Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts

The Israeli–Palestinian Case

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In this article, the authors use the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as an example of ostensibly intractable ethnonational conflict and examine the psychological dynamics that contribute to its intractability. They review the unique characteristics of this conflict and the clash of narratives. They argue that some ethnonational conflicts have characteristics that increase their resistance to change and that societies in such conflicts form societal beliefs that, on the one hand, help them cope with the stressful conditions of the conflicts but, on the other hand, perpetuate the conflicts. Finally, they discuss some social psychological contributions to changing societal beliefs as a way of intervening in such conflicts.

Conflicts between and among states that dominated the international scene for decades are gradually being replaced by conflicts between ethnic, religious, linguistic, and national groups within the states—often termed ethnonational conflicts (Connor, 1994). The conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Tamils and Hindus in Sri Lanka, Muslims and Serbs in Bosnia, and Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda are only a few examples of ethnonational conflicts raging around the world. Dealing with these conflicts introduces new challenges to the international system because of the ostensibly intractability of the conflicts; the underestimation of the psychological dynamics that can contribute to their escalation, stalemate, and perpetuation (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994); and the difficulty of applying traditional efforts to their resolution (Rouhana, 1998). These conflicts, also termed deep-rooted (Burton, 1987), enduring rivalry (Goertz & Diehl, 1993), or protracted social conflicts (Azar, 1990), are often transformed into intractable social conflicts (Kriesberg, 1993) that defy traditional negotiation and mediation efforts (Azar, 1990; Burton, 1990).

Although psychological factors contribute to the perpetuation of these conflicts, it should be made clear at the outset that they are neither a psychological epiphenomenon nor conflicts generated mainly by psychological factors. These are conflicts over vital tangible resources in which basic human needs such as identity and security become central to the conflicts and their resolution (Burton, 1990). These conflicts can be resolved only when both the tangible disputed resources are adequately negotiated and the unaddressed human needs that fuel the conflicts are satisfactorily addressed. Yet, because they have psychological bases too, social psychology can and should be able to offer insights into their intractable dynamics and contribute to designing approaches to their resolution.

The purpose of this article is to examine the characteristics and psychological dynamics of some ethnonational conflicts—ostensibly intractable conflicts—that increase their resistance to resolution and to explore some social psychological contributions to designing approaches to their resolution. We use the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as a case study.

Characteristics of Intractable Conflicts That Increase Their Resistance to Resolution

Our analysis in this article is limited to ethnonational conflicts, such as those in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka, that are less amenable to peaceful conflict-resolution efforts. We refer to such conflicts as intractable ethnonational conflicts. They share characteristics that differentiate them from tractable conflicts, which are more amenable to peaceful negotiation (Bar-Tal, 1998; Kriesberg, 1993). The most important characteristics are described below.

Totality

Intractable ethnonational conflicts often concern existential and basic needs such as recognition and security, the fulfillment of which is essential for existence and survival. Often, therefore, they are multifaceted, touching on wider aspects of political and cultural life. The conflicts penetrate the societal fabric of both parties and force themselves on individuals and institutions. Leaders, pub-
lics, and institutions—such as educational and cultural systems—become involved in the conflicts. At some stages of the conflicts, even intellectual life and scholarly inquiry become politicized as interest in the other society originates in the motivation to "know your enemy" and inquiries become guided by security needs and considerations.

**Protractedness**

Intractable ethnonational conflicts last at least a generation, often many generations. Their duration means that both parties develop deep-rooted animosity and prejudice, that their collective memories are affected by conflict-related events, and that the individuals and societies adapt their lives to the conflicts.

**Centrality**

The centrality of intractable ethnonational conflicts is reflected in the group members' preoccupation with the conflicts. Thoughts related to the conflicts are highly accessible and are relevant to various discussions within each society (Bar-Tal, Raviv, & Freund, 1994). The centrality of such conflicts is further reflected in their saliency on the public agenda. The media and the political and intellectual elites are greatly preoccupied with the conflicts and their developments.

**Violence**

Intractable ethnonational conflicts usually involve violent events, including full-scale wars, limited military engagements, or terrorist attacks. The continual cycle of violence afflicts civilian and military casualties and causes property destruction and, often, population displacement. The violence and its vividness and saliency in each society are another reason for the conflicts' centrality in public life; they also generate intense animosity that becomes integrated into the socialization processes in each society and through which conflict-related emotions and cognitions are transmitted to new generations. Virtually every civilian can be the potential target of a random attack, and mundane daily decisions are affected by the conflicts.

**Perception of Irreconcilability**

Societies embroiled in intractable ethnonational conflicts often see them as zero-sum and view their differences as irreconcilable. Each side perceives its own goals as essential for its own survival and, therefore, does not see a place for the concessions regarded by the other side as essential for conflict resolution. The minimum requirements for one party to reach an agreement are not provided by the other. Societies fail to develop integrative solutions and present them for public discourse.

