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The Role of National Identity in Conflict Resolution

Experiences from Israeli-Palestinian Problem-Solving Workshops

My colleagues' and my work as scholar-practitioners has focused on analysis and resolution of protracted, seemingly intractable conflicts between national, ethnic, or other kinds of identity groups, best exemplified by intercommunal conflicts, such as those in Cyprus, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, and apartheid South Africa. My own most intensive and extensive experience, over the past quarter-century, has been with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and my analysis draws primarily on that experience.[1]

Using the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a case in point, this chapter examines the way in which issues of national identity can exacerbate an international or intercommunal conflict and the way in which such issues can be addressed in conflict-resolution efforts. The chapter starts out with a brief history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, setting the stage for the identity issues at the heart of the conflict. It then proceeds to describe the struggle over national identity between the two peoples, which has led them to perceive their conflict in zero-sum terms, with respect to not only territory and resources but also national identity and national existence. Next, it argues that long-term resolution of this and similar deep-rooted conflicts requires changes in the groups' national identities, such that affirmation of one group's identity is no longer predicated on negation of the other's identity. Such identity changes are possible as long as they leave the core of each group's national identity intact. Furthermore, the chapter proceeds to argue, such changes *need* to be and *can* be "negotiated" between the two groups. One venue for negotiating identity, described in the next section, is provided by the problem-solving workshops between Israeli and Palestinian elites that my colleagues and I have convened for many years. Finally, the

paper concludes with an illustration of the possibilities and limits of the negotiation of identity, based on a joint Israeli-Palestinian exploration of the problem of Palestinian refugees.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is now more than a century old (see Tessler, 1994, for a comprehensive account of the history of the conflict, or Mendelsohn, 1989, and Gerner, 1991, for shorter accounts). Its origins go back to the birth of political Zionism at the end of the 19th century (see Halpern, 1969, and Hertzberg, 1973). The early decades of the 20th century brought to Palestine waves of Jewish immigrants who purchased land, built settlements and social institutions, and clearly signaled their intention to establish a Jewish homeland and ultimately a Jewish state in Palestine. The growing Jewish presence was soon perceived as a threat by the Arab population of the land, which was itself influenced by the development of Arab nationalism and the construction of a specifically Palestinian identity (see Muslih, 1988, and Khalidi, 1997). Violence first erupted in the 1920s and has continued to mark the relationship between the two peoples ever since.

During the period of the British mandate, which was established after World War I, various formulas for the political future of Palestine were explored, including partition and establishment of a federal state, but none was found to be acceptable to both the Arab and the Jewish populations (or indeed to either one of them). In November 1947—in the wake of World War II and the decimation of European Jewry—the United Nations General Assembly voted to end the British mandate over Palestine (on May 15, 1948) and to partition the land into a Jewish and an Arab state. The Zionist leadership accepted the partition plan, with reservations. The Arab leadership, both within Palestine and in the neighboring states, rejected it. Fighting between the two sides broke out immediately after adoption of the UN resolution and turned into all-out war after May 15, 1948, when the British forces withdrew, the Jewish leadership in Palestine declared the independent state of Israel, and regular armies from the neighboring Arab states joined the fray. Fighting continued until early 1949.

In July of 1949, Israel and the Arab states signed armistice agreements (though the state of war continued). The armistice lines became the official borders of the State of Israel. These borders included a larger portion of Palestine than the UN partition plan had allotted to the Jewish state. The Arab state envisioned by the partition plan did not come into being. Two parts of mandatory Palestine remained under Arab control: the West Bank, which was eventually annexed by Jordan, and the Gaza Strip, which came under Egyptian administration. The establishment of Israel and the war of 1948–49 also created a massive refugee problem, with the flight or expul-

sion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs from their homes in the part of Palestine that became the State of Israel. I shall return to the refugee problem later in this chapter.

The map changed radically as a result of the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967—and, along with it, the political atmosphere in the Middle East. By the end of the Six-Day War, as Israelis called it, Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, thus extending its control over the entire territory of mandatory Palestine. It also occupied the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights—Egyptian and Syrian territories, respectively. The new geopolitical and strategic situation created by the 1967 War led to the Palestinianization of the Arab-Israeli conflict, bringing it back to its origin as a conflict between two peoples over—and increasingly within—the land they both claimed (Kelman, 1988).

The Palestinianization (or re-Palestinianization) of the conflict has manifested itself in the actions of the Arab states, of the Palestinian community itself, and of Israel. Israel's neighboring Arab states gradually withdrew from the military struggle against Israel—though not before another major war in 1973—leaving it, essentially, to the Palestinians themselves. The disengagement of the Arab states became dramatically clear with the 1977 visit to Jerusalem of President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, the largest and most powerful Arab state, an initiative that led to the Camp David accord of 1978 and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979. The Palestinians took repossession of their struggle, which in the years between 1949 and 1967 had been mostly in the hands of the Arab states. Fatah, under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, and other Palestinian guerrilla organizations grew in strength and eventually took over the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was originally a creature of the Arab League. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, the Palestinian movement gradually shifted its emphasis from the liberation of all of Palestine through armed struggle against Israel to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza through largely political means. The end of the occupation became the immediate goal of the movement and, with the onset of the *intifada*—the uprising in the West Bank and Gaza—in December 1987, the occupied territories became the focal point of its struggle.

On the Israeli side, the *intifada* further underlined the Palestinianization of the conflict in the wake of the 1967 War. What had been largely an interstate conflict between 1948 and 1967 had now been internalized by Israel—that is, transformed into a continuous confrontation with a resentful Palestinian population, living under occupation within Israel's post-1967 borders. Many Israelis were persuaded by the *intifada* that continuing occupation was not tenable and that the Palestinians were indeed a people, whose national movement had to find some political expression if there was to be a peaceful accommodation between the two sides (Kelman, 1997c).

By the end of the 1980s, there was a strong interest on all sides in finding a peaceful accommodation and an increasing recognition that some version

of a two-state solution would provide the best formula for a broadly accept-able historic compromise. The political obstacles to such a solution, how-ever, remained severe. A number of strategic and micropolitical considera-tions—traceable, in particular, to the end of the Cold War and the aftermath of the Gulf War—eventually brought the leaderships on both sides to the negotiating table at the Madrid Conference in 1991 and the subsequent talks in Washington. These talks, however, never developed momentum. It was only after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin came into power in Israel in 1992, at the head of a government led by the Labor Party, and gradually (and reluctantly) concluded that Israel would have to deal di-rectly with the PLO leadership in order to make progress in the negotia-tions, that a breakthrough was finally achieved. This breakthrough oc-curred in the secret Oslo talks, which culminated in the exchange of letters of mutual recognition between the PLO and the State of Israel (which, in my view, was the most significant achievement of the Oslo process) and the Declaration of Principles signed in Washington in September 1993 (see Kelman, 1997c, for further details).

