Negotiating National Identity and Self-Determination in Ethnic Conflicts: The Choice Between Pluralism and Ethnic Cleansing

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The contradictions of ethnonational identity, which make it a prime force in both the promotion and the destruction of human dignity and social justice, have become more pronounced with the ending of the Cold War. It is necessary to reconceptualize national identity and develop new norms for accepting a group's right to national self-determination through establishment of an independent state expressing its national identity, and even for accepting its claim to national identity itself. This article proposes that (1) implementation of a group's right to self-determination cannot be left to the group alone, but must be negotiated with those who are affected by that decision, particularly minority populations; and (2) national identity itself must be "negotiated" — explored and discussed — with those who are affected by the group's self-definition.

Ethnonational identity groups are the primary entities through which basic human needs— the *societal* needs of individuals — are met. It is this quality of identity groups, however, that accounts for the protracted and destructive nature of conflicts that may arise *between* identity groups. The dual role of identity groups, as agents both of the satisfaction of basic human needs and of the extremes of mutual destruction when these needs are threatened, has become more pronounced with the ending of the Cold War and the break-up of old regimes and empires. This dilemma serves as the starting point of the present analysis.

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The analysis is an effort to think through the implications of recent events, epitomized by the process of ethnic cleansing in the republics of the former Yugoslavia. In fact, of course, ethnic cleansing is not a new phenomenon. It is so frightening precisely because it echoes the highly successful Nazi project of making Europe "Judenrein"—cleansed of Jews. When one sees this happening—happening again, one might say—in the heart of Europe, as the nations of the former Soviet Union and Eastern/Central Europe are ostensibly moving toward democracy, one cannot help but react with some sense of despair: Is this the new order that the end of the Cold War has brought into being?

It is an oversimplification to say that the ethnic conflicts in Bosnia and elsewhere represent, in essence, the reemergence of old hatreds that have lain dormant for decades and that are now again coming to the fore. This may be true, as far as it goes, but the events must be understood in terms of the *current* situation—as responses to both the fears and the opportunities that have been provoked by the break-up of old empires and regimes. The fears were readily aroused and magnified by historical experiences that remain alive in collective (and to some degree personal) memories, but they are fears of annihilation *now*. Similarly, the sense of opportunity (e.g., to create a Greater Serbia) is fed by collective dreams that go back many generations, but it represents an opportunity for expansion and domination *now*.

The Contradictions of National Identity and Self-Determination

The irony is that these fears of annihilation and this quest for domination are the proximate consequences of a process of liberation for people (or peoples) emerging from a recent and often extended history of repression, oppression, and subjugation. They are integrally linked to a process of national self-determination, which typically (or at least often) is viewed as the establishment of an independent nation state. The principle of self-determination does not carry that implication automatically, as Hurst Hannum (1990) has shown in his careful legal and historical analysis of the concept[1], but for the sake of argument let us assume this equation for the moment.

To many of us—certainly to most practitioners of conflict resolution working within a human-needs based model—self-determination in general is a positive concept. *National* self-determination tends to be linked to *personal* self-determination, which can be categorized as a fundamental human need. Moreover, there is considerable merit in the proposition that justice and the satisfaction of human needs are often (though not always) best served by a people's—certainly an oppressed people's—exercise of self-determination through the establishment of an independent political state. For example, I have for a long time viewed the mutual acceptance of each other's right to national self-determination in the form of two independent states as the optimal solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (e.g., Kelman

1987). Similarly, I have found myself in favor of independent statehood in some cases, though opposed or at least ambivalent in others.

A variety of criteria come into play when one seeks to determine whether justice is served well or poorly by the creation of an independent state. Some of the factors strengthening a population's claim to an independent state include a recent history of independence which was forcibly terminated through military conquest and annexation; a history and continuing experience of oppression as a minority within an existing state; a history of struggle, actively supported by a large majority of a unified population; and evidence that serious efforts to work out a *modus vivendi* within the existing structure have failed, so that separation has become a last resort. The claim to an independent state would be weakened to the extent that it lacks popular support and is primarily the project of ambitious, aggressive leaders, perhaps with the backing of outside powers; the existing structure has been moderately successful in meeting the needs and interests of the population, including ethnic minorities; the proposed state lacks the capacity to meet the needs and interests of its population; and, perhaps most important, there is no assurance that the proposed state is willing and able to provide adequate protection for the rights of minorities within its borders.