**Overview: The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict as a Clash of Narratives**

The dispute between Israelis and Palestinians is a salient example of this type of ethnonational conflict. It originated with the appearance of Zionism around the turn of the previous century as a communal clash between indigenous Palestinians and Jewish immigrants to Palestine. Zionism aimed at the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. However, because on the same land lived Arabs who had their own national identity as Palestinians (Khalidi, 1997; Kimmerling & Migdal, 1993), Zionism and Palestinian nationalism clashed over the ownership of the land, the right for self-determination, and statehood. The conflict between the Jewish and Palestinian communities escalated as the number of Jewish immigrants grew and the resistance of the Palestinians to such immigration and to Zionism increased.

In 1947, after the United Nations (UN) declared the partition of Palestine into two states, one Arab and one Jewish, the communal clash evolved into a full-blown war. The Palestinians rejected the UN resolution, and the Jewish community proclaimed the establishment of an independent Jewish state in 1948 (the Arab and Jewish communities at the time numbered 1,300,000 and 700,000, respectively). When five Arab states declared war against Israel, the conflict took on a strong regional interstate dimension. Israel, which won the war, expanded its borders beyond those designated by the UN resolution. The rest of Palestine came under Jordanian and Egyptian control, and the vast majority of the Palestinians who lived in the portion of Palestine on which Israel was established—about 80% of Palestine—were dispersed, mainly to the neighboring Arab states. The regional component dominated the conflict until the 1967 war between Israel on the one side and Egypt, Jordan, and Syria on the other, which brought the remainder of Palestine under Israeli control (in addition to Syrian and Egyptian land). Since this war, the Israeli–Palestinian component of the conflict has gradually returned to the fore, focusing on the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the parts of Palestine that Israel occupied in 1967—the West Bank and Gaza (with East Jerusalem as its capital).

In June 1967, immediately after the war, Israel annexed East Jerusalem, declaring the two parts of the city as Israel's capital and extending the status of residents (but not citizens) to its Arab population. The rest of the West Bank and Gaza remained under occupation, and the population was governed by military rule. Israel also began a process of establishing Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza and around East Jerusalem. The number of Jewish settlers is estimated at 150,000 (Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997). Palestinian resistance to the occupation, which began in 1967, peaked in

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1 At the end of 1996, Israel's citizens numbered 5,759,400, 80% of whom were Jewish; the rest were mainly Arabs (Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997). The Arab citizens in Israel mostly call themselves "Palestinians in Israel" (Rouhana, 1997). The Palestinian population in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza is estimated at 2,390,000 (Zureik, 1996).

2 This number was provided by formal Israeli statistics (Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997) and, therefore, does not include residents in the Jewish communities that were established around East Jerusalem and that Israel considers as an integral part of Israel but the Palestinians consider as settlements like all other settlements in the West Bank.

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The totality and comprehensiveness of social conflict should be seen in light of the clash of narratives between the two societies. Whether in Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine, Sri Lanka, or Bosnia, the narratives of the two communities in conflict are in total clash as to the root causes of the conflict, the meaning of the historical developments, and the role played by the in-group and the out-group during the various stages of the conflict. Although the two sides can sometimes agree on historical facts, the clash encompasses the meaning and implications of these facts and extends to names, language, main actors, causes, and responsibilities. Moreover, the narratives include goals, interests, and values that are incompatible and, therefore, fuel the conflict. Thus, for each group, the conflict is represented as a societal cognitive schema with elaborate conflict-related beliefs that are incompatible with those of the other group (Bar-Tal, Kruglanski, & Klar, 1989). The incompatibility underlies the recognition of the relationship between the two groups as conflict. Bar-Tal and Geva (1985), who referred to this incompatibility as “cognitive discrepancy,” argued that in times of conflict, the opposing sides freeze their incompatible set of beliefs and therefore set obstacles to the possibilities to resolve it peacefully.

As with any intractable ethnonational conflict, the protagonists’ versions of the conflict’s evolution and causes diverge sharply. Although Palestinians and Israelis agree that Jews from various parts of the world came to Palestine to establish a Jewish homeland, their narratives diverge sharply on almost every other aspect. According to the Palestinian narrative, the Jewish settlers occupied the land, and Palestinians were dispossessed and displaced. The Palestinian narrative views this influx as an invasion of foreigners who took over the country from Palestinians and in the process pushed out Palestinians, making many of them refugees in the neighboring countries. According to the Zionist narrative, the land was liberated and redeemed in a process of national revival. The Jews gathered their exiles in the land of their forefathers to establish their state, which was attacked by hostile, nonaccepting Arabs at its birth. As an outcome of Arab aggression and defeat, the Palestinians became refugees. Thus, the war between the Arab states and Israel in 1948-1949 is for Israel the “War of Independence,” but for Palestinians, it is “the catastrophe” (Al-Nakba). Whereas a central part of the Palestinian narrative focuses on the expulsion of the Palestinians, a central part of the Zionist narrative stresses the Jewish struggle for survival and security; any responsibility for the Palestinian fate is usually denied.