The Oslo breakthrough occurred because a number of long-term and short-term interests of the parties—to which I alluded briefly—persuaded them of the necessity of reaching an agreement. "But a significant factor contributing to the breakthrough was the conclusion, on both sides, that negotiations were not only necessary but also possible—that they could yield an acceptable agreement without jeopardizing their national existence. This sense of possibility evolved out of interactions between the two sides that produced the individuals, the ideas, and the political atmosphere re-quired for negotiations" (Kelman, 1997d, p. 213). A variety of unofficial contacts between the two sides, including the workshops to be described in this chapter, contributed to creating this sense of possibility and the climate conducive to negotiations (see Kelman, 1995).

Though the Oslo agreement was a genuine breakthrough in the effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the process of negotiating an interim agreement and initiating final-status negotiations has faced numerous ob-stacles and experienced dangerous setbacks, all reminding us of the in-tractability of conflicts between identity groups, such as the Israeli-Palestin-ian conflict. Significant changes in the conflict have taken place with the establishment of a Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which constitutes the scaffolding for a Palestinian state. But the path to a negotiated agreement has been obstructed by such events as the He-bron massacre of Palestinians at prayer, the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the suicide bombings against Israeli civilians, the continuation of the Israeli settlement process in the West Bank, the deteriorating economy and quality of life in the West Bank and Gaza, the corrupt and autocratic leadership of the PA, and the three-year rule of Prime Minister Netanyahu in Israel.

The election of a new Israeli government in May of 1999 brought new hope that serious negotiations of the final-status issues will be pursued. But

the negotiations failed and, in late September 2000, a new *intifada* broke out, producing a violent Israeli response and a serious deterioration of the peace process. Nevertheless I feel fairly confident that the negotiations will eventually succeed in establishing a Palestinian state. I am less confident that this new state will be truly independent, secure, and viable, and that its establishment will form the basis of a long-term peace and a cooperative, mutually enhancing relationship with Israel, conducive to ultimate reconciliation between the two peoples. How the identity issues that divide the two peoples are addressed in the negotiations and the public debates that surround them will play a major role in determining the quality and durability of the solution achieved at the negotiating table.

The Struggle over National Identity

Although national identity is carried by the individual members of a national group and can thus be studied as a property of individuals, the present chapter refers to it as a collective phenomenon—as a property of the group. "Insofar as a group of people have come to see themselves as constituting a unique, identifiable entity, with a claim to continuity over time, to unity across geographical distance, and to the right to various forms of self-expression, we can say that they have acquired a sense of national identity. National identity is the group's definition of itself as a group—its conception of its enduring characteristics and basic values; its strengths and weaknesses; its hopes and fears; its reputation and conditions of existence; its institutions and traditions; and its past history, current purposes, and future prospects" (Kelman, 1997a, p. 171; see also Kelman, 1998b).

In the Israeli-Palestinian and other such conflicts, the threat to collective identity is a core issue in the conflict, which is integrally related to the struggle over territory and resources. Both peoples and their national movements claim the same territory, and each seeks ownership of that territory and control over its resources as the basis of an independent state that gives political expression to its national identity. The integrity of this collective identity is critical to each group for several reasons. First, the integrity of the national identity is an end in itself, in that the identity serves as a source of distinctiveness, unity, and continuity for the group and of a sense of belongingness for its members. Second, the national identity constitutes the ultimate justification of the group's claim to ownership of the land and control of its resources. And third, the national identity provides a focus for developing and maintaining the group's distinctive culture, religion, and way of life. The collective identity of each group is bolstered by a national narrative—an account of the group's origins, its history, and its relationship to the land—that explains and supports its sense of distinctiveness, its positive self-image, and the justice of its claims and grievances.

In conflicts such as that between Israelis and Palestinians, in which the

two sides live in the same space and claim ownership of the same territory, it is not only the actions of the other but also the identity and the very existence of the other that are a threat to the group's own identity. The other's identity and its associated narrative challenge the group's claims to ownership—at least to exclusive ownership—of the land and its resources. The other's presence in the same space, particularly if it is accompanied by demands for a share of the power and for recognition of the other culture, religion, and/or language, is perceived as a threat to the integrity and cohesiveness of the group's society and its way of life.

These dynamics lead to a view of the conflict as a zero-sum struggle, not only around territory but also around identity (Kelman, 1987). Acknowledging the other's identity becomes tantamount to jeopardizing the identity—and indeed the national existence—of one's own group. Each side "holds the view that only one can be a nation: Either we are or they are. *They* can acquire national identity and rights only at the expense of *our* identity and rights" (Kelman, 1987, p. 354). Thus, over the course of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there has been a systematic tendency on each side to deny the other's identity as a people, the authenticity of the other's links to the land, the legitimacy of the other's claims to national rights, and the very existence of the other as a national group (Kelman, 1978, 1982). Negation of the other's identity and of the narrative in which it is embedded becomes so important to the conflict that it is incorporated in the identity that each group constructs for itself and in the narrative that it presents to the world (Kelman, 1999).

The contrasting Israeli and Palestinian narratives about the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 both rely on the negation of the other to bolster the justice of their own cause. For Israelis, the creation of Israel represented a rightful return of the Jewish people to its ancestral homeland. Establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine did not, in their eyes, constitute an injustice to the Arabs who resided there, because Palestinian Arabs were not a people, distinct from the Arab inhabitants of surrounding countries, and never exercised sovereignty in Palestine. Moreover, in the Israeli narrative, the responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem and the suffering of the Palestinian Arab population rests with their own aggressive and incompetent leadership, which rejected all compromise and initiated violent attacks in the effort to block the establishment of Israel. For Palestinians, by contrast, the creation of Israel represented an act of usurpation by European settlers, who forcefully displaced the indigenous population and destroyed their society, their property, and their way of life. In the Palestinian narrative, Jews are a religious group, not a nation entitled to its own state, and Zionism is a form of settler colonialism that imposed itself on a region in which it has no roots. Each identity gains some of its strength and legitimacy from negating and delegitimizing the other.

Identities that rest in part on negation of the other inevitably take on an exclusivist and monolithic character (Kelman, 1997b). In the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict, such exclusivist and monolithic definitions of identity have begun to give way in recent years. For significant segments of the two population, however—and in some respects even for large majorities—such definitions still prevail.

In the Israeli-Palestinian case, a defining element of each group's identity is its relationship to the land and its history. Insofar as this relationship is *exclusive*—that is, insofar as the group's identity rests on the view that the land and its history belong to it alone and that the other's claims on them as part of its own identity are illegitimate and inauthentic—there is little room for conflict resolution. Conflict resolution becomes an option when the parties accept the possibility that certain elements of identity may be *shared* with the other, acknowledging that the other also has a profound attachment to the land, anchored in authentic historical ties to it. Israelis and Palestinians have been gradually moving toward acceptance of shared elements of identity as they have been searching for a political formula for sharing the land. It has proved more difficult for the two sides, so far, to accept Jerusalem as a shared element of the two identities and to develop a political formula to reflect that view.