On the basis of these criteria, I have favored independent statehood for the Baltic Republics and for Eritrea, despite misgivings about the process by which these states were established. Given the history of oppression and struggle of the Kurdish people, who are divided over Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria, I am inclined to think that justice would be served by an independent Kurdish state carved out from the Kurdish regions in each of these states, but there seems to be no unified support for such a project among the Kurdish population, especially across existing borders. I was not convinced that the establishment of an independent state of Slovakia was in the interest of the population, nor am I persuaded by the call for independent statehood by the Quebecois, the Basques in Spain, or the Turkish Cypriots. Above all, I think it was a mistake to recognize Slovenia and Croatia as independent states at the time and in the way it was done, because no consideration was given to the consequences of the establishment of these states and the resulting breakup of Yugoslavia for ethnic minorities within the various republics.

The criteria listed and loosely applied in the above examples reflect certain clear biases that inform my analysis. Overall, I would advocate caution before breaking up established, multiethnic states, because I believe that ethnic pluralism is most consistent with the principles of democracy and human rights, and also because the establishment of new, ethnically based states could become a threat to ethnic minorities within those new borders and to patterns of interdependence that have been developed over time. Yet, despite reservations about the way in which national self-determination may at times be implemented, I subscribe to the general notion that people ought to have the right to national self-determination, with the implication that this may result in the establishment of an independent state.

These observations bring us back to the dilemma that is underscored by recent events. National identity, national self-determination, and the establishment of a state as the political expression of a group's national identity are in themselves positive concepts: They represent major sources of human dignity and self-esteem for populations that have been subjected to oppression, colonization, humiliation, and discrimination; and they are vehicles for ending these conditions and producing favorable changes, materially as well as psychologically, in the terms of their existence. Yet, these positive, laudable goals often lead, as we have seen with such horrendous clarity in the former Yugoslavia as well as in many other places around the world, to systematic efforts to destroy other peoples as part of a project of establishing an ethnically pure, homogeneous state or region, i.e., to *ethnic cleansing* in the form of killing, expulsion, population transfer, intimidation (to "encourage" people to move), starvation, rape.

The dilemma is not new. Hurst Hannum, for example, in the first edition of his book, which was completed before the events of the post-Cold-War era, wrote that "the search for homogeneity [in nation states] may....be more likely to lead to repression and human rights violations than to promote the tolerance and plurality which many would claim to be essential values in the twentieth century and beyond" (1990: 26). However, the dangers of this process are now so apparent that there is an obligation to rethink these issues systematically, particularly if one conceives of group identity as a basic need that must be satisfied in order to resolve social conflicts. Since it is clearly unacceptable to satisfy this need in the ways in which it is now manifesting itself, we cannot avoid confronting this dilemma.

The dilemma is not new for me personally, either. Ambivalence about nationalism goes back to my childhood in Vienna, where I experienced nationalism in the form of Nazism, which for me was a very direct oppressive force, and of Zionism, which for me was a personally liberating force, a way in which I was able to maintain self-esteem in the face of Nazism (and for that matter in the face of the anti-Semitism that was pervasive in Austria prior to the Anschluss).

My very first publication (Kelman 1945), published in Hebrew in a student magazine in New York, struggled with this dilemma. Entitled "In defense of nationalism," it describes many of the positive features of nationalism, including its contribution to the struggle for freedom and against oppression and, at the psychological level, to people's self-respect and sense of efficacy. At the same time, I wrote about the evils of nationalism (which were, of course, the reasons why I felt it had to be defended in the first place) even slipping in a sentence that advocated selective conscientious objection.