Each national narrative is in a way based on a fundamental negation of the other’s. For the Israelis, to accept the central piece of the Palestinian narrative that Palestine was indeed populated by indigenous people who were gradually and systematically dispossessed and replaced by newcomers means that the Jewish state was born in sin. Thus, the Israeli narrative denies this Palestinian account. For the Palestinians, to accept the central part of the Zionist narrative that the Jews are not to be seen as newcomers but a people returning to their own homeland—albeit after 2,000 years—means that Palestinians were aliens in their own land, a view that they by definition reject. Thus, both Israeli and Palestinian narratives emphasize different aspects of the conflict, provide divergent interpretations to the same events, and produce a coherent narrative that supports its own claims and is fully supported by the public.

Unique Characteristics of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict That Make It More Resistant to Resolution

In addition to having all the characteristics described above, the conflict narratives indicate that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has additional unique characteristics that make it even more resistant to resolution than many other ethnonational conflicts.

Perception of exclusive legitimacy. Historical realities aside, each group perceives itself as the exclusively indigenous people on the land. Thus, Palestinians see themselves as the indigenous population; in their eyes, the Jews who began coming to Palestine in large numbers at the turn of the century have no indigenous right to the land. Likewise, the Jewish population see themselves as the indigenous population by virtue of their historical and biblical heritage there. Although when they began to immigrate at the turn of the century they had not actually lived on the land for thousands of years, many believed that the Arabs who inhabited the land did not really have the characteristics of a nation and thus did not have legitimate roots in it.
This perception and the mutual awareness of its existence have a number of political and psychological consequences. The indigenous status gives each group a sense of exclusive entitlement over the land. Such exclusivity leads to the denial of the other in many various ways, eventually resulting in a pattern of mutual denial between the two communities (Kelman, 1978). Thus, despite the changing political realities of the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians, the perception that the other is an illegitimate “invader” at best a tolerated guest, still persists. Mutual awareness of the other’s exclusive sense of entitlement is perhaps at the core of the fear that the out-group wants the in-group’s places, homes, towns, and indeed homeland, fueling a constant sense of threat.

The perception of exclusive indigenous status makes any agreement burdened by a mutual sense of ultimate concession (Rouhana, 1997). In a possible historical compromise in which Israel withdraws from the West Bank and Gaza, Israelis feel that Israel is making the ultimate concession, giving up its own right in parts of the Land of Israel in order to preserve a Jewish state. The Palestinians feel that they are making the ultimate concession by giving up the main part of Palestine in order to achieve sovereignty on a small part of the land. Thus, an agreement is almost inevitably accompanied by a profound sense of loss that can overshadow its potential gains.

**History of victimization.** Both groups bring to the conflict a national history of persecution and destruction. In the Jewish case, the unparalleled, protracted history of persecution that peaked with the Holocaust of European Jews produced a siege mentality (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992) that was brought to bear on the conflict with Palestinians and other Arabs. In the Palestinian case, the history of colonization that peaked in the catastrophe in which their society was dismantled and their homeland lost is considered by many to be second only to physical destruction. Thus, each group brings to the conflict a deep sense of persecution and destruction not always recognized by the other side, which is preoccupied with its own tragic national experience. These particular national histories, especially in the Jewish case, instill a basic sense of lack of security and mistrust of the international community that only adds to the inherent difficulty of resolving the conflict.

**Intermingling and dispersion of national populations.** Within the immediate conflict area, each group is defined across geographical borders. Israel has a significant minority (20%) of non-Jewish, mainly Palestinian, citizens, and Jews continue to settle and expand in the West Bank and Gaza, occupying key tracts of land. Moreover, there are about four million Palestinians outside the country (Zureik, 1996) whose legitimate home is perceived to be within the country and millions of Jews outside the country that Israel proclaims to be their state according to its Law of Return. Thus, Israel currently defines itself as the state of the Jewish people in Israel and in the Diaspora at the expense of those Palestinians who are currently citizens of Israel and who are posing challenges to the state’s identity by persistently demanding equality (Rouhana, 1997). Thus, too, a future Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza would likely wish to define itself as the state of the Palestinian people, opening its doors to the Palestinian refugees in other countries, at the expense of Jewish settlers, if they were to remain as citizens of the Palestinian state. With each passing day, solutions based on land division and demographic separation become less feasible, which only exacerbates the sense on both sides that the conflict is perhaps irreconcilable.