Identities that rest on negation of the other also take on a *monolithic* character; that is, all dimensions of the group's identity—such as ethnicity, religion, and language—tend to be viewed as highly correlated. The ideology calls for complete correspondence between ethnic boundaries, political boundaries, boundaries of emotional attachment, and boundaries of intensive interaction. Self and other are, in principle, completely separated along all of these lines. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as other protracted conflicts, particularly between identity groups living in close proximity within a small space (such as Northern Ireland or Cyprus), might be more amenable to resolution if there were some degree of disaggregation of the monolithic identity, based on distinctions between different types of boundaries. Such distinctions would allow for the development of a *transcendent* identity—not in place of the particular ethnonational identities, but alongside of them. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, a transcendent identity could be fostered by separating the concept of the state, as a sovereign political entity, from that of the country, as a geographical entity. This distinction would allow the two communities to treat the entire country (Eretz Yisrael or Palestine) as an object of common sentimental attachment and as the framework for common instrumental pursuits (in such areas as development and use of water resources, environmental protection, public health, and tourism), while living in and identifying with separate political states within that country.

The zero-sum view of identity and the mutual denial of the other's identity that I have described create serious obstacles to conflict resolution. All issues tend to become existential—matters of life and death for each side. Compromise solutions that involve sharing of the land or agreeing on different boundaries for different purposes are likely to threaten exclusivist

and monolithic identities. The demonized other is not trusted to negotiate in good faith and respect agreements. In short, when acceptance of the other's national rights and recognition of the other's national identity are seen as relinquishing the group's own rights and jeopardizing its own identity, distributive solutions based on compromise are hard to achieve. Even if the parties agree to make certain compromises in response to reality demands and external pressures, these compromises are unlikely to lead to durable changes in the relationship between the conflicting groups, conducive to stable peace, mutually enhancing interaction, and ultimate reconciliation. Lasting change requires mutual adjustments in collective identity.

Identity Changes

The stubborn resistance to change in collective identities is widely recognized and taken for granted. Yet identities have to change, at least tacitly, if protracted identity conflicts are to be settled and, certainly, if they are to be resolved in a way that transforms the relationship and opens the way to reconciliation. South Africa provides perhaps the best illustration of an arena of intense, protracted conflict in which fundamental identity changes paved the way to resolution and reconciliation, although it also illustrates the difficulties in changing the worldviews and the structural realities that became entrenched in the apartheid era.

Despite their undeniable rigidities, identities are potentially changeable (and indeed negotiable) for two reasons: First, unlike territory and resources, they are not inherently zero-sum; though they are perceived and debated as such in intense conflicts, it is in fact not the case that A's identity can be recognized and expressed only if B's identity is denied and suppressed.

If the two identities are to become compatible, however, they have to be redefined. And this points to the second reason for the potential changeability of group identities: they can be redefined because they are to a large extent constructed. To view national identity as a social construction does not imply that it is manufactured out of nothing. There may be cases in which one can properly speak of an imagined past, invented to buttress a newly formed identity (cf. Anderson, 1983). Generally, however, the social construction of an identity draws on a variety of authentic elements held in common within a group: a common history, language, or religion; common customs, cultural expressions, experiences, values, grievances, aspirations (Kelman 1997b). Typically, the social construction of an identity involves a dual process of *discovery* (or rediscovery) and *creation* of such common elements (Kelman, 1997a). The social construction of the identity implies a degree of arbitrariness and flexibility in the way the identity is composed (which elements are admitted into it and which omitted from it), and in what its boundaries are (who is included and who is excluded). These choices depend on the opportunities and necessities perceived by the elites

that are engaged in mobilizing ethnonational consciousness for their politi-cal, economic, or religious purposes (Kelman, 1997b). Serbs and Croats, for example, share a common language and culture, but differ in religion and historical experiences. Political leaders have at times focused on the simi-larities in the effort to shape them into a single nation; at other times they have magnified the differences to define them as separate—and mutually antagonistic—nations.

Thus, although national identities are generally constructed out of real experiences, these experiences can be ordered in different ways, resulting in different boundaries and priorities. As a consequence, they can be—and typically are—deconstructed and 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 some-times radically, as historical circumstances change, crises emerge, opportu-nities present themselves, or new elites come to the fore" (Kelman, 1997b, p. 338). Clearly, therefore, there is room for maneuver in a group's self-definition, particularly with respect to the definition of group boundaries and the priorities among different elements of the group's identity.

Changes in identity over the course of a protracted conflict come about through a combination of changed perceptions of the *necessity* and the *possi-bility* of resolving a conflict that has become increasingly costly to the par-ties. The mounting costs and dwindling prospects of governing Algeria for the French, of maintaining apartheid for white South Africans, of the occu-pation of Palestinian territories for Israelis, and of the armed struggle for the Palestinians created the *necessity* for changes in identity: Algeria as an in-tegral part of France, South Africa under exclusive white control, Israel within the borders of Greater Israel, and Palestinian repossession of the en-tire homeland were assigned lower priority in the national identities of these groups as it became clear to a majority that these aspirations could not be realized at an acceptable cost.

What made it *possible* to change these priorities was often the discovery that accommodation of the other's identity need not destroy the core of the group's own identity, and that a compromise solution to the conflict was therefore negotiable. This kind of learning can take place in the course of official or unofficial interactions between the groups or their members, in-cluding the problem-solving workshops that my colleagues and I have con-ducted: In the course of Israeli-Palestinian workshops, for example, partici-pants have learned to differentiate their image of the enemy by discovering that there are potential negotiating partners on the other side, that there is a distinction between the other's ideological dreams and operational pro-grams, and that the other has positive goals beyond destruction of their group (Kelman, 1987). They were enabled to enter into the enemy's per-spective, thus discovering the historical sources of the other's claims and grievances, the depth of the other's fears, and the authenticity of the other's sense of peoplehood. They began to visualize a different future, discovering

possibilities for mutually beneficial coexistence and cooperation. As such experiences multiply, and as the learnings produced by them are infused into the two political cultures, each group may gradually change its identity by eliminating the negation of the other's identity as an element of its own identity and perhaps even admitting the possibility of a partnership as a new element of its own identity.

Negotiating Identity

The changes I have described are often the result of an explicit or implicit process of negotiating identity. At its core, national identity is clearly non-negotiable; indeed, the very idea of negotiating identity sounds like an oxymoron. National identity is a collective psychological conception, which cannot be dictated or prescribed by outsiders. A group of people who define themselves as a nation cannot be told that they have no right to do so because their self-definition does not conform to some set of theoretical, juridical, or historical criteria for doing so, or because their nationhood is inconvenient to others. 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). Neither Palestinians nor Israelis will give up the core of their identity: their sense of peoplehood, their attachment to the land, their conviction about the historical authenticity of their links to that land, their commitment to their national culture, language, and way of life. Nor will they give up the national narrative that substantiates the justice of their cause.

