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Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts

Daniel Bar-Tal
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The article presents a conceptual framework that concerns the sociopsychological foundation and dynamics of intractable conflict. First, it defines and characterizes the nature of intractable conflict, and then it describes how societies involved in this reality adapt to the conditions of intractable conflict. This adaptation meets three fundamental challenges: satisfying the needs of the society members, coping with stress, and withstanding the rival. In trying to confront them successfully, societies develop appropriate sociopsychological infrastructure, which includes collective memory, ethos of conflict, and collective emotional orientations. This infrastructure fulfills important individual and collective level functions, including the important role of formation, maintenance, and strengthening of a social identity that reflects this conflict. Special attempts are made to disseminate this infrastructure via societal channels of communication and institutionalize it. The evolved sociopsychological infrastructure becomes a prism through which society members construe their reality, collect new information, interpret their experiences, and make decisions about their course of action. This infrastructure becomes hegemonic, rigid, and resistant to change as long as the intractable conflict continues. It ends up serving as a major factor fueling the continuation of the conflict, thus becoming part of a vicious cycle of intractable conflict.

Keywords: sociopsychological dynamics; collective memory; ethos of conflict; collective emotion; social identity

The intractable conflicts in Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Kashmir, and the Middle East are examples of severe violent confrontations that threaten the well-being of the peoples involved and the international community. These conflicts are over real issues such as territories, natural resources, self-determination, statehood, religious dogmas, and/or basic values, and it is these real issues that have to be addressed in conflict resolution. But, the fact that they are accompanied by intense sociopsychological dynamics makes it especially difficult to resolve them.

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The present contribution attempts to outline a new conceptual framework that may illuminate the psyche of the society members involved in intractable conflicts. The conception suggests that the societal psychological (i.e., sociopsychological) infrastructure that evolves during an intractable conflict plays a determinative role in its development, continuation, and later in its resolution and reconciliation. The assumption of the conception is that although each intractable conflict has its unique context, contents, and characteristics, the general sociopsychological principles and dynamics are similar. Thus, the conception enables us to unveil the nature and contents of the sociopsychological infrastructure, outline the factors affecting its formation, and demonstrate how it is maintained and functions in different conflicts.[1] This will also facilitate comprehending the nature of the needed psychological changes that facilitate the long process of peace making. The present article will not describe a particular case, but will focus on the general presentation of the conception, which can be applied to an analysis of any intractable conflict.[2]

The article first defines and characterizes the nature of intractable conflict and describes the challenges it poses to a society that has to adapt to its conditions. Then, it presents the sociopsychological infrastructure that evolves in times of intractable conflict and that includes collective memory, ethos of conflict, and collective emotional orientations. In the third part, the article outlines six functions that the sociopsychological infrastructure fulfills for a society and later focuses on its contribution to the reshaping of social identity of society members. Then, the article describes the institutionalization of the sociopsychological infrastructure in societies and elaborates on its consequences both for societal members as individuals and for the society as a whole. Finally, the article draws some conclusions from the conceptual framework that was presented.

Intractable Conflicts

Conflicts between societies or nations, which erupt when their goals, intentions, and/or actions are perceived as mutually incompatible (Bar-Tal, Kruglanski, & Klar, 1989; Mitchell, 1981; Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994), cannot be viewed as a unitary phenomenon. There are different types of conflicts, which are classified in different ways, and one of the more meaningful classifications focuses on their severity and longevity. This type of long-lasting, severe conflict has serious implications for the involved societies and the world community; therefore, understanding its dynamics is a special challenge for social scientists (see, for example, Azar, 1990; Coleman, 2003; Goertz & Diehl, 1993; Mitchell, 1981; Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003).

The present conception elaborates the characteristics of severe conflicts on the basis of Kriesberg's work. Kriesberg (1993, 1998) suggested elaborated criteria for classifying conflicts on the intractable-tractable dimension.[3]

Characterization of Intractable Conflicts

Kriesberg (1998) suggested that the following four necessary features characterize intractable conflicts. I shall outline them and describe some of their implications.

Protracted

Intractable conflicts persist for a long time, at least a generation, which means that at least one generation did not know another reality. Their long duration implies that the parties in conflict have had many confrontational experiences, and, as a result, they have accumulated animosity and hostility. Moreover, the duration of the intractable conflict forces society members to adapt their lives to face the continuously stressful situation.