**Double asymmetry.** As perceived by the protagonists and depending on how power is defined (Boulding, 1989), the power relations in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict are complex. For example, relations between Israel and the Palestinians are characterized by a perceived asymmetry in favor of Israel, which is shared by both Arabs and Jews at least to the extent that Arab–Jewish relations in Israel are considered (Rouhana & Fiske, 1995). However, in terms of the power relations between Israel and the Arab world, the power asymmetry is not as straightforward. Despite Israel’s ostensibly superior position in the battlefield, the Arab world surpasses Israel in human and material resources and, most importantly, in the capability of enduring a defeat. Thus, for many Israelis, the asymmetry tilts in favor of the Arabs, although these perceptions are dynamically evolving.

The impact of the double power asymmetry on the conflict dynamics in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has generally been overlooked, and very little research has been reported on the perception of power, its impact on conflict-resolution activities, or intergroup perceptions (e.g., Rouhana & Fiske, 1995; Rouhana & Korper, 1997; Rouhana, O’Dwyer, & Vaso, 1997), despite the increasing evidence of the role that power asymmetry plays in intergroup perceptions and discrimination (e.g., Ng, 1982; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1985).

**Politicization of religion.** On both sides, religion is becoming increasingly politicized and plays a major role in the intergroup and intragroup conflict dynamics. Until recently, religious differences between Arabs and Jews have played a limited role in the dynamics of the conflict. Although the conflict has so far been defined and perceived by the mainstreams in each society as a national conflict, religious segments in both societies are reframing it in religious terms, adding dimensions of fanaticism to already existing wide gaps. The methods that religious zealots on both sides use, particularly violent acts, receive visibility in the mass media that is disproportional to the zealots’ real representation in the populations. These segments anchor their national and territorial claims in religious doctrine that considers the country a holy land and views Jerusalem as a sacred city. Consequently, they refuse to consider territorial compromises.

Thus, both the claims of the religious Zionist parties for a Jewish state in the entire Land of Israel and Hamas for an Islamic state in all of Palestine invoke deep religious beliefs to rationalize their political claims.
Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Conflicts

Coping Mechanisms: Societal Beliefs

Intractable ethnonational conflicts generate conditions of stress, threat, and anxiety and incur such human and material costs (Breznitz, 1983; Lazarus, 1982; Milgram, 1986, 1993) that societies must develop mechanisms for coping with such conflicts. Coping refers to various ways in which people try to successfully meet the demands of a conflict situation (Zeidner & Endler, 1995). In addition to the military, human, and economic resources required to cope with the conflict, each society needs also to develop psychological mechanisms that enable protracted confrontation with the opponent and allow adaptation to conflict conditions. Thus, each society promotes patriotic devotion to the country and its people, persistence, endurance for physical and psychological stress, readiness for personal sacrifice, unity, solidarity, and courage. The formation of these psychological conditions is made possible by a set of societal beliefs that emerges within each society about the conflict, the self, and the other.

Societal beliefs are defined as society members' shared cognitions on issues that are of concern to society and that contribute to their sense of uniqueness. Their contents refer to society’s characteristics and structure and to processes of its development, and they include beliefs about societal goals, self-images, aspirations, norms and values, images of out-groups, and so forth. As shared cognitions acquired in a socialization process in which institutions actively impart the beliefs to the public, they provide a common social prism through which society members view the conflict. Once formed, they become incorporated into an ethos and are reflected in the group’s language, stereotypes, images, myths, and collective memories (Bar-Tal, in press). They provide the informational and motivational bases that are of crucial importance for social action as citizens have to believe in certain ideas to bear the stress, costs, and hardship of intractable conflict, to act on behalf of the society, and to fight the enemy. Although not exhaustive, the set outlined below includes the major beliefs discussed in the literature. The first four, which refer to the nature of the conflict and the images of the self and the adversary, are the most important.

Our goals are just. These beliefs outline the society’s goals, their crucial importance, and their absolute justness. In the Israeli case, they refer to the goal of establishing a Jewish state in what they consider to be their ancient homeland and the justness of this goal in light of Jewish history, historical connection with land, and the modern revival of Jewish nationalism. In the Palestinian case, these beliefs refer to the goals of establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, the return of Palestinian refugees, and the justness of these goals in light of their natural rights as the inhabitants of the land. Both Zionist and Palestinian literature spells out the goals and their roots in universal values of justness.