But there are many elements that can be added to or subtracted from an identity without jeopardizing its core. In fact, changes in less central elements of the identity are often advocated precisely in order to protect the core of the identity. It was on that basis that the majority of Israelis and Palestinians came to accept territorial compromise—that is, a shrinking of the territorial dimension of their identity—as the best available option for maintaining their national identity. The Peace Now movement in Israel, for example, advocated withdrawal from the occupied territories largely on the grounds that this was the only way in which Israel could maintain its character as both a Jewish state and a democratic state. Yehoshafat Harkabi (1986), a former chief of Israeli military intelligence and a prophetic voice in the debate about Israeli-Palestinian peace, explicitly advocated a "smaller Israel"—a "Zionism of quality" rather than a "Zionism of acreage." He argued that Israel had to choose between withdrawing from the West Bank and making way for a Palestinian state there, or annexing the West Bank with the consequence that Israel would eventually *become* a Palestinian state. On the Palestinian side, the territorial dimension of the Palestinian identity has gradually changed as the movement reflected on its realistic

options. The thinking of the PLO evolved from advocacy of a Palestinian Arab state in the whole of Palestine, to a secular democratic state, and eventually to a Palestinian state alongside of Israel comprising the West Bank and Gaza (cf. Muslih, 1990). Significant segments of both societies still reject territorial compromise on religious or ideological grounds and link their national identity to possession of the land in its entirety. But the Palestinian and Israeli mainstreams have by now come to terms with a national identity that finds its political expression in only part of the land, as evidenced by the opinion polls that are now conducted on a regular basis in both societies.

Such changes in elements of identity are a legitimate subject for "negotiation" between groups whose identities clash, because the identity that one group chooses for itself has significant implications for the rights, interests, and identity of the other. Whenever one group translates the self-definition of its nationhood into action—"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" (Kelman, 1997b, p. 337)—the other is inevitably affected. Each group, therefore, has a legitimate concern about the way the other defines itself, the way it formulates its national identity. It is not surprising, then, that identity issues play an important role in the formal and informal processes of pre-negotiation and negotiation—that is, in the efforts to open a way to the negotiating table and to reach agreement around the table.

To some extent, identity issues are part of the subject matter of the official negotiations. I have already referred to the territorial dimension of identity: insofar as Israelis and Palestinians are negotiating on the basis of a "land for peace" formula, they are accepting territorial limits to their national identities, which have, after all, been historically linked to the whole of the land. Similarly, the mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO, as expressed in the exchange of letters between Arafat and Rabin—which I have described above as the most important breakthrough of the Oslo agreement —can be viewed as a product of the negotiation of identity: an act of acceptance and legitimization of the other who in the past had been defined as the antithesis to the self.

Although redefined identities are thus promulgated around the official negotiating table, the "negotiation" of identity is primarily an informal, unofficial process in which members of the conflicting parties explore and invent ways of accommodating their group identities to one another. The purpose of negotiation in this looser sense of the term is not to produce political agreements, but to develop joint understandings and formulations that can help pave the road to political agreements at the official level. Implicitly and explicitly, this kind of "negotiation" has been a central focus for problem-solving workshops between Israelis and Palestinians that my colleagues and I have conducted over the past quarter-century.

Problem-Solving Workshops

Problem-solving workshops are the central instrument of *interactive problem solving*, an unofficial, third-party approach to the resolution of international and intercommunal conflicts, derived from the pioneering work of John Burton (1969, 1979, 1984) and anchored in social-psychological principles (see Kelman, 1972, 1979, 1992, 1998a). A workshop is a specially constructed, private space in which politically involved and often politically influential (but generally unofficial) members of conflicting communities can interact in a nonbinding, confidential way. The microprocess of the workshop provides them the opportunity to penetrate each other's perspective; to explore both sides' needs, fears, priorities, and constraints; and to engage in joint thinking about solutions to the conflict that would be responsive to the fundamental concerns of both sides.

Let me describe a typical "one-time" workshop for Israeli and Palestinian participants. By "one-time" I mean that this particular group of Israelis and Palestinians convenes only for this one occasion. Some of the individuals may have participated in more than one such workshop, and the one-time workshops that we have held over the years have had a cumulative effect within the two societies. But, until 1990, we made no effort to reconvene the same *group* of participants for another occasion. The workshops take place under academic auspices and are facilitated by a panel of social scientists knowledgeable about international conflict, group process, and the Middle East. The workshops usually begin with two pre-workshop sessions, about four hours in length, during which the third party meets separately with each of the two parties. The workshop itself typically lasts about two and a half days, often scheduled over an extended weekend. The participants include three to six Israelis and an equal number of Palestinians, plus a third party of three or more members.

The Israeli and Palestinian participants have included parliamentarians, leaders and activists of political parties or political movements, journalists, editors, directors of think tanks, and politically involved academicians—that is, scholars who not only publish academic papers but who also write for newspapers and appear in the media, who serve as advisors to political leaders, and some of whom move back and forth between government and academia. Some of our participants have been former diplomats, officials, or military officers, and many were later to become negotiators, ambassadors, cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, and leading figures in the media and research organizations. We look for people who are within the mainstream of their societies and close to the center of the political spectrum. At the same time, they have to be people who are at least willing to explore the possibility of a negotiated solution and to sit down as equals with members of the other party.

The central ground rule of problem-solving workshops is the principle of privacy and confidentiality. In the early days of our work, confidentiality

was particularly important for the protection of our participants, because the mere fact that they were meeting with the enemy was controversial and exposed them to political and even physical risks. Confidentiality is equally important, however, for the protection of the process that we are trying to promote in workshops. We are trying to encourage the participants to talk and listen to each other, rather than focus on their constituencies, on third parties, or on the record. We want them to think out loud, to experiment with ideas, to explore different options, without having to worry about how others would react if their words in the group were quoted outside. We want them to engage in a type of interaction that is generally not feasible among parties engaged in a bitter conflict—a type of interaction that, indeed, deviates from the conflict norms that usually govern their behavior: an interaction that is analytic rather than polemical, one in which the parties seek to explore each other's perspective and gain insight into the causes and dynamics of the conflict; an interaction that is problem-solving rather than adversarial, one in which the parties sidestep the usual attempt to allocate blame and, instead, take the conflict as a shared problem that requires joint effort to find a mutually satisfactory solution.