In subsequent work on nationalism (beginning some 20 years after that first article) my analysis has dwelled extensively on the dualities of nationalist ideology and its object, the nation state. In a paper published in 1977 I discussed what I called "the dialectics of human dignity" created by the role of the nation state. One paragraph is directly relevant to the present discussion:

It is both understandable and in many ways rational for groups that feel oppressed to take the establishment of an independent nation state as the focus of their struggle, perceiving such a state as their vehicle for achieving dignity. Despite the fact that the nation state rarely corresponds to the ideal model postulated by nationalist ideology, it contrasts favorably with the experience of foreign domination and colonial status, which by its nature denigrates a people's identity and neglects its needs and interests. An independent state provides opportunities, at least to certain elites, to gain control over their lives, to increase their economic and political power, and to give expression to their cultural values and traditions. To the masses, it provides greater assurance that their needs will be sympathetically considered and a greater feeling that they are respected, autonomous human beings. To be sure, the hopes for a better life in an independent state are often frustrated; foreign oppression may merely be replaced with domestic oppression, and, for some minorities, membership in a nation-state may be tantamount to internal colonization. Nevertheless, we should not minimize the potential contribution of an independent nation-state to an oppressed people's dignity, even if it is only by enabling them to gain, through identification with the state, a vicarious sense of efficacy and importance (Kelman, 1977: 549-550).

The paper then adresses the paradox that the dysfunctional elements of the contemporary nation state—those related to the growing interdependence *between* nation states and the upsurge of ethnic divisions *within* nation states—may in fact create barriers to the enhancement of human dignity.

The present article is an attempt to continue to struggle with these contradictions of nationalism and its embodiment in the nation state for the promotion of justice and human dignity. The following paragraphs present and justify two normative propositions, anchored in a social-psychological analysis of nationalism and national identity.

First, the implementation of a national group's right to self-determination, through the establishment of an independent state that expresses its national identity, cannot be left to the group alone. It must be negotiated with those who are affected by that decision, including, in particular, minority populations.

Second, even a group's national identity itself must be "negotiated," i.e., explored and discussed, with those who are affected by the group's self-definition.

Negotiating National Self-Determination

The argument in support of the first proposition centers on the need to balance a given group's right to national self-determination with the rights of others, particularly minority groups, who are affected by that act of self-determination.

The principle of national self-determination. National identity in the context of the current international system, which is still dominated by the nation state, is a significant source of dignity and self-esteem for individuals and groups. At the same time, national or ethnic categories are probably the

predominant basis for discrimination, persecution, and oppression of groups of people in the contemporary world.

In view of the positive and negative significance of national/ethnic identity to human well-being and satisfaction of basic human needs, the principle of national self-determination (broadly defined, without specifying the particular form that it is to take) can be derived from important human rights. It is continuous in spirit with the right to personal autonomy or self-determination, which is a central component of the satisfaction of human needs and achievement of human potentialities. At the group level, it is a condition for enabling people to fulfill their cultural aspirations and lead their lives in a way that is consistent with their collective values, as well as a condition for the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups against discrimination, exploitation, and repression.

Implementing the principle of self-determination. Although national self-determination is linked to fundamental human rights, the precise form that it is to take in any given case must be subject to negotiation. In particular, the establishment of an independent national state in the exercise of the right to self-determination cannot be treated as an automatic right. The decision to establish an independent state cannot be left to the discretion of the national group itself, since it has potential impact on the rights and well-being of other groups, including:

a) Ethnic minorities (or less powerful ethnic groups) within the territory in which the state is to be established (for example, the Russian minority in Estonia);
b) Other units of an existing state from which the new state would secede or separate itself (for example, Croatia in relation to the other Yugoslav republics);
c) The wider region, since the resulting conflict may have repercussions for neighboring states, for example, because they contain populations ethnically related to the one that is establishing the state; or because refugees flee in large numbers to these neighboring states; or because the conflict undermines regional stability; and
d) The international system, for example, because of the effects of secession on treaties made with the former state (as in the case of Ukraine and its nuclear weapons).

The establishment of an independent state must therefore be based on a process of negotiations with all those who are potentially affected by the new arrangements.