Violent

Intractable conflicts involve physical violence in which society members (soldiers and civilians) are killed and wounded in either wars, small-scale military engagements, or terrorist attacks. Such violence occurs over time, with fluctuating frequency and intensity. The consequences of physical violence, especially the loss of life, have an immense emotional impact on all society members. They perceive the violence as intentionally inflicted by the opposing party; as unjustified, sudden, untimely; and especially as violating the sanctity of life. In addition, the consequences of violence are considered a problem of a society and hence the society takes the responsibility to treat and compensate victims, to prevent the reoccurrence of physical violence, and to avenge the human losses.

Perceived as Irresolvable

Society members involved in intractable conflict do not perceive a possibility of resolving the conflict peacefully. Because neither side can win, both sides expect the conflict to continue and involve violent confrontations. They take all the necessary steps to prepare themselves for a long conflict, and this requires major adjustments on the part of the societies involved.

Demand Extensive Investment

Parties engaged in an intractable conflict make vast material (i.e., military, technological, and economic) and psychological investments to cope successfully with the situation.

In addition to the four features proposed by Kriesberg (1993, 1998), Bar-Tal (1998a) proposed three necessary characteristics that further elaborate the nature of intractable conflicts. They are listed below.

Total

Intractable conflicts are existential from the point of view of the participating parties. They are perceived as being about essential and basic goals, needs, and/or values that are regarded as indispensable for the society's existence and/or survival. In addition, they are often of a multifaceted nature, involving various spheres such as territory, self-determination, statehood, economy, religion, or culture.

Perceived as Zero Sum in Nature

Intractable conflicts are all-out conflicts, without compromises and with adherence to all the original goals. Each side focuses only on its own needs and adheres to all the goals, perceiving them as essential for its survival and therefore neither side can consider compromise and/or concessions. In addition, parties engaged in intractable conflict perceive any loss suffered by the other side as their own gain, and conversely, any gains of the other side as their own losses.

Central

Intractable conflicts occupy a central place in the lives of the individual society members and the society as a whole. Members of the society are involved constantly and continuously with the conflict. It means that thoughts related to the conflict are easily accessible and are relevant to many decisions that society members make for both personal and collective purposes. The centrality of the intractable conflict is further reflected in its high salience on the public agenda. The media, leadership, and other societal institutions are greatly and continuously preoccupied with the intractable conflict.

Summary

In sum, some of the above described essential features of intractable conflict are purely psychological such as viewing it as being existential, irresolvable, and of zero sum nature. Other features are more tangible and observable. All of the features may evolve with time and each of them has its own pace of development. Once all of them appear, the state of intractability begins, in which each characteristic adds to this chronic reality. But only when all the seven features emerge in their extreme form, the intractable conflicts appear in their most extreme nature. In reality, intractable conflicts differ in terms of the intensity with which each of the seven features occurs. Moreover, intractable conflicts fluctuate, as they may deescalate and then escalate again. Thus, the seven features change in intensity over time.

The parties involved in intractable conflict cannot win and do not perceive a possibility of resolving it peacefully but continue the confrontation for many decades

until intractability eventually is overturned; that is, either one side wins or both sides decide to resolve it peacefully. Of crucial importance for the continuation of intractable conflict and lack of its peaceful resolution are the shared beliefs of the rival societies' members that they have the human and material resources to continue the conflict and that time is on their side. This means to them that they can improve their situation with time and may even win the conflict.

Challenges of Intractable Conflicts

The described characteristics of intractable conflicts clearly imply that these conflicts inflict severe negative experiences such as threat, stress, pain, exhaustion, grief, traumas, misery, hardship, and cost, both human and material terms (see, for example, Cairns, 1996; de Jong, 2002; Robben & Suarez, 2000). Also, during intractable conflicts, collective life is marked by continuous confrontation that requires mobilization and sacrifice of the society members. This situation is chronic, as it persists for a long time. Thus, members must adapt to the conditions in both their individual and collective lives (see, for example, Hobfoll & deVries, 1995; Shalev, Yehuda, & McFarlane, 2000). I would like to suggest that from a psychological perspective, this adaptation requires meeting three basic challenges.