The agenda of a problem-solving workshop is designed to allow this kind of interaction to unfold. The core agenda of a one-time workshop has four components. First, each side is asked to discuss its central concerns in the conflict—the fundamental needs that would have to be addressed and the existential fears that would have to be allayed if a solution is to be satisfactory to it. The parties are asked not to debate the issues raised, although they may ask for clarification of what the other says. The purpose is for each side to gain an adequate understanding of the other's needs, fears, and concerns, from the perspective of the other. Once they have demonstrated that they understand the other's needs to a significant degree, we move to the second phase of the agenda: joint thinking about possible solutions. What participants are asked to do in this phase is to develop, through an interactive process, ideas about the overall shape of a solution for the conflict as a whole, or perhaps, a particular issue in the conflict, that would address the needs and fears of both sides. They are given the difficult assignment of thinking of solutions that would meet not only their own side's needs, but the needs of both sides.

Once the participants have developed some common ground in this process of joint thinking, we turn to the third phase of the workshop: discussion of the political and psychological constraints within the two societies that would create barriers to carrying out the ideas for solution that have been developed in the group. We deliberately leave the discussion of constraints to the third phase, so that it does not hamper the creative process of jointly generating new ideas. Finally, depending on how much progress has been made and how much time is left, we ask the parties to engage in another round of joint thinking—this time about ways of overcoming the constraints that have been presented. The participants are asked to

come up with ideas about what their governments, their societies, and they themselves might do—separately or jointly—that would help to overcome the barriers to negotiating mutually satisfactory solutions to the conflict.

The third party in our model enacts a strictly facilitative role. It does not propose solutions, nor does it participate in the substantive discussions. Its task is to create the conditions that allow ideas for resolving the conflict to emerge out of the interaction between the parties themselves. The facilitation of the third party, however, is an important part of the process. The third party sets the ground rules and monitors adherence to them; it helps to keep the discussion moving in constructive directions, tries to stimulate movement, and intervenes as relevant with questions, observations, and even challenges. It also serves as a repository of trust for parties who, by definition, do not trust each other: They feel safe to come to the workshop because they trust the third party to maintain confidentiality and to protect their interests.

Workshops have a dual purpose: to produce *changes*, in the form of new insights and ideas, in the individual participants; and to *transfer* these changes into the political process at the levels of both public opinion and decision making. These two purposes may at times create contradictory requirements—most notably in the selection of participants (Kelman, 1992). To balance these contradictory requirements, we look for participants who are not officials, but politically influential. They are thus more free to engage in the process but, at the same time, because of their positions within their societies, any new ideas that they develop in the course of a workshop can have an impact on the thinking of decision makers and the society at large.

The Israeli-Palestinian workshops we carried out until 1990 were all one-time events designed to create a climate conducive to movement to the negotiating table. In 1990, we organized our first continuing workshop, in which a group of high-level Israelis and Palestinians met periodically over a three-year period (Rouhana & Kelman, 1994). In 1994, Nadim Rouhana and I convened a Joint Working Group on Israeli-Palestinian Relations, which is still in progress.[2] For the first time in our program, this group has been engaged in producing jointly authored concept papers on some of the final-status issues in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and on the future relationship between the two societies. One of three papers that the group has published so far—a paper on the problem of Palestinian refugees and the right of return (Alpher & Shikaki, et al., 1999)—provides the starting point for my detailed illustration of the negotiation of identity, to be presented in the next section.

Much of the discussion in our workshops, from the beginning and until this day, has focused, in effect, on a process of negotiating collective identities. In our experience, such a process can be productive only if it is based on mutual respect for the core of the other's identity and on the principle of reciprocity. Each side must know that the other does not seek to undermine

its group identity, and each must take care not to undermine the other's identity. And each must know that the risks it takes in acknowledging the other's claims, rights, and authenticity will be reciprocated by the other's acknowledgment of its claims, rights, and authenticity.

Starting from the understanding that neither side is prepared to negotiate the core of its identity—its peoplehood, its relationship to the land, the basic justice of its cause—or the general lines of its national narrative, there remain various elements of each group's identity that can be "negotiated" in the interest of mutual accommodation. Let me illustrate some of the possible changes in identity that can be and have been discussed in problem-solving workshops and similar encounters and that have, over time, begun to penetrate the Israeli and Palestinian political cultures.

1. Many members of both communities have become able to remove the negation of the other's identity as an integral part of their own identity. Though the other may still be seen as an obstacle to achieving one's own national goals, the other is not as often seen as the antithesis of one's own identity whose demise is a condition for one's own survival. Thus, many Israelis have come to accept the reality of Palestinian peoplehood, particularly after observing Palestinians' readiness to make sacrifices for their national cause during the *intifada* and Palestinians' celebration of the signing of the Oslo agreement in September 1993. Interestingly, Israelis saw parallels between these events and their own struggle for statehood and celebration at attaining it—a significant degree of identification with the other whose existence had previously been denied. Many Palestinians, on their part, now recognize the right of Israelis to their state, on the grounds that the state has existed for over half a century and that its dismantlement would create a new injustice to the generations that were born into it. Very few Palestinians, on the other hand, are prepared to acknowledge the historical links of Jews to the land, which might be seen as justification for the establishment of the Jewish state in the first place.

2. We have seen signs of softening of the exclusiveness of group identity, which allows for the recognition that—despite the validity of one's own claims—the other too has valid claims. The recognition of elements of identity shared with the other, such as a common identification with the land, opens the way to political solutions based on sharing territory and resources. In a recent workshop, for example, mainstream Israelis and Palestinians were able to agree—much to everyone's surprise, including their own—on a formula for sharing Jerusalem: a united city containing the capitals of both states. Public opinion polls on both sides also suggest greater willingness to share Jerusalem than had been widely assumed (Segal, 1999).

3. Workshop participants have experimented with disaggregating the monolithic nature of their identities, recognizing that there are different boundaries of group identity (such as ethnic boundaries, political boundaries, boundaries of sentimental attachment) that do not necessarily coincide. This recognition opens the way to the development of transcendent

identities, which might allow the two peoples to maintain a common attachment to the country while "owning" only part of that country as their political state. The concept of a "united country with divided sovereignties" was discussed in one of our workshops in the early 1980s. In a more recent workshop, the idea of establishing different kinds of boundaries was explored in the attempt to find solutions to the problem of Israeli settlements in the areas in which Palestinians hope to establish their state.

4. Workshop discussions can help to identify outdated elements of group identity, which refer to maximalist goals and dreams of glory or self-aggrandizing images that have no current political relevance but poison the climate for conflict resolution. Examples here might be Palestinian references to the armed struggle as the way to eliminate the Zionist entity, or Israeli references to the Zionist project of making the desert bloom. Workshops have often sensitized participants to words and images that humiliate and frighten the other and could be discarded with minimal cost to group identity.