A central, absolutely critical element of such a process is negotiation of firm guarantees for the protection of *minority rights*. The term "minority" in this context is not restricted to numerical minorities. In Yael Tamir's formulation, "a minority is a group whose culture is not adequately reflected in the public space" (1991: 589). Essentially, the term refers to ethnic groups that

differ from the group that is defining the identity of the new state and that therefore become vulnerable. (In view of the common phenomenon of double minorities in ethnic conflicts, even a group that is more powerful in one context, may be less powerful—and hence vulnerable—in another.) Minority rights consist of three key components:

a) The right to *exist* as a group, which means protection against gross violations of human rights, including genocide (which is by definition directed at ethnic groups), torture and disappearance (which are always directed at groups excluded from the moral community, groups that are often defined in ethnic terms), rape and other forms of violence, expulsion, starvation, and destruction of a group's economic base, homes, communities, and cultural institutions;

b) The right to equal treatment, including protection against legal or structural discrimination; and

c) The right to maintain, foster, and teach the group's own culture, language, religion, and traditions.

No independent national state can be accorded legitimacy unless firm guarantees for the protection of these minority rights have been negotiated. Justice for one group cannot be achieved at the expense of justice for others.

Maintaining the status quo during negotiations. While negotiations are in progress for establishing a new state by separation or secession from an existing state, maintaining the existing borders represents what might be called the "default option," in order to protect minority rights and the rights of others affected by the proposed redrawing of boundaries. The issue here is not the maintenance of sovereignty and the integrity of borders, but the protection of minority rights. The presumption is that existing mechanisms, even though probably imperfect, must be maintained until it is clear that the new arrangements will provide adequate guarantees for minorities and will safeguard the interests of other groups and entities that will be affected by establishment of the new state.

Protection of human rights, in my view, is a far more important value than protection of the integrity of existing borders. I propose existing borders as the default option when establishment of a new state is being negotiated only because this is the best way to provide basic safeguards for human rights (and for the interests of all affected parties). By the same token, insofar as existing states violate the rights of minorities, they open themselves up to international intervention. Indeed, it is necessary to reconsider the principle of non-intervention and to enhance the legitimacy of international intervention in cases of violation of human rights, provided this is done on the basis of carefully devised criteria and mechanisms requiring collective, multilateral action and minimal reliance on military force. I propose to give existing states and their borders the benefit of the doubt until

new arrangements are negotiated only because, and insofar as, they provide assurance that minority and other groups' rights are adequately protected.

Criteria for the legitimacy of independent states. An independent national state is not entitled to international legitimacy unless it provides absolute guarantees for the protection of minority rights and the fulfillment of other obligations. This means, most significantly, that a new (or, for that matter, existing) state, even though it is established to fulfill the quest for national self-determination by the majority of the population (and quite properly so, in my view), *must never be, claim to be, or strive to be an ethnically pure state.*

The argument can be put in the terms of human-needs theory. Political states in the modern world are the basic providers of need satisfaction and protection for all of their citizens. They must therefore address the security, development, and identity needs of ethnic minorities as well as majorities, allowing members of each group to share equally in the benefits of the state and to preserve their own identity and cultural values. The needs of one group—even the majority—cannot be met in ways that undermine or threaten the well-being and safety of other groups. There may be certain domains in which the identity of the majority carries greater weight, for example, in the designation of the state's official language, provided the individual and collective rights of minorities are fully respected. The state cannot be allowed, however, to become a vehicle for *exclusively* embodying the identity and promoting the interests of any single group, not even the majority and certainly not a dominant minority. The logical extension of such exclusivity is the quest for an ethnically pure state, which leads inexorably to a policy of ethnic cleansing.

More generally, it has become necessary to delegitimize the conception of the nation state as an ethnically homogeneous entity, even though this was part of the original rationale for the nation state and, in fact, the meaning of the term. A modern state cannot be consistent with the principles of democracy and human rights unless it is *pluralistic:* It must accept diversity within its borders and offer full protection to minorities both at the level of individual rights (protection against discrimination) and collective rights (opportunity to develop and express their own culture and language), and full citizenship with a meaningful place in the society's identity. The absence of pluralism as part of the ethos of a democratic state necessarily means that the national identity of the dominant ethnic group is being achieved at the expense of justice for ethnic minorities.

In light of this analysis, scholars and policy makers need to be innovative in devising political arrangements that allow both the majority ethnic community and ethnic minorities to express their group identities and to be secure in the protection of their human rights. Such arrangements require separating ethnic identity from citizen identity; exploring different forms of federation, confederation, and autonomy; and looking toward decentralization and devolution of various instruments of power from central national

authorities to local and regional authorities, on the one hand, and to transnational units on the other.