First, it is necessary to satisfy needs that remain deprived during intractable conflicts, such as, for example, psychological needs of knowing, mastery, safety, positive identity, and so on (Burton, 1990; Staub, 2003; Tajfel, 1982). If people are to function properly as individuals and society members, their needs must be fulfilled (Maslow, 1954).

Second, it is necessary to learn to cope with the stress, fears, and other negative psychological phenomena that accompany intractable conflict situations. Societies involved in intractable conflicts are required to live for extended periods of time under difficult conditions of violence, human loss, threat and danger, demands for resources, and other hardships. These conditions are likely to cause stress. Therefore, one of the challenges that societies involved in intractable conflict face is the development of appropriate mechanisms, on both the individual and collective levels, for coping with these difficult conditions of stress.

Third, adaptation requires development of psychological conditions that will be conducive to successfully withstanding the rival group—that is, to attempts to win the conflict or, at least, not to lose it. Successful withstanding enables groups to maintain intense conflict with an opponent over time, with all the concomitant challenges and adjustments, on a personal and societal level, that this entails. For these purposes, they need to develop a system of psychological conditions such as loyalty to a society and country, high motivation to contribute, persistence, readiness for personal sacrifice, unity, solidarity, adherence to the society's goals, determination, courage, and endurance.

To meet the above challenges, societies in conflict develop a sociopsychological repertoire that includes shared beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and emotions and that eventually turns into a sociopsychological infrastructure.[4] As this sociopsychological infrastructure plays a determinative role in intractable conflict, I will now describe and analyze it at length, especially referring to its functional roles in meeting the challenges I just presented.

Sociopsychological Infrastructure

A basic premise of the present article is that the central sociopsychological infrastructure in intractable conflict consists of three elements: collective memories, ethos of conflict, and collective emotional orientation, which are in mutual interrelations. In this cognitive-affective repertoire, societal beliefs are the basic components of collective memories and an ethos of conflict.[5] Thus, before presenting each of the elements of the sociopsychological infrastructure, I shall describe first societal beliefs.

Societal beliefs are cognitions shared by society members on topics and issues that are of special concern for their society and contribute to their sense of uniqueness (Bar-Tal, 2000a). The contents of societal beliefs refer to characteristics, structures, and processes occurring in the society and cover different domains of societal life. They are organized in thematic clusters and each theme may contain a number of societal beliefs. Themes may, for instance, pertain to a security issue, a view of an out-group, or equality in a society. Societal beliefs feature often on the public agenda, are discussed by society members, serve as relevant references in decisions made by the leaders, and influence chosen courses of action. Societal institutions actively impart societal beliefs to society members and encourage their acquisition. They provide a basis for common understanding of reality, good communication, interdependence, and the coordination of social activities, all of which are necessary for the functioning of the social system. In addition, societal beliefs underlie the development of the collective emotional orientation of a society (Bar-Tal, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1994). They are the shared beliefs that evoke emotions; they define the cues for the interpretation and evaluation of information, which in turn evoke the emotions; and they define legitimate ways of expression for these emotions (e. g., Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

In fact societal beliefs constitute the perceived common element in the reality of the society members. Some of these societal beliefs provide the collective narrative of the society[6]: Indeed, this is what the societal beliefs of collective memory and ethos of conflict do (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006). It is recognized that not all society members in conflict share consensual repertoire of societal beliefs related to conflict. But at the climax of intractable conflict, these societal beliefs are often shared by the great majority of society members, though the extent of sharing may alter with