5. In the course of workshop discussions, participants may decide to reorder the priorities within their national identities, such that certain elements (e.g., territorial ambitions), which may not have been given up but have become too costly to pursue, are relegated to low priority and thus become available for negotiated compromise. Thus, over time, Palestinians (in our workshops and in the larger society) decided to give priority to ending occupation and establishing a Palestinian state over recovering the lost land in its entirety. Israelis gave priority to maintaining the Jewish character of Israel over controlling the whole of the land.

6. Finally, workshop participants may "negotiate" changes in national narratives that accommodate the other's view of history as much as possible, such as accepting a share of the responsibility for the course of the conflict. The above-mentioned concept paper of our current Joint Working Group on Israeli-Palestinian Relations on "The Palestinian refugee problem and the right of return" (Alpher & Shikaki, et al., 1999) provides a good illustration of such an effort to negotiate identity. I shall conclude this chapter with a more detailed discussion of this concept paper, trying to show what made it possible to achieve common ground in this effort, what still remains to be done, and possible directions for achieving further progress.

The Problem of Palestinian Refugees

From the point of view of the struggle over national identity, the problem of Palestinian refugees is probably the most important and the most difficult issue to resolve in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It may ultimately be more important and more difficult than the issue of Jerusalem, because it bears directly on the contrasting views of the justice or injustice of the establishment of Israel presented by the two national narratives.

The problem of Palestinian refugees goes back to the 1948 war that followed the declaration of an independent State of Israel. In the course of that war, somewhere between 600,000 and 760,000 Palestinian Arabs—about half of the Arab population of mandatory Palestine—were displaced from their homes in what became the State of Israel (Morris, 1987, pp. 297–298). They were turned into refugees and most of them and/or their descendants remain refugees to this day. The precise number of Palestinian refugees today is in dispute. The figure given by UNRWA—the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which is charged with the welfare of Palestinian refugees—is almost three and a half million (as of January 1998). This number includes Palestinians who registered as refugees with UNRWA after losing their homes in 1948, as well as their descendants. The majority of this population lives in refugee camps in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (some 350,000) and Syria (some 300,000) by and large remain stateless, as do many Palestinians living elsewhere in the Arab world.

Palestinians and Israelis have differed sharply in their account of the Palestinian exodus in 1948. According to the Palestinian narrative, "the Arab refugees were forcibly expelled by Jewish forces or left in a panic flight to escape massacre and . . . they were helped on their way by occasional massacres, committed by Jewish forces to keep them running" (Alpher & Shikaki, et al., 1999, p. 173). According to some Israeli accounts, the Arab population was urged by its own leaders to leave their homes in anticipation of an early return after the defeat of the Jewish forces by the Arab armies. The more recent writings of Israeli "revisionist historians" (e.g., Morris, 1987) support the claim that there were indeed some systematic efforts by Jewish forces to expel the Arab population at various times and places. No doubt, a combination of circumstances created refugees in a war that was fought in the midst of the country's towns and villages.

How the refugee problem is ultimately resolved raises major practical and symbolic issues for both sides that reach to the core of their respective identities. By *practical* issues, I refer to those relating to the *implementation* of any agreement on the refugees—that is, to the concrete steps that will be taken to deal with the plight of the current refugee population. By *symbolic* issues, I refer to those relating to the *principle* of the right of return of the refugees to their original homes.

At the practical level, Palestinians are concerned with normalizing the status of the refugees to the satisfaction of the individual Palestinians involved and of the entire Palestinian community. Normalization of the status of individual refugees could take any one or combination of the following forms: return to Israel (perhaps their original homes, where that is still feasible), return to the Palestinian state, financial compensation, resettlement in a country outside of Palestine, integration with citizenship in the state in which they are now living, or Palestinian citizenship and permanent status in the state in which they are now living. The options offered to the

refugees must be such as to satisfy the entire Palestinian community that the final peace agreement was not achieved at the expense of any part of that community.

At the symbolic level, Palestinians are asking for an Israeli acknowledgment of the right of return as a matter of principle, even if they are prepared to compromise on the implementation of that right. From the Palestinian perspective, Israeli acknowledgment of the right of return presupposes admission of direct moral responsibility for the plight of the refugees. Such an acknowledgment and admission would confirm the Palestinian narrative about the consequences for the Palestinian people of the Zionist enterprise, of Jewish settlement in Palestine, and of the establishment of Israel. In confirming the Palestinian narrative, such an acknowledgment would also recognize the Palestinian national rights that are anchored in this narrative. There seem to be two interrelated, but separable, reasons for Palestinians' emphasis on this symbolic issue. Psychologically, they need an Israeli acknowledgment that Palestinians have a right to return to the homes from which they were wrongfully displaced, in order to satisfy their sense of justice and be able to let go of the conflict. Politically, they need this acknowledgment to support the validity of their claims (such as claims for compensation) in the bargaining that lies ahead.

For Israelis, too, major practical and symbolic issues are at stake in the resolution of the refugee problem. At the practical level, Israelis are primarily concerned with the impact of a return of Palestinians in large numbers to Israel proper (i.e., to Israel within its pre-1967 borders). A large-scale return of refugees (beyond a symbolic number of up to 100,000) would be disruptive to the society because it would raise many divisive questions about the ownership of homes, villages, and other properties that have changed hands or been destroyed after the 1948 events. To what precise destination would refugees return whose former houses are now inhabited by Jewish families or whose homes or villages no longer exist? Furthermore, and most centrally, Israelis are concerned about the impact of a large-scale return of Palestinians to Israel on the demographic balance and the Jewish character of the state. In short, they see a large-scale return of refugees to Israel proper as creating an existential threat to Israel by undermining the Jewish majority and the viability and stability of the state. There is also concern among Israelis about a mass return of refugees to the future Palestinian state because of the impact on the stability and economy of that state, but this concern is shared by the Palestinians themselves, who are at least as mindful as Israelis about the absorptive capacity of the Palestinian state.

At the symbolic level, Israelis have serious concerns about acknowledging the principle of a Palestinian right of return, even if Palestinians agree that this right will not be implemented through a large-scale return of refugees to Israel proper. Acknowledgment of that principle is particularly troubling, from the Israeli perspective, if it entails admission of moral re-

sponsibility for the plight of the refugees. Such an acknowledgment and admission would undermine the Israeli narrative about the rightful return of the Jewish people to its ancestral homeland, the establishment of the State of Israel, the Arab rejection of partition and attack on the new state, and the resulting refugee problem. Again, there seem to be two reasons for Israelis' stance on this symbolic issue and, in particular, for their reluctance to accept direct moral responsibility for the plight of the refugees. Psychologically, they are not willing to accept a national self-image that negates the righteousness of their cause and implies that Israel was "born in sin." Politically, they are concerned that accepting the principle of the right of return and moral responsibility for the refugee problem would keep the issue open, even after a peace agreement has been signed, and make Israel vulnerable to future claims.