Summary. The basic argument thus far can be summed up briefly: Assertion of the right of national self-determination, including the possibility of establishing a national state in the exercise of that right, gains its moral strength from the protection of minority rights, or, to put it more generically, from the requirement to ensure that the needs and interests of vulnerable identity groups are met. In other words, the failure of existing political arrangements to meet this requirement for a particular ethnic or national group, causing that group to experience oppression, denigration, or discrimination, provides the moral justification for the group's claim to self-determination. But that very same requirement clearly implies that self-determination in the form of statehood (or in any other particular form) cannot be automatic; that it must be negotiated with those whose needs and interests are affected by the new arrangements, especially ethnic minority populations; and that it cannot be based on the quest for an ethnically pure state. A modern state consistent with the principles of democracy and human rights can only exist within a framework of ethnic pluralism. Any effort to base a state on ethnic purity must automatically come under suspicion as a threat to fundamental human rights and an invitation to ethnic cleansing.

"Negotiating" National Identity

The second proposition presented here extends this argument to national identity itself. National identity is the psychological underpinning of national self-determination; that is, establishment of an independent state and other forms of self-determination are attempts to give political expression to a group's national identity. Parallel to the argument about self-determination, I propose that a group's definition of its national identity, and particularly its ideas for "implementing" its national identity, are of legitimate concern to other groups that are affected by that definition, and must therefore be open to "negotiation" with those other groups.

The term "negotiation" is used loosely in this context, to refer to an informal, unofficial process of give and take between groups whose ideas about their respective national identities conflict with one another. It is a process that entails exploration of each other's sense of identity, of the components of that identity that are vital to the group, of the ways in which the group's self-definition might affect the other group, and of reciprocal adjustments in the two groups' self-definitions that might help to resolve the conflict between them.[2] The purpose of such discussion is to develop joint understandings and formulations, rather than political agreements.

To some extent, however, "negotiated" identities could become component parts of a political agreement. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, for example, the essence of the peace process has been the mutual acceptance of territorial limits to the political expression of each group's national identity: Though each people's identity is linked to the whole of Palestine or

Land of Israel, each now seems prepared to confine its political focus to a *part* of that land. These negotiated identities will undoubtedly be reflected in the ultimate political agreement, since both sides will want assurances about the finality of the agreement signed and of the borders established.

I have chosen the term negotiation to emphasize that a group's formulation of its identity is not just its own business, but a matter of vital concern to others. Mutually acceptable identities must therefore be shaped through a joint process of give and take. Clearly, individuals and groups cannot negotiate how they *feel* about their identity. They can, however, negotiate how they *think* and *speak* about their identity: how they conceptualize it and how they formulate it in public political discourse. The formulations of group identity by political leaders, in particular, have a major impact on how their communities think about it and, ultimately, even on how they feel about it. Negotiation of identity in this sense is intended to ensure that no group defines its identity in ways that threaten the rights, interests, and identity of other groups. Without such assurance, a group is not entitled to international recognition and normative support for its national identity.

The negotiation of identity is not an impossible task. It is a substantial part of the process that my colleagues and I have facilitated over the years in workshops with Israelis and Palestinians, as well as with Greek and Turkish Cypriots (see, e.g., Kelman 1992a; Rouhana and Kelman 1994). In our workshops, the parties have often been able to take at least the first step in this process: discovering what each side finds problematic about the other's definition of its national identity, e.g., its self-image as the exclusive owner of the land. At times, they have moved to the second step: redefining their identity in ways that reflect their own group's sense of its boundaries, cultural characteristics, and history, without unduly threatening the identity and fundamental needs of the other party.

The basic proposition, that national identity is an appropriate subject for negotiation, presents us with dilemmas that parallel and in some respects exceed the dilemmas of negotiating self-determination.

On the one hand, national identity has many of the earmarks of a "non-negotiable" item, for both normative and empirical reasons. Normatively, it is a concept with many positive features. It is one expression of the basic human need for personal identity. Moreover, it often serves, particularly for oppressed and vulnerable groups, as a source of dignity and self-esteem, and as a rallying point to promote and protect a group's rights and interests.