changes in the nature of the conflict.[7] Without extensive sharing of societal beliefs of collective memory and ethos of conflict, a society involved in intractable conflict has great difficulty meeting the challenges of the conflict. The present conception describes the sociopsychological dynamics of a prototypical society involved in intractable conflict in which a widely shared sociopsychological repertoire about the conflict evolves. This repertoire, which is eventually institutionalized and disseminated, becomes a sociopsychological infrastructure that serves as a prism through which the society members collect information and interpret new experiences. Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual framework, which will be further elaborated below.
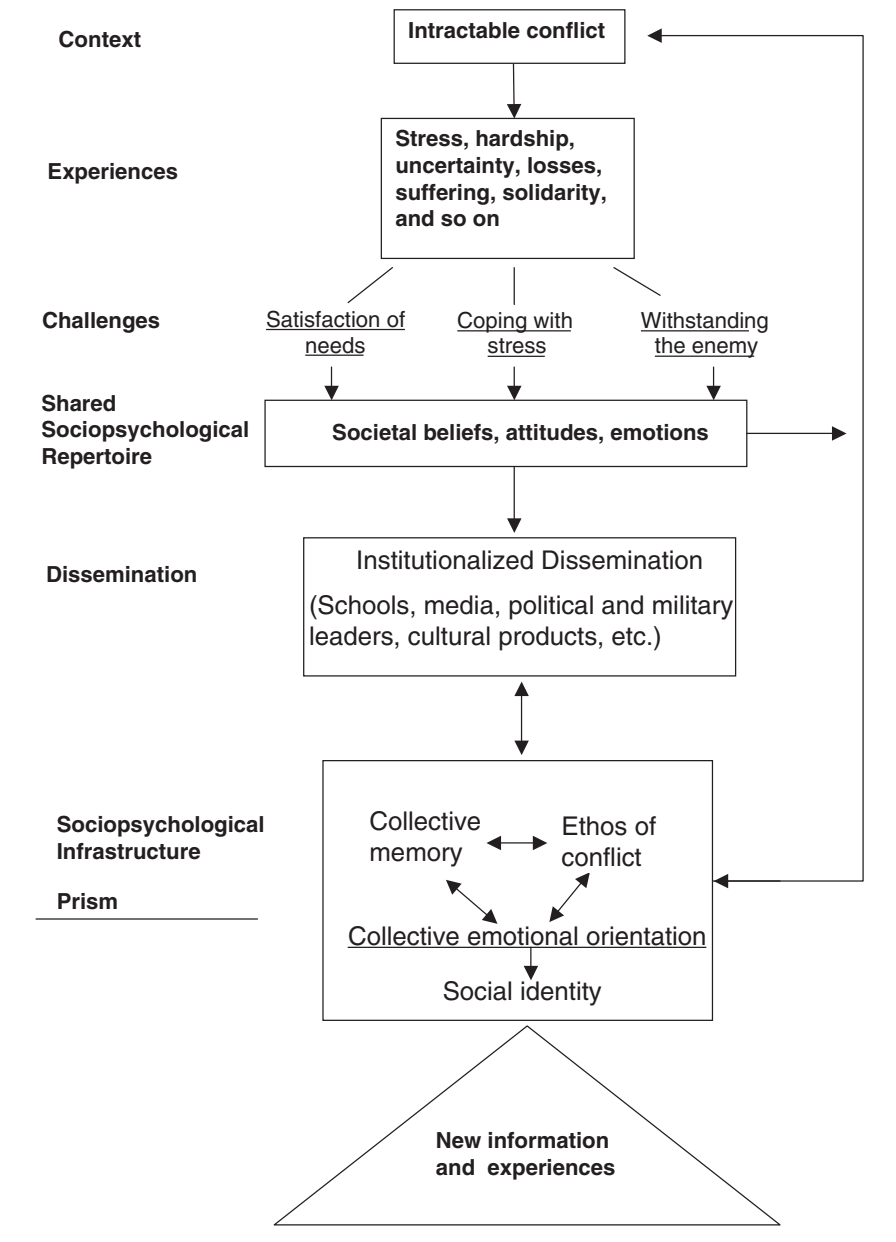
Collective Memory

Societal beliefs of collective memory, in the case of intractable conflict, evolve to present the history of the conflict to society members (Cairns & Roe, 2003; Connerton, 1989; Halbwachs, 1992; Wertsch, 2002). This narrative develops over time, and the societal beliefs describe the conflict's beginning and its course, providing a coherent and meaningful picture (Devine-Wright, 2003). Such beliefs have a number of characteristics: First, they do not intend to provide an objective history of the past, but tell about the past as it is functional to the society's present existence, especially given its confrontation with the rival society. Thus, they create a socially constructed narrative that has some basis in actual events but is biased, selective, and distorted in ways that meet the society's present needs. They omit certain facts, add doubtful ones, change the accounts of events and offer a purposive interpretation of the events that took place. Second, societal beliefs of collective memory are shared by society members and are treated by many of them as truthful accounts of the past and a valid history of the society. Often, in societies engaged in intractable conflict, members' shared collective memory (i.e., public memory) corresponds to the narrative relayed by the society's governmental institutions (i.e., official memory). This narrative may even dominate school textbooks, being presented as the history of the society.

