist attacks, such those of the Hamas in early 1996, were seen as an attack of the entire Palestinian community on the Jewish nation as a whole.

The rise to power of the ‘national camp’ in such a short time after the assassination, and under the campaign slogan ‘Netanyahu is good for the Jews’, cannot, therefore, be fully explained without taking into account Israel’s political culture and the ability of the national camp to use its communitarian codes as a ‘tool kit’ for framing peacemaking as an internal Jewish practice, disarticulating peace and tolerance from its universal, egalitarian and democratic qualities. By coming to power, the national camp ‘gained authoritative sanction’, a necessary condition for retaining the re-articulation process as definitive and durable (Sewell, 1996, p. 884).

The new right-wing government, headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, stopped the process of democratizing the relations with the Palestinians and effectively reproduced the old identity politics that Rabin’s government courageously worked to deconstruct through the Oslo Peace process. The renewed focus on Jewish unity encouraged zero-sum logic between Jewish and Palestinian national interests.

Under this logic, terrorist attacks initiated by Jewish and Palestinian extremists effectively closed the democratic space for reconciliation between the pragmatic secular elements on both sides, thus, in effect, grounding the entire peace process to a halt, as both sides retreated to old-time to adversarial tactics led by ethnonational considerations.

Acknowledgements

I thank Nielan Barnes, Gil Eyal, Noah Levin-Epstein, Akos Rona-Tas, Gershon Shafir, Michal Shamir, Eppie Yaar, and the participants in ‘culture and society’ workshop at UCSD for their helpful comments and suggestions. The author alone is responsible for the content of the article.

Notes


(t)he so called ‘unity’ of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have
no necessary ‘belongingness’. The ‘unity’ which matters is a linkage between the articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected... The unity formed by this combination or articulation, is always, necessarily, a ‘complex structure’: a structure in which things are related, as much through their differences as through their similarities. Although articulation is always contingent, one of many possible arrangements, it is not a process of random association. It is rather a dynamic which reproduces structures across practices and at the same time is dependent on these combinatory structures between its parts ‘that links practice to effect, discourse to social force, meaning to reality, and experience to a specific political arrangement’.

[2] In Israel, where civil society is relatively weak, political parties play a central role in public life; they shape public discourse, define policy options and mobilize group action. The ‘national camp’ represents a coalition of right-wing and religious political parties, orthodox-religious organizations and the settler movement. The ‘peace camp’ represents an ensemble of Jewish left-wing political parties, Arab parties, an array of civic organizations and peace movement and large segments of the economic and cultural elites.


[4] According to Sewell (1996), a transformative or ‘real’ historical event starts with ‘a local rupture’, characterized by ‘heightened emotion’ and a disturbance of one of the mini-structures. Because these mini-structures support one another—or, as Sewell puts it, are articulated with each other—local rupture develops into a series of ruptures, which eventually lead to a breakdown of the overall structure. The disarticulation of the structure makes room for its re-articulation, in a manner that results in a durable transformation of structure. Sewell thus describes events as cultural transformations shaped by particular, contingent conditions which results in rearticulation of structures.

[5] The liberal view of tolerance is connected to a modernist view of democracy that assumes that religion, tradition, ethnicity and other types of community attachments are irrelevant to the modern phenomena of democracy and nation-State formation.

[6] Most of the Intra-Jewish debates and conflicts in Israel take place within the Zionist communitarian version of Israel’s political culture. Only a very small portion of the public discourse in Israel advances a liberal discourse as an alternative to Zionist communitarian ideology. This liberal discourse is commonly used by small post-Zionist forces mostly from the Israeli academic intelligentsia. One of their main agenda is, for example, the abolition of the ‘Law of Return’ and the promotion of the principle of ‘Israel as a state for all its citizens’.

[7] For example, in his speech opening the Summer Knesset Session (15 May 1995) Rabin stated that, ‘Just as we made peace with our greatest enemy in war, with Egypt, so will we make peace with others who were our enemies and who will be our partners in building peace in the Middle East’. For many more examples of the way Rabin constructed of the Oslo peace process as partnership between the moderate Israelis and Palestinians, see Barnett, 1999; Grinberg, 2000; Lustik, 1997.