Empirically, national identity is a psychological conception, which cannot be dictated or prescribed by outsiders. It makes no sense to tell a group of people who define themselves as a nation (in the sense of peoplehood, not statehood) that they have no right or justification for doing so because their self-definition does not conform to some set of theoretical, juridical, or historical criteria for what constitutes a nation. Nor does it make sense to tell them how to draw the boundaries of the group: whom to include and whom to exclude. People are a nation if they perceive themselves as such and are

prepared to invest energy and make sacrifices in terms of that perception (Kelman 1978).

Of course, intense, protracted conflicts between identity groups are often marked by precisely such efforts to challenge and dictate the other's identity. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, has had a long history of mutual denial of the other's nationhood and of the authenticity of its national claims. My analyses of this conflict (e.g., Kelman 1978, 1987), have pointed to the futility of such efforts to reject the other's self-definition and impose one's own preferred definition on them, and have at least come close to arguing that a group's national identity is not negotiable.

On the other hand, however, how a group defines itself often has significant consequences for others. The moment a group acts on the self-definition of its nationhood — for example, by making territorial claims, by demanding an independent state, by seeking to redraw borders, by declaring who is included in the national identity and who is excluded from it, or even by selecting a name for itself — its chosen identity has an impact on the interests, rights, and identity of other groups. Such other groups do, therefore, have a legitimate concern about and stake in the way in which a given group defines itself. For this reason, national identity, even though it is a psychological fact created by the way a group chooses to define itself, is a legitimate subject for negotiation with other groups and entities that are affected by this self-definition.

In trying to draw out the empirical and normative implications of the dilemma of negotiating national identity, it helps to keep in mind that national identity is a social construction. This idea provides a useful conceptual handle for sorting out what is feasible and what is acceptable in the negotiation of identity. To say that national identity is a social construction does not mean that it is manufactured out of nothing. There may be instances in which one can properly speak of an imagined past, invented to buttress a newly formed identity (cf. Anderson 1983). In most cases, however, the social construction of an identity draws on a variety of authentic elements held in common within a population group: a common history, a common language, a common religion, common customs, common cultural expressions, common experiences, common values, common grievances, common aspirations.

Typically, the social construction of an identity involves a dual process of *discovery* (or rediscovery) and *creation* of such common elements (Kelman 1997). The social construction of the identity implies a degree of arbitrariness and flexibility in the way the identity is composed (which elements are brought into it and which omitted), and in where its boundaries are drawn (who is included and who excluded). These choices depend on the opportunities and necessities perceived by the elites that are engaged in mobilizing ethnonational consciousness for their political, economic, or religious purposes.

Interestingly, the idea that national identity is a social construction has implications for both horns of the dilemma of negotiating national identity. The social construction of national identity is precisely what makes it unreasonable to reject (or for that matter defend) it on the basis of some formal (theoretical, juridical, or historical) criteria. It is the identity that a group, under the leadership of its mobilizing elites, chose to construct. By the same token, since national identity is a social construction, it can also be *reconstructed*. In fact, the reconstruction of identity is a regular, ongoing process in the life of any national group. Identities are commonly reconstructed, sometimes gradually and sometimes radically, as historical circumstances change, crises emerge, opportunities present themselves, or new elites come to the fore.

This reconstruction of a group's identity is a process in which other groups, who are affected by the group's definition of its identity, have a legitimate right to participate. In other words, the reconstruction of identity is an appropriate subject for the give and take of informal negotiation. While a group's identity cannot be dictated and prescribed by others, it can well be explored and discussed with them.

How one conducts such "negotiations" between conflicting groups with incompatible definitions of their respective identities is of critical importance. They should be carried out in a context of give and take based on the principle of reciprocity. With both identities simultaneously on the table, the parties need to engage in a process of jointly thinking about ways in which their respective identities can be accommodated to each other. That is, they should jointly generate ideas for formulating each identity so that it will not threaten the interests, rights, and identity of the other. This kind of interaction requires an underlying attitude of respect for the other's identity. It must be clear that each party recognizes the other's identity, acknowledges its authenticity and legitimacy, and does not seek to threaten and undermine it. The mutual respect and acknowledgment of the other's identity must be accompanied, however, by the recognition that group identities are not fixed, God-given essences, but continually evolving products of human interaction.