It follows that opposing groups in a conflict will often entertain contradictory and selective historical collective memories of the same events. By selectively including or excluding certain historical events and processes from the collective memory, a society characterizes itself and its historical experiences that count in unique and exclusive ways (Baumeister & Gastings, 1997; Irwin-Zarecka, 1994; Salomon, 2004). In short, the narrative of collective memories relating to an intractable conflict provides a black and white picture, which enables parsimonious, fast, unequivocal, and simple understanding of the history of the conflict.

In terms of particular contents, the societal beliefs of collective memory touch on at least four important themes in terms of the perception of the conflict and its management. First, they justify the outbreak of the conflict and the course of its development. Second, the societal beliefs of collective memory of intractable conflict present a positive image of the in-group (e.g., Baumeister & Gastings, 1997). Third,

Figure 1
Conceptual Model of the Psychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts

Context	**Intractable conflict**
Experiences	**Stress, hardship, uncertainty, losses, suffering, solidarity, and so on**
Challenges	Satisfaction of needs Coping with stress Withstanding the enemy
Shared Sociopsychological Repertoire	**Societal beliefs, attitudes, emotions**
Dissemination	Institutionalized Dissemination (Schools, media, political and military leaders, cultural products, etc.)
Sociopsychological Infrastructure **Prism**	Collective memory Ethos of conflict Collective emotional orientation Social identity
	New information and experiences

the societal beliefs of collective memory delegitimize the opponent (Bar-Tal, 1990; Frank, 1967). Fourth, the beliefs of collective memory present one's own society as the victim of the opponent (Bar-Tal, 2003). This view is formed over a long period of violence as a result of the society's sufferings and losses and even sometimes viewed as "chosen trauma" (Bar-Tal, 2003; Mack, 1990; Volkan, 1997).

Ethos of Conflict

In addition to the narrative of collective memory, societies also evolve a narrative about the present—this is called an ethos. I have defined ethos in previous work as *the configuration of shared central societal beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society at present and for the future* (Bar-Tal, 2000a). Ethos supplies the epistemic basis for the hegemonic social consciousness of the society and serves as one of the foundations of societal life. It binds the members of society together, connects between the present and the goals and aspirations that impel them toward the future, and gives meaning to the societal life (see, for example, McClosky & Zaller, 1984, who analyze beliefs about democracy and capitalism in the U.S. ethos).

I would like to suggest that under prolonged intractable conflict, societies develop a particular ethos—ethos of conflict, which gives a general orientation and direction and provides a clear picture of the conflict, its goals, its conditions, requirements, and images of the in-group's society and of the rival (Bar-Tal, 2000a). This narrative reflects the society members' experiences in conflict. Some of the themes appear especially in times of conflict and others appear also in times of peace, but in intractable conflict their contents become adapted to the new conditions. The narrative of the ethos of conflict is supported by the narrative of collective memory and in both narratives similar themes appear.

In earlier work I proposed that the challenges of the intractable conflict lead to the development of eight themes of societal beliefs that comprise ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal, 1998a, 2000a).[8] They include the following: *Societal beliefs about the justness of own goals*, which first of all outline the goals in conflict, indicate their crucial importance, and provide their explanations and rationales. *Societal beliefs about security* refer to the importance of personal safety and national survival and outline the conditions for their achievement. *Societal beliefs of positive collective self-image* concern the ethnocentric tendency to attribute positive traits, values, and behavior to own society. *Societal beliefs of one's own victimization* concern self-presentation as a victim, especially in the context of the intractable conflict. *Societal beliefs of delegitimizing the opponent* concern beliefs that deny the adversary's humanity. *Societal beliefs of patriotism* generate attachment to the country and society by propagating loyalty, love, care, and sacrifice. *Societal beliefs of unity* refer to the importance of ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements during intractable conflict to unite the forces in the face of the external threat. Finally, *societal beliefs of peace* refer to peace as the ultimate desire of the society.

In sum, societal beliefs of collective memory and ethos of conflict complement each other and together constitute a solid and holistic narrative that societal members share. Each theme includes a cluster of societal beliefs referring to the same topic. Some of the themes appear in both narratives, especially justness of conflict's goals, positive self-collective view, self-view as a victim, and delegitimization of the rival (see also Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003, for a discussion of other beliefs). They provide the contents that contribute to the continuation of the conflict by constituting its epistemic basis.