The opponent has no legitimacy. These beliefs deny the adversary’s legitimacy through dehumanization, negative trait characterization, outcasting, use of negative political labels, and negative group comparisons. Thus, the opponent is categorized “. . . into extreme negative social categories which are excluded from human groups that are considered as acting within limits of acceptable norms and/or values” (Bar-Tal, 1989, p. 170). These beliefs blame the causes of the conflict’s outbreak, its continuation, and the violence on the opponent. They also justify one’s own hostile acts (Bar-Tal, 1990; Rieber, 1991).

Mutual delegitimization has been one of the bitter outcomes of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Although the expressions of these beliefs have varied over time in form and intensity, both groups have developed different types of delegitimizing beliefs and used cultural, educational, and political channels to transmit and perpetuate them (Bar-Tal, 1988).

We can do no wrong. These beliefs reflect the ethnocentric tendency to attribute positive traits, values, and behaviors to one’s own society (Levine & Campbell, 1972; White, 1970). In intractable ethnonational conflict, special effort is taken to propagate, on the one hand, characteristics related to courage, heroism, or endurance and, on the other hand, those related to humaneness, morality, fairness, trustworthiness, and progress. These characteristics are presented in sharp contrast to those of the enemy (Burn & Oskamp, 1989; Silverstein & Flamentbaum, 1989) and allow for a clear differentiation between the two parties.

For the Jewish community, Jews have been self-viewed as a “new people,” reborn in the Land of Israel (Hofman, 1970), and self-stereotyped as persistent, brave, hardworking, determined, and intelligent. Ethnocentric self-presentation has also been related to the Jewish heritage. Jewish religion and traditions have been viewed as the roots of Western civilization and superior morality (Hazani, 1993). The Jewish people, therefore, have often portrayed themselves as a “light to goyim” (non-Jews).

The self-perception of Palestinians should be analyzed within the context of the power asymmetry in which Palestinians perceive Israel to have the upper hand (Rouhana & Fiske, 1995; Rouhana & Korper, 1996). Thus, the Palestinians’ self-image is positive when it comes to moral claims, courage, and sacrifice, but it might be mixed when it comes to progress, success, and achievement. For example, Palestinians might consider themselves to be the most educated people in the Arab world, but when the comparison shifts to Israel, the sense of superiority is not likely to be maintained.

We are the victims. These beliefs concern self-perception and self-presentation as a victim, especially in the context of the intractable conflict. The focus of
these beliefs is on the harm and atrocities perpetrated by the adversary.

Throughout the conflict, both Israelis and Palestinians perceived themselves as the victims of the other side. Beginning with the prestate conflict and in all four major wars, Jews perceived themselves to be victims of Arab aggression. The images of Jews as victims evolved through a long history of victimization that left its mark on the Jewish self-perception and implanted the Israeli ethos (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Liebman, 1978). During the first 30 years of Israel’s existence, Israelis perceived the Arabs’ intention to be overwhelmingly focused on the annihilation of their state. For example, the Arab embargo on Israel and terrorist attacks on Israelis were viewed as unequivocal evidence of their victimization. Within this frame of reference, all the four major wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973 and numerous military clashes are perceived as having been fought in self-defense. Arab attitudes and behaviors were viewed as another direct expression of the world’s hostility, and Arab anti-Zionism, during the intractable conflict, was viewed as a continuation of old anti-Semitism (e.g., Harkabi, 1972).

Palestinians perceive themselves as victims of the Zionist scheme to take over Palestine. For a long time, they referred to Palestine as the “raped homeland” and to Israel as the aggressor who conducted massacres and expulsions against innocent people and who dispossessed people of their lands and destroyed their properties. The continual cross-border attacks in which refugees paid a high price perpetuated the perception of Israel as the aggressor. The Palestinians’ perception of victimization was enhanced after 1967, as the West Bank and Gaza were occupied by Israel and Palestinians’ resistance to occupation, which peaked with a seven-year civil uprising, was met with vigorous military force. The sense of victimization is shared by the various Palestinian communities in refugee camps, under occupation, and in the Palestinian autonomous areas.

The last three societal beliefs refer to social conditions that are conducive to mobilization of the material and human resources of society in order to cope with intractable conflict. Societal beliefs of patriotism generate attachment to the country and society by propagating loyalty and sacrifice (Bar-Tal, 1993); societal beliefs of unity refer to the importance of ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements during intractable conflict in order to unite the forces in the face of the external threat (Moscovici & Doise, 1994); and, finally, societal beliefs of peace refer to peace as the ultimate desire and to society members as peace-loving. Such beliefs have the role of inspiring hope and optimism, strengthening positive self-image, and contributing to empathic self-presentation to the outside world.