[8] Rabin linked the public protest of the national camp against his government to the anti-peace protests of the Hamas stating that ‘there is an evil circle of cooperation between—not to compare the two—the Hamas murderers and the radical right’ (The Jerusalem Report, 28 July 1994). In April 1995, on Israel Television, Rabin was even more direct in his characterization of the relationship between the Likud (the major right-wing party in Israel) and Hamas: ‘The terrorist organizations are succeeding because the Likud has become the collaborator of Hamas and Islamic Jihad’ (The Jerusalem Report, 20 April 1995).


[11] For example, one of the most common slogans that had been promoted during the elections campaign of April–May 1996 displayed a poster showing the late Rabin above another picture of the right-wing leader Benjamin Netanyahu with the phrase ‘We will not forget. We will not forgive’. The slogan was created by the Shalom Haver (peace/farewell, friend) organization, which was established by left-wing activists and members of Rabin's family shortly after the assassination with the goal of ‘commemorating Yitzhak Rabin’s legacy’.

[12] Sima Kadmon, a leading left-wing opinion makers echoed this message in her newspaper editorial when she wrote: 'Rabin was an authentic man who would disapprove a consensual appeasement that doesn’t lead to any accomplishment. He didn’t strive to any conciliation'. (Yedioth Ahronoth, 1 November 1998) After Netanyahu was elected as prime minister, Labour members have petitioned the Knesset speaker not to allow him to address the Knesset to commemorate Rabin. Netanyahu and his right-wing supporters, in turn, accused the Left of 'exploiting a national tragedy for political gain' which 'serves to further divide the nation, not unify it' (Jerusalem Post, 9 November 1996). Those messages clearly rejected any agenda of Jewish unity.

[13] Only very few dissenting voices within the peace camp reacted in a way which emphasized the political content of the assassination and enforced the new identity politics of the Oslo peace process. The journalist Avishai Margalit (1998), for example, criticized the mamlakhti content of Rabin's assassination memorial day noting that: 'Political assassination should be remembered politically'. And the poet and left-wing activist Yitzchak Laor criticized the left for serving the goal of national unity by 'a Rabin festival... as if there is no other way for culture other than togetherness an kitch and unity, as if plurality that does not merge cannot exist' (Ha'aretz, 26 January 1996).


[16] For example in an interview to The Jewish Post of New York (January 1996), Netanyahu said:

We hope that this tragic incident will draw the people of Israel together... we hope to see a constructive reaching out from both sides of the Zionist body politic and an end to the emotionally charged tone which has characterized intra-Jewish relations for the past three years... Interecine strife is abhorrent to Jews because we lost our independence, our capital Jerusalem, and our Holy Temple over a civil war in the past... We call on Prime Minister Shimon Peres to lead the way for national conciliation and to work for a consensus which will unite World Jewry.


[18] Gedalia, a ruler of Judea described in the Old Testament books of Jeremiah and Kings II, was murdered by a Jewish rival in the period following the destruction of the first temple.


Surveys were conducted by the ‘Lucille Cohen Institute for Public Opinion Research’ as part of a project aimed to periodically and systematically gauge attitudes of democracy and tolerance in the Israeli public. The distribution of the demographic characteristics of the two samples is similar to their distribution among the adult Jewish population in Israel: 51 per cent women and 49 per cent men; about 25 per cent with academic degree, 20 per cent religious.

The respondents’ most disliked group was recorded by the interviewer who was instructed to make sure that the respondents’ name only political groups, organizations, parties or movements whose members are Israeli citizens.

Note that the overall increase in tolerance cannot be explained by changes in the composition of the disliked target groups after the assassination. In fact, as shown in Table 2, after the assassination the proportion of Arab groups—the least tolerated groups—increased from 19.2 per cent to 21.5 per cent, while the major increase in toleration was registered for Jewish ‘peace camp’ groups whose proportion as disliked groups dropped from 30.2 per cent to 23.4 per cent.

Similarly, explaining the increase in Israeli public support for peace during the first half of the 1990s as a result of the 1987/1992 Palestinian Intifada, cannot explain why the Israeli public was ready to pay the price it had earlier been reluctant to pay, especially when we consider that Israel increased its military superiority over the Arabs after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War. For a discussion of the problems of tracing Israel’s peace policies to such ‘external factors’, see Levy (1997).

References