In addition to societal beliefs, the sociopsychological intergroup repertoire in situations of intractable conflicts includes a collective emotional orientation. First, however, a few words will be said about a collective emotional orientation.

Collective Emotional Orientation

Societies may develop characteristic collective emotional orientations, with an emphasis on one or a number of particular emotions. The society provides the context, information, cues, models, and instructions against which the emotions of its members arise. Because these are cultural frameworks shared by society members and have strong effects on them, emotional experiences become a societal phenomenon, taking the form of collective emotional orientation (Barbalet, 1998; Bar-Tal, 2001; Kemper, 1990; Mackie & Smith, 2002).

Societies involved in intractable conflict, I would argue, tend to be dominated by a number of collective emotional orientations (see also, for example, Petersen, 2002; Scheff, 1994). The most notable is the collective orientation of fear, but in addition, they may be dominated by hatred and anger, as well as guilt, or pride. Two of the emotional orientations will be now described.

Collective fear orientation. Fear is a primary aversive emotion, which arises in situations of threat and danger to the organism (the person) and/or his or her environment (the society) and enables them to respond adaptively (Gray, 1989; Öhman, 1993). It constitutes combined physiological and psychological reactions programmed to maximize the probability of surviving in dangerous situations. Of special note is that fear can be collectively experienced, as for example political persecutions, terror attacks, or wars (e.g., Corradi, Fagen, & Garreton, 1992; Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006; Lake & Rothchild, 1998; Petersen, 2002). Intractable conflict is a dominant situation that involves threats and dangers to society members and to society as a whole. Intractable conflicts go on for a long time and involve physical violence in which soldiers and civilians are killed and wounded, civil property is destroyed, refugees suffer, and often atrocities are performed. All these situations imply threats and dangers. In addition, beliefs about threats and dangers are embedded into societal beliefs of collective memory and ethos and disseminated via societal channels of communication and educational and cultural institutions (Bar-Tal,

2001; Paez, Basabe, & Gonazales, 1997). The ongoing threat and the associated beliefs that circulate and are reinforced serve as fertile ground for evolvement and maintenance of collective fear orientation.

   Collective hatred. Hatred is a hostile feeling directed toward another person or group that consists of malice, repugnance, willingness to harm and even annihilate the object of hatred (Sternberg, 2005). According to Allport (1954), hate has behavioral implications as it is an "enduring organization of aggressive impulses toward a person or class of persons. Since it is composed of habitual bitter feelings and accusatory thoughts, it constitutes a stubborn structure in the mental-emotional life of the individual" (p. 363). Conflict situations provide a fertile breeding ground for hatred because the rival group threatens the basic existence of the group and performs harmful violent acts, which are viewed as unjust (Baumeister & Butz, 2005). White (1984) identified hate in cases of conflict and saw it as a cold, deep, and steady negative emotion, lasting a long time as a result of a long accumulation of objectionable, hateful acts by the rival group. Recently, Halperin (2006) found that hatred can be also hot as a result of immediate cues that arouse it. His findings also show that it arises under conditions of continuing harm by an out-group, which is viewed as being intentional and unjustified and attributed to stable negative dispositions of out-group members. In situations of intractable conflict, it is openly expressed and characterizes the societies involved. It may be acquired on the basis of personal experience, as well as on the basis of information provided by external sources, without having any contact with the other group (Staub, 2005). Hatred is a potent motivating force because it may lead to the most violent acts against the hated group, including extreme forms of terrorism, ethnic cleansing, and even genocide (Kressel, 1996; Sternberg, 2000; Yanay, 2002).

Functions of the Sociopsychological Infrastructure

   I would like to suggest that the above sociopsychological infrastructure (i.e., collective memory, ethos of conflict, and collective emotional orientations) fulfills important functions on both the individual and collective levels, for societies involved in intractable conflicts, especially during their climatic and irreconcilable phase. In general, it helps to meet the challenges that intractable conflict poses: It helps to satisfy the deprived needs, facilitates coping with stress, and is functional to withstanding the enemy.[9] On a more specific level, I will delineate six functions that do not exhaust the entire list. The first three functions and the last one mainly respond to the first challenge of satisfying needs, the fourth function refers to coping with challenges, and the fifth discussed function is related to the challenge of withstanding the enemy.