Although not all individuals or segments of society share these beliefs, the beliefs are widespread as part of each society’s shared social and political cognition. But within each society, there are intragroup differences on other political beliefs, such as the most agreeable solution to the conflict. The intragroup conflicts might become exacerbated as the parties to the conflict get closer to an agreement that some segments on each side oppose. Some functional coalitions in favor of an agreement or against it can develop across the dividing lines. Thus, in the Israeli–Palestinian case, there are sharp intragroup divisions within both Israeli and Palestinian societies. In Israel, the differences between the Labor and Likud Parties over the desirable agreements with the Palestinians divide Israeli society. Among Palestinians, the differences between supporters and opposers of the Oslo process threaten the unity of Palestinian society. At the same time, there seems to be a convergence of interests between supporters of the Oslo Agreements across the conflict lines to continue with the peace process. But on the Israeli side, the supporters of the Oslo process have been in opposition since 1996, when a Likud government was elected.

**Maintenance of Societal Beliefs**

Societal beliefs that emerge in intractable ethnonational conflicts are maintained by cognitive and motivational processes that allow for biased information processing and that have been broadly reported and reviewed in the literature (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Hewstone, 1990; Rubin et al., 1994; Stephan & Stephan, 1996) and by intergroup identity differentiation resulting from the conflicts (Brewer & Miller, 1996; Huddy & Vartanian, 1995; Jessick, Bloom, Boldizar, & Samuelson, 1985; Rouhana, 1993).

Society members seek and process information in selective and biased ways because the stressful and threatening conditions cause increased motivation for closure, which leads to cognitive freezing (Kruglanski, 1989). Under cognitive freezing, society members commit themselves to certain beliefs and refrain from critically challenging them (see also Jervis, 1976; Vertzberger, 1990). The freezing has the following cognitive consequences.

**Biased selection of information.** Society members seek information that confirms their beliefs and usually avoid inconsistent information. In this manner, existing beliefs are augmented by the consistent information and are not exposed to challenge as the inconsistent information is avoided.

**Biased interpretation.** Individuals in intractable conflict are predisposed to ascribe to information that is consistent with their desired beliefs. Thus, the information is interpreted as supporting the held beliefs. Similarly, behaviors of the in-group and the out-group are interpreted in line with the existing schemas about the self and the enemy.

**Biased elaboration.** Society members form new beliefs that are consistent with their already held beliefs. This process reinforces the held beliefs with new ones. These cognitive processes support the society’s beliefs of conflicive ethos, which focus on the in-group’s goals and their justifications and portray a favorable self-image and a diabolical enemy image (Frank, 1967; Stag-
The question that arises, then, is how can the vicious cycles that are typical of intractable conflict be broken?

Conflict Social Psychological Contributions to the mean-ings of the out-group’s identity. They often fail to differentiate among the various members usually attribute multiple meanings to their own nonconflict situations. Furthermore, although in-group identity is likely to have even stronger implications for progress give this component centrality such that it be-

Intractable intergroup conflict also has an immediate impact on collective and personal identity. Conflict and identity support each other in a mutual fortification process (Rouhana, 1997). For each group, group identity—in this case, national identity—gains particular salience, because it is the central component in one’s collective identity that differentiates the in-group from the out-group. The mutual acts of violence, exclusion, and aggression give this component centrality such that it becomes the focus of in-group mobilization, thus high-lighting the differentiation between the two groups. Each group identity becomes dominated by a component that is not shared with the other and that is supported by additional symbols and meanings from the group’s experience and history, thus accentuating the collective identity and increasing the intergroup differentiation. Personal identity is to some extent derived from one’s social identity (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1985), but accentuated group identity is likely to have even stronger implications for the personal identity of the in-group members who share the accentuated identity than one might expect under nonconflict situations. Furthermore, although in-group members usually attribute multiple meanings to their own identity, they often fail to differentiate among the various meanings of the out-group’s identity.

Social Psychological Contributions to the Resolution of Intractable Ethnonational Conflict

The question that arises, then, is how can the societal beliefs that are confidently held as central, used by society to cope with the conflict, and transmitted to new generations be changed?

There is no doubt that intractable interethnic conflicts are over tangible interests such as territory, power, and wealth. However, underlying these interests are basic human needs such as identity, security, and recognition (Azar, 1990; Burton, 1987). On the basis of Maslow’s (1970) needs hierarchy, various theorists of conflict resolution originating in international relations suggested that these basic human needs cannot be negotiated or suppressed and that unless these needs are satisfied, the conflict cannot be resolved (Azar, 1990; Burton, 1990; Mitchell, 1973; Rubenstein, 1990). A settlement that neglects to fully address the parties’ needs will not bring a permanent, peaceful end to the conflict. Therefore, a genuine resolution has to satisfy the needs of both parties engaged in the intractable ethnonational conflict in a way that is acceptable to the mainstreams of both societies. At the same time, it is obvious that any attempts to peacefully resolve intractable conflict also have to take into consideration its psychological foundations and use psychological principles in the process of its resolution.