Our Joint Working Group on Israeli-Palestinian Relations discussed, in considerable detail, the divergent narratives of the two communities; the fundamental needs, fears, and concerns of each community that would have to be addressed if a solution of the problem of Palestinian refugees is to be acceptable to each; and the general principles that must underlie such a solution. The joint concept paper that finally emerged from the group's discussion (Alpher & Shikaki, et al., 1999) starts with a review of the two narratives, of the basic needs of each side, and of the principles that must govern a solution. It then proceeds to present four possible solutions to the refugee/right of return issue. Solutions 1 and 2 reflect the traditional positions—conceivably, the opening negotiating positions—of the Palestinian and Israeli sides, respectively. Solutions 3 and 4 are compromise solutions, from a Palestinian and an Israeli standpoint, respectively. These two solutions represent serious efforts, on the part of each side—based on intensive discussions within the group—to come up with a compromise that would accommodate the concerns of the other side without jeopardizing its own vital interests. The paper discusses the advantages and disadvantages of each solution, highlights the areas of agreement between solutions 3 and 4 as well as the remaining gaps between the two sides, and points to possible ways in which these gaps might be bridged.

Solutions 3 and 4 represent a considerable narrowing of the gap between the two sides when compared to the opening positions of solutions 1 and 2. Still, there remains a significant gap between the two positions, particularly with respect to the symbolic issues that divide the two sides. Solution 3 calls for an Israeli acknowledgment of the moral right of Palestinians to return to their homes based on Israel's acceptance of responsibility for creating the refugee problem (although it recognizes that the actual exercise of the right of return would be limited). Solution 4, the Israeli compromise proposal, acknowledges that Israel shares practical (but not moral) responsibility for the plight of the refugees, and accepts the right of return to the Palestinian state, but not to Israel proper (although it agrees to the return of a limited number of refugees to Israel).

The third party tried very hard to encourage the participants to bridge the remaining gaps between solutions 3 and 4 and try to come up with a joint solution 5—a compromise of the compromises, as it were. We did not succeed in this effort, however. In part, further movement toward a joint position on the symbolic issues was blocked by the great difficulty of the assignment. We were dealing here with issues that reached to the core of each group's identity and associated narrative. For Israelis to acknowledge anything more than shared practical responsibility for the refugee problem and for Palestinians to accept anything less than an Israeli acknowledgment of moral responsibility would undermine their respective narratives, and most members of the group were not prepared to go that far. Furthermore, at least some of the participants may have preferred to leave the final bridging of the gap between the two sides to the official negotiators. Since that final bridging would inevitably entail large concessions on one or both sides, they may have felt that it could best be done in the context of an overall agreement, where concessions on the refugee issue could be made with appropriate trade-offs on other issues.

Even though the Joint Working Group did not come up with a joint solution to the refugee problem, the concept paper that it produced represents a significant contribution to the final negotiation of this issue. The publication of the paper is in itself significant, in that it is the joint product of a group of politically mainstream and influential Israelis and Palestinians, who worked on it over the course of two years and agreed to make it public. It is also significant that the Israeli and Palestinian authors of the paper explicitly premise their discussion on the assumption of a two-state solution, advocating the establishment of a viable, independent Palestinian state. In the paper, each group recognizes the other's narrative, without abandoning its own. The different options for resolving the refugee problem are evaluated in terms of their success in addressing the fundamental needs and fears of each side. What emerged from this effort is a considerable narrowing of the gap between the two sides, even though the paper does not entirely bridge that gap. Solutions 3 and 4 represent substantial movement from the initial positions reflected in solutions 1 and 2—movement based on each side's sincere attempt to accommodate the basic concerns of the other.

With respect to the practical issues—that is, the actual implementation of the right of return—the gap between the two sides was substantially narrowed in the Working Group's paper. "Solutions 3 and 4 concur that, at the practical level, the core of the solution involves four components: a 'return,' however defined, of a limited number of refugees to Israel proper; return of a larger number to the Palestinian state; permanent absorption in host countries (notably Jordan); and compensation. Both sides agree that a successfully negotiated solution should close the file on the refugee issue" (Alpher & Shikaki, et al., 1999, p. 184). The two solutions disagree about some important details. For example, the Israelis frame the limited return of refugees to Israel proper as part of a program of family reunification,

whereas the Palestinians frame it as part of the exercise of the right of return. With regard to compensation, solution 3 calls for both collective and individual compensation for the refugees' losses, whereas solution 4 calls for collective compensation only. Furthermore, solution 4 stipulates a similar mechanism of collective compensation for Jewish refugees from Arab countries (albeit without an operational link to the compensation of Palestinian refugees), whereas solution 3 eschews any such linkage. These differences clearly require further negotiation. But what is important is that the two solutions agree on the crucial practical issues of implementing the right of return: Palestinians concede that there will be no large-scale return of refugees to Israel proper; and Israelis accept the refugees' right of return to the Palestinian state, agreeing to leave it up to Palestinian authorities to control the inflow of refugees in accord with the state's absorptive capacity.

With respect to the symbolic issues—those relating to the principle of the right of return—the concept paper represents significant movement toward a mutually acceptable formulation, although there is still a wide gap between the two positions. Solution 4, the Israeli compromise statement, acknowledges that Israel "shares practical (but not moral) responsibility, together with the other parties to the process that culminated in the 1948 war, for the plight and suffering of the refugees, and that rectification of that plight by all parties is a central goal of the Arab-Israeli peace process" (Alpher & Shikaki, et al., 1999, p. 181). This statement comes closer than past statements by mainstream Israelis to acknowledging the suffering of the Palestinian refugees and accepting a share of the responsibility for it, and thus beginning to address the Palestinians' sense of justice. The movement reflected in this statement was generated by an intensive process of negotiating identity within the Working Group. Though it represents significant movement, this acknowledgment is not sufficient to meet the Palestinians' call for full Israeli acknowledgment of the *principle* of the right of return, based on acceptance of direct *moral* responsibility for the plight of the refugees. Solutions 3 and 4, thus, still remain far apart at the symbolic level. This remaining gap is understandable in that the two solutions, though they represent serious efforts at compromise, have their point of departure in two sharply clashing national narratives. The question is whether it might be possible to bridge that remaining gap through a further process of negotiating identity.

Closing the gap at the symbolic level is clearly difficult because of the sharp clash in national narratives that gives rise to it. Neither party can be expected to give up the core of its narrative in the course of the current negotiations; it is likely to take several generations before such changes can occur. But it *is* possible, as part of the process of negotiation and reconciliation, for the parties to make changes in how they formulate their narratives, where they place their emphasis, how they present the other within their own narratives, and what they require by way of acknowledgment or validation of their narratives. Such changes at the edges of the narratives can po-

tentially be "negotiated," in the sense of being explored and jointly formulated by the parties in a spirit of mutual accommodation.