First, the sociopsychological infrastructure, especially the societal beliefs of collective memory and of ethos of conflict, fulfills the epistemic function of illuminating the conflict situation. The situation of intractable conflict is extremely threatening and accompanied by stress, vulnerability, uncertainty, and fear. In view of ambiguity and unpredictability, individuals must satisfy the need for a comprehensive understanding of the conflict, which provides a coherent and predictable picture of the situation (e.g., Burton, 1990). The collective memory and ethos of conflict fulfill these demands, providing information and explanations about the conflict. These societal beliefs explain the nature of the conflict to society members.

Furthermore, the societal beliefs of collective memory and ethos of conflict are functional for coping with stress created by the conditions of intractable conflict. Successful coping with stress often involves making sense of and finding meaning in the stressful conditions within existing schemes and the existing worldview, or an integration between the events and the existing worldview (Antonovsky, 1987; Frankl, 1963; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Taylor, 1983). The societal beliefs of collective memory and ethos of conflict provide such meaning and allow "sense-making." Moreover, certain contents, such as well-defined goals, a positive self-collective view, recognition of being a victim, and seeing difficult conditions as a challenge to be overcome with patriotism and unity, are especially functional for coping with stress (Antonovsky, 1987; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Taylor, 1983). The societal beliefs of collective memory and ethos of conflict include these contents and are therefore highly functional for coping with the stressful conditions of intractable conflict.

Second, in its moral function, the sociopsychological infrastructure serves to justify the acts of the in-group toward the enemy, including violence and destruction (see, for example, Apter, 1997; Jost & Major, 2001). It allows justification for group members to carry out misdeeds, perform intentional harm, and institutionalize aggression toward the enemy. This is an important function that resolves feelings of dissonance, guilt, and shame for group members. Human beings do not usually willingly harm other humans. The sanctity of life is perhaps the most sacred value in modern societies. Killing or even hurting other human beings is considered the most serious violation of the moral code (Kleinig, 1991). However, in intractable conflict, groups hurt each other most grievously, even resorting to atrocities, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. The sociopsychological infrastructure allows this violence. It justifies and legitimizes the most immoral acts and allows the attribution of one's own immoral behavior to the rival's violence and external-situational factors.

Third, the sociopsychological infrastructure creates a sense of differentiation and superiority (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). It sharpens intergroup differences because it describes the opponent in delegitimizing terms and at the same time glorifies and praises one's own society, as well as presents it as the sole victim of the conflict. Because societies involved in intractable conflict view their own goals as justified and perceive themselves in a positive light, they attribute all responsibility for the outbreak of the conflict and its continuation to the opponent. The repertoire focuses

on the violence, atrocities, cruelty, lack of concern for human life, and viciousness of the other side. It describes the other side as inhuman and immoral; the conflict as intransigent, irrational, far-reaching, and irreconcilable; and this precludes any peaceful solution. These beliefs stand in contrast to the societal beliefs about positive collective self-image, which portray the in-group in positive terms. Being accompanied by strong emotions, this differentiation allows needed positive self- and collective esteem and also feelings of superiority, which are of special importance in the situation of intractable conflict, when both sides engage in violence, often performing immoral acts (Sandole, 2002).

Fourth, the sociopsychological infrastructure prepares the society members to be ready for threatening and violent acts of the enemy, as well as for difficult life conditions. The narratives of collective memory and ethos with the collective emotional orientations tune the society members to information that signals potential harm and continuing violent confrontations, allowing psychological preparations for the lasting conflict and immunization against negative experiences. Society members are attentive and sensitive to cues about threats so no sudden surprises can arise. In this sense the sociopsychological infrastructure also allows economic predictability, which is one of the basic conditions for coping successfully with stress (e.g., Antonovsky, 1987; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This is because human beings need to live in a world whose future can, to some extent, be predicted, and they have to feel mastery over their fate. Moreover, unpredictable events, especially when harmful, may cause negative psychological reactions. Given, however, that some degree of unpredictability is unavoidable, people prefer to be positively surprised. In this way, expectations of negative events prevent disappointments.