Through the years, social psychology has contributed a number of principles and strategies to resolve intergroup conflicts. But, because it is beyond the scope of this article to elaborate on them, only a few examples are given. Thus, Sherif (1967) found that introduction of superordinate goals to opposing parties may lead them to resolve the conflict and combine forces to achieve new goals. Osgood (1962) applied the notion of contingent cooperation to develop the strategy of graduated reciprocation in tension reduction, which aims to reduce intergroup tension through a series of unilateral initiatives designed to reduce tension and supposed to lead to reciprocity.

A number of social psychologists have outlined principles of negotiation that are designed to bring the parties in conflict to discuss their contradictory positions with the apparent aim of peacefully resolving the differences (e.g., Deutsch, 1973; Pruitt & Carnavale, 1993; Rubin & Brown, 1975). In addition, a number of psychologists have discussed the importance of third-party intervention, which can fulfill various roles and functions in the effort to reconcile the differences of the adversaries in conflict (e.g., Fisher, 1990; Rubin, 1981).

The present article focuses on the cognitive change that is necessary for conflict resolution. At a minimum, parties in conflict have to change their beliefs about avoiding contact and negotiation with the enemy. But this is only a beginning. Successful resolution of conflict, and especially of intractable ethnonational conflict, requires profound changes of beliefs by leaders and negotiators, as well as by the society at large in order to support a negotiated agreement. Leaders cannot leave their constituencies behind in the process of change; they have to make the necessary effort to change their societies’ beliefs and images.
Publics ought to change their societal beliefs of conflictive ethos that help to perpetuate the conflict. The change has to encompass societal beliefs about goals that fuel the conflict, irreconcilability of the conflict, delegitimization of the opponent, and virile self-image. Moreover, peaceful resolution of intractable conflict requires not only a change of conflictive ethos but also the active construction of a new ethos consistent with a peaceful relationship. This ethos should consist of societal beliefs about the utility of a cooperative relationship, mechanisms that maintain peaceful relations, a vision of peace, and the necessity of providing the conditions for trustful and empathic relations with yesterday's enemy. Acquiring an ethos of peace does not necessarily negate all the societal beliefs of conflict, such as patriotism or unity (Bar-Tal, 1998).

The changes described above do not take place overnight. Rather, they progress sluggishly even when leaders intensively propagate them. They may require mobilization of the political, cultural, and educational institutions. However, without progress on the ground toward an agreement that changes the nature of the intergroup relations and that each side considers meaningful, the change of beliefs that is required to support a final agreement will be hard to achieve. In the Israeli—Palestinian case, decades of violent conflict and propagation of conflictive ethos have greatly hampered the evolution of beliefs that could support a peace process. Without such an evolution, it is difficult to advance the peace process, as is evident from the rifts that followed the Oslo Agreements. In this case, although the handful of elite members who were involved in the secret negotiation and the ensuing agreements seem to have undergone changes sufficient to produce mutual trust, the publics were left behind with their enemy images and conflictual relationships and their ethos of conflict.

National narrative, with its primary political beliefs and sentimental attachments to the national group, also plays a critical role in achieving a resolution. It can be considered a main part of collective identity (Rouhana, 1997), in which case it becomes clear that intractable ethnonational conflicts are often identity conflicts. Thus, even when the two groups can agree on a pragmatic solution to a problem, the agreement might be blocked if it somehow legitimizes the other side's national narrative—and by implication negates one's own. For example, when a group of influential Israelis and Palestinians who had been working together for years on how to arrive at jointly acceptable approaches to the problem of Palestinian refugees and their right of return seemed to agree on the general shape of a pragmatic solution (which included the return of a limited number of refugees to Israel proper, the return of others to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, and compensation for those who did not return), the narratives were still irreconcilable.3 The Palestinians insisted on the acknowledgment of the right of return of refugees to all of Palestine (including Israel)—a central component of their national narrative that was completely rejected by the Israelis—even if this right was not to be fully exercised. Accepting the right of return in principle, the Israeli participants argued, would imply that they accepted responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem, violating a central component of their narrative. Even if the two sides could have agreed on a certain number of refugees to return to Israel, they could not agree on how to present the gesture to their respective publics. Palestinians wanted to consider that the returnees would be practicing their right of return, but Israelis insisted they would only be allowed in what would be portrayed as a unilateral gesture of goodwill. The difference between the two constructions of such an agreement is rooted in divergent national narratives and the basic overriding need to remain true to one's own narrative.