Proceeding from this assumption, the parties must be prepared to work with each other in a way that reflects and advances evolving, innovative ideas and norms about national identity. This means, above all, that they must strive to satisfy the requirements of pluralism, without threatening or seeking to replace either group's particularistic identity. They must move away from *exclusivist* and *monolithic* definitions of identity toward acceptance of the possibility that certain elements of identity may be *shared* by different groups, and that members of these groups may develop a *transcendent* identity alongside of their particular identities.

This conception requires some elaboration and illustration, in order to clarify the substantive issues that the negotiation of national identity might pursue. Ethnonational groups in conflict tend to view their group identity in exclusive terms: Defining components of their identity, such as land, history,

language, or cultural products, are perceived as theirs and theirs alone. The other group's claim to any of these elements as part of its own identity tends to be seen as a threat and hence dismissed as unjustified and inauthentic. For both Israelis and Palestinians, for example, the group's relationship to the land is seen as a historically rooted, defining element of the national identity. This link to the land has also been seen, throughout the history of the conflict, as mutually exclusive.

Negotiating identity in this context does not and cannot mean relinquishing or attenuating one's own links to the land. Rather, it means acknowledgment that the land is a shared element of the two national identities—that the other also has a profound attachment to the land, anchored in authentic historical ties to it. Such a reconstruction of identity is bound to have some bearing on the search for a political solution to the conflict. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, the gradual movement toward acceptance of shared elements of identity has gone hand in hand with the gradual development of a political formula for sharing the land. A comparable process of negotiating Jerusalem as a shared element of the two identities and developing a political formula to reflect that view has yet to materialize.

Similarly, ethnonational groups in conflict tend to view their group identity monolithically, expecting all dimensions of that identity to be perfectly correlated: The ideology calls for complete correspondence between ethnic boundaries, political boundaries, boundaries of emotional attachment, and boundaries of intensive interaction. Protracted conflicts, particularly between identity groups living in close proximity within a small space, as in the case of Northern Ireland, Cyprus, or Israel/Palestine, could more readily be resolved if there was some degree of disaggregation of the monolithic identity, based on distinctions between different types of boundaries. Such distinctions would allow for the development of identities that transcend the primary ethnonational boundaries.

These transcendent identities would not be intended to replace the particularistic identity of each group, but to coexist alongside of it. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, for example, the separation of the concepts of state and country would allow the two communities to maintain a common attachment to the entire country while living in separate states within that country. Within Israel itself, Jews and Palestinian Arabs could develop a transcendent civil identity as full and equal citizens of their common state, while maintaining the separate ethnic identities that are so important to both groups.

Conclusion

The contradictions of ethnonational identity have made it a prime force in both the promotion and the destruction of human dignity and social justice. Recent events have underscored the strains on justice that can be created by the quest for national identity. Far too often, in the name of national identity, justice for one group has been pursued at the expense of justice for others. It is time to reconceptualize national identity and to develop new norms for

accepting, not only a group's right to establish an independent state as the political expression of its national identity, but also its claim to national identity itself. When national identity is conceived, not as primordial essence, but as social construction, a group's national self-determination and the reconstruction of its identity become appropriate subjects for negotiation with other groups who are affected by this group's self-determination and self-definition. Joint reconstruction of identity, in a negotiation process that fosters reciprocity, mutual respect, and pluralism, can transform the quest for national identity into a force that is primarily constructive, rather than primarily destructive, as it is today. Social scientists can contribute significantly through the reconceptualization of national identity and the development of a methodology for negotiating identity.

NOTES

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1. See also Tamir (1991), who defines the right to national self-determination as "the right of a nation to preserve its existence as a unique social group" (p. 566), which "involves a right of access to the public sphere, [but] does not necessarily entail a right to an independent state" (p. 587).

2. See Kelman (1992b) for an illustration of what such a process of negotiating identity might consist of. The article, published before the Oslo agreement, proposes an approach of the natural acknowledgement of the other's nationhood on the part of Israelis and Palestinians.

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