Thus, in the case of the right of return, we can assume that Palestinians will not abandon their conviction that they have a moral right to return to the homes from which they feel they were wrongfully displaced by the Israelis, and that Israelis will not admit guilt for the plight of the refugees. The question is whether it is possible to jointly formulate an Israeli acknowledgment that would be substantially responsive to what Palestinians need to hear about the right of return without requiring either side to abandon these core elements of their narratives. In the terms of my summary, toward the beginning of this section, of the symbolic issues that the refugee problem raises for the two sides, the question would be: Can the parties formulate an Israeli acknowledgment that would provide significant (though probably not total) satisfaction of Palestinians' sense of justice and validation of their claims for restitution, without requiring Israelis to negate the righteousness of their cause and making them vulnerable to future claims?

Let me offer three possible approaches to answering this question, which can be seen as three steps in the negotiation of identity that might further narrow the gap between the two sides manifested in solutions 3 and 4.

First, it may be possible to *redefine the conception of responsibility* in a way that would not imply guilt and thus be acceptable to the Israeli public, and yet be viewed by Palestinians as confirming their narrative, validating their claims, and satisfying their sense of justice. One possibility here is for Israel to accept a degree of causal responsibility without necessarily accepting guilt. An Israeli acknowledgment might, for example, describe the refugee problem as a tragic and unjust outcome of a historical process that arose with the establishment of the State of Israel. It might go on to say that, while there are disagreements about the precise historical events and the distribution of blame, Israel acknowledges that it was an active participant in this historical process and, indeed, a beneficiary of it, and thus bears part of the responsibility for these events. The statement might conclude with an offer of compensation as an expression of that responsibility. A statement of this kind clearly implies causal responsibility without explicitly acknowledging guilt. It thus has the potential, if properly fine tuned, of an acknowledgment consistent with both the Palestinian and the Israeli narratives.

Second, it may be possible to *find a mutually acceptable moral basis for the right of return*, which satisfies Palestinians' need for an Israeli acknowledgment of the right of return as a moral principle without linking that moral right to the refugees' original homes in Israel. One approach here would be to anchor the moral basis for the right of return in return to Palestine: Israelis might acknowledge the Palestinians' *moral* right to return to *Palestine*, based on the proposition that both peoples have legitimate claims to the land and that sharing the land (by establishing two states within it) is, therefore, a just solution to the conflict. Although the two sides differ in

their views of the justice and injustice of the events of 1948, the two-state solution allows them to develop a shared view of justice for the future. Israeli acknowledgment of the refugees' moral right to return to Palestine, while not fully addressing Palestinians' sense of justice, would do so to a significant degree. It would also strengthen the validity of Palestinian claims by confirming (in a context of reciprocity) Palestinian national identity and rootedness in the land. For Israelis, anchoring the moral basis for the refugees' right of return in return to Palestine, rather than to their original homes, would greatly reduce their concerns about future claims, even though it may not entirely eliminate them.

Third, in conjunction with the two approaches just discussed and possible other approaches to narrowing the gap between the two sides at the symbolic level, it may be possible for each side to find ways to *affirm the identity of the other.* Such affirmations, perhaps in the form of acknowledgments that the other has integral links to the land and national rights, could compensate each side for the concessions they make to resolve the refugee issue: the Israelis for the risks they take in accepting causal responsibility for the plight of the refugees, and the Palestinians for accepting something less than the right of the refugees to return to their original homes. Affirmation of the other's identity can take place only in the context of a process of negotiating identity, based on the principle of reciprocity, in which each side learns to uncouple negation of the other from affirmation of the self. Each can affirm the other's identity to the extent that it feels assured that it is not thereby jeopardizing its own identity and its own claims.

The three approaches to narrowing the remaining gap between the Israeli and Palestinian positions in our Working Group's paper on the problem of refugees all represent efforts to negotiate identity. As such, they search for ways whereby each group can accommodate the narrative of the other without undermining its own narrative. In such a process, each group is encouraged to affirm or protect the identity of the other if, in turn, its own identity is protected or affirmed. Each may be willing to grant something more to the other than it was originally prepared to offer, or receive something less from the other than it originally demanded, in return for a substantial concession by the other at the symbolic level.

Conclusion

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as in other protracted ethnic conflicts, the ever-present disputes over territory, resources, and political control are exacerbated by perceived threats to national identity and national existence that underlie the actions and reactions of the opposing communities. Threats to identity and existence create obstacles to the settlement of conflicts, even when both parties have concluded that a compromise agreement is in their best interest. Moreover, even when specific issues in conflict are

settled and political agreements signed—often with the mediation of powerful third parties—these agreements may not lead to stable peace, fruitful cooperation, and ultimate reconciliation between the two parties, unless they have formed a new relationship based on mutual respect for their national identities.

The experience of my colleagues and myself in problem-solving workshops on the conflicts in Israel/Palestine, Cyprus, Sri Lanka, and Northern Ireland, and experiences with similar efforts in other parts of the world, support the central argument of this chapter about the role of national identity in intercommunal conflict and conflict resolution. A central feature of such deep-rooted, protracted conflicts is the struggle over national identity between the two parties, which leads them to perceive their conflict in zero-sum terms, not only with respect to territory and resources, but also with respect to national identity and national existence. Long-term resolution of such conflicts and reconciliation between the former enemies requires changes in the groups' national identities; in particular, they require a redefinition of each group's identity so that affirmation of its own identity is no longer predicated on negation of the identity of the other. Such identity changes are possible, provided they leave the core of each group's identity and national narrative—its sense of peoplehood, its attachment to the land, its commitment to the national language, culture, and way of life—intact. Furthermore, such changes must and can be "negotiated" between the two groups. It is possible for the groups to accommodate their national identities and the surrounding narratives to one another, as long as each respects and acknowledges the other's peoplehood and thus reassures the other that the core of its identity will not be jeopardized by changes in the periphery. Although some negotiation of identity takes place around the negotiating table, it is primarily a process that must engage the entire body politic on each side, at all levels and through different media. Problem-solving workshops provide a specially constructed arena for engaging in this process and jointly developing new insights and formulations that can be injected into the public debate and can penetrate the political culture on both sides.

A central lesson from our experience is that national identity, though very much part of the problem in ethnic conflicts, can also become part of the solution. The way we talk about our identity affects the way we think about it and ultimately the way we act on it. In groups that are caught up in protracted conflict, identity depends on the conflict and is shaped by the conflict: Many elements of identity are constructed as vehicles for pursuing the conflict. It should be possible, within limits, to reconstruct these elements as vehicles for peace and reconciliation. What is needed is an investment of identity in conflict resolution and in a new relationship with the former enemy. Development of such a new, transcendent identity confronts many obstacles. It cannot bypass the political process of negotiating a mutually acceptable agreement, nor can it be allowed to threaten or undermine

the particularistic identity of each group. But within these constraints, the potential for reconstructing the national identities of former enemies in the service of peace and reconciliation exists and needs to be nurtured.

Notes

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