It is not clear how a clash of narratives can be resolved without a fundamental discussion of the core issues related to both parties' identity and national narrative. Pragmatic solutions that avoid the central issues can go only so far, as is evident from the turbulent course of the Oslo process.

Producing a vision of peace is extremely difficult in societies embroiled in intractable conflicts whose dynamics are not conducive to such vision. However, some social psychologically based intervention methods can contribute to initial steps, such as changing beliefs necessary for initiating a conflict-resolution process and exploring narratives, at least in small groups. One such intervention method is the interactive problem-solving workshop that has been applied in various intractable conflicts (Azar, 1990; Burton, 1990; Doob & Foltz, 1973; Fisher, 1997; Kelman, 1992; Mitchell, 1973; Rouhana & Kelman, 1994). One way to analyze the workshop process is in terms of the modifications of the beliefs that participants hold and the introduction of new beliefs that are consistent with a potentially peaceful relationship that can satisfy the basic human needs of both parties.

From 1979 until 1990, Kelman and his colleagues applied a one-shot problem-solving workshop on an almost annual basis (for a review, see Fisher, 1997). Since 1990, Kelman and Rouhana have been conducting a continuing and sustained unofficial intervention program in the Palestinian—Israeli conflict. The program is guided by human needs theory and builds on Kelman's (1986, 1992) earlier work. In 1990, Kelman and Rouhana began a continuing workshop in which high-ranking Israelis and Palestinians met regularly in a series of workshops that ended in 1993 (see Kelman, 1992; Rouhana, 1995a; Rouhana & Kelman, 1994). Using the problem-solving workshop as the main intervention tool, the workshop provided a setting for constructive interaction guided by a set of ground rules geared toward facilitating constructive interaction between the participants and inducing joint

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3 This example is drawn from the deliberations of the Joint Working Group on Israeli—Palestinian Relations. The group, organized and cochaired by Herbert C. Kelman and Nadim N. Rouhana, has been meeting since 1984 in an effort to produce concept papers on issues that the Oslo Accords failed to address, including the problem of the Palestinian refugees and their right of return. See Kelman (1997) for a description of the rationale and methodology the organizers use.
problem solving (Burton, 1987; Kelman, 1992; Rouhana, 1995a).

Given the characteristics of this type of conflict (tolltality, protractedness, centrality, etc.), this approach is particularly suitable to examine one's beliefs about the conflict and to develop new beliefs about the other side and its basic human needs. One's point of view is thoroughly presented in a setting designed to enhance mutual understanding and conducive for acquiring new beliefs that are consistent with peaceful relations between the parties. Indeed, the essence of the method is to have each party present its community's human needs and elaborate on concerns and fears that have to be taken into consideration if a solution between the two societies is to be achieved. During this learning process, participants modify their existing beliefs and possibly acquire new ones. Once the two sets of human needs are presented and understood, participants are encouraged to engage in joint problem solving and think of ways to take the two sets of needs into consideration. The groups go through a number of phases (Rouhana, 1995a), but once they reach the phase of joint problem solving, they begin working as one team vis-à-vis a common problem. Going through the phases is time-consuming, as participants from groups embroiled in deep-rooted conflict need sustained and facilitated interaction to build the needed trust and to develop the requisite cognitive empathy to engage in joint problem solving. At this stage, as participants explore joint visions of peace, they acquire new beliefs about peaceful relations between their communities.

In 1994, Kelman and Rouhana began the Joint Working Group on Israeli-Palestinian Relations, which also involves a series of continuing workshops. Using the same intervention tool, this project aims at producing joint concept papers on issues that the Oslo Agreements left for final status negotiations, such as the future of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza and the right of return of Palestinian refugees (Kelman, 1997). The objective is to produce papers that can, as much as possible, respond to the human needs of both societies and thus be accepted by both societies. The goal is to disseminate these papers to both publics and to decision makers of both communities.

The design of this work is closely tied to the changing political realities on the ground and the political developments in the official negotiation process. Some hypotheses regarding how this work can contribute to conflict resolution are presented in Kelman (1995). In general, although the potential contribution of these projects—like other conflict-resolution projects—is hard to demonstrate and the field obviously has yet to develop methods of research and evaluation (Rouhana, 1995b), this line of work, nonetheless, offers a promising direction for psychologists interested in social conflict to contribute to the development of theory, practice, and research methodology.

Successful outcomes of unofficial efforts such as the continuing workshop and the joint working group do not guarantee the transfer of change to the macro level. The changes on the societal level are more complex and require a methodology that goes beyond intervention at a small-group level. However, the problem-solving workshop demonstrates that under the proper conditions, conflict beliefs can be changed, and participants can acquire new beliefs and produce visions of peace that they "nego- date" with their opponents and that they can disseminate and share with their compatriots.

REFERENCES