Fifth, the sociopsychological infrastructure has the function of motivating for solidarity, mobilization, and action (Bar-Tal & Staub, 1997). Coser (1956) pointed out that conflict with another group heightens the morale within the group and "leads to mobilization of the energies of group members and hence to increased cohesion of the group" (p. 95). The ethos of conflict implies threat to the society's well-being and even to its survival. It raises the security needs as a core value and indicates a situation of emergency that requires uniting the societal forces. Collective emotional orientations such as fear, hatred, or anger, together with collective pride, increase affiliation, solidarity, and cohesiveness among society members in view of the threat to individuals and to society at large. Solidarity and unity are crucial for muting the threat. Moreover, by justifying the goals of the conflict and focusing on delegitimization, and the intransigence and violence of the opponent, as well as on being a victim, fear, hatred, and anger, the infrastructure implies the necessity to exert all the efforts and resources of the society in the struggle against the enemy. It plays a central role in stirring up patriotism, which leads to readiness for various sacrifices to defend the group and the country and avenge acts of past violence by the enemy. In addition, it reminds society members of past violent acts by the rival and indicates that these

acts could recur. The implication is that society members should mobilize and be united in view of the threat and maybe even should carry out violent acts to prevent possible harm (see the analyzed case of Israeli patriotism by Ben-Amos & Bar-Tal, 2004, as an illustration). This function, therefore, is crucial for the challenge of withstanding the enemy.

Last, but not least, the described narratives of collective memory and ethos fulfill the unique role of contributing to the formation, maintenance, and strengthening of a social identity that reflects the lasting conditions and experiences of intractable conflict. The nature of social identity and its role in intractable conflict will be now described.

Social Identity

First of all, it is important to note that individuals have to identify themselves as society members for a society to exist (see Jenkins, 1996; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). This condition is widely accepted by social scientists, who have paid special attention to the study of the nature, evolvement, and maintenance of social identity (Tajfel, 1982). Social identity combines identifications—of varying degrees—with different groups (Tajfel, 1982). The formation of social identity is based on a self-categorization process in which individuals group themselves cognitively as belonging to the same social category, in contrast to some other classes of collectives (Turner & Reynolds, 2001). Members of an ethnic group or a nation have a shared sense of belonging and identification with their group and this creates cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects on a collective level.

Intractable conflicts greatly affect the nature, contents, and functioning of social identity (Ashmore, Jussim, & Wilder, 2001; Cash, 1996; Ross, 2001; Worchel, 1999). First, in times of intractable conflict, society members tend to increase their sense of identification with the society to fulfill their need of belonging and security. Second, social identity in times of intractable conflict supplies strength to society members, as their sense of common fate and belonging increases. Third, enhanced social identity provides the basis for the unity, solidarity, and coordination needed to cope with the conflict condition. Strong social identity is one of the forces that facilitate society members' mobilization for the conflict, with a readiness to make even extreme sacrifices.

Furthermore, in the context of intractable conflict, the evolved sociopsychological infrastructure (especially its societal beliefs of collective memory and ethos), which dominates the society through the years of the conflict, eventually shapes the nature of social identity; that is, societal beliefs of ethos of conflict and collective memory offer contents par excellence that imbue social identity with meaning (Barthel, 1996; Gillis, 1994; Oren, Bar-Tal, & David, 2004). These are expressed in language, societal ceremonies, symbols, myths, commemorations, holidays, canonic texts, and so on. As will be later described, they are institutionalized in the societies involved in intractable conflict. In fact, strong identification with the society involved in intractable conflict is related to the acceptance of major shared beliefs

(e.g., societal beliefs of ethos and collective memory). As a result, when social identity is dominated by meanings that provide ethos of conflict and collective memory, this supports the continuation of the conflict (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Such a social identity forms the epistemic ground for the antagonistic views of the other society that lead to intractable conflict (Oren et al., 2004).

Institutionalization of the Sociopsychological Infrastructure

The context of the intractable conflict, with its prolonged violent confrontation between two societies over their slashing existential goals, powerfully determines the sociopsychological infrastructure of the society members, which consists of the described societal beliefs of collective memory and ethos of conflict, as well as of collective emotional orientations of fear, hatred, and anger. As the conflict goes on, people form a stable view of the violent reality on the basis of their sociopsychological repertoire and the accumulated experiences, whereas the continuous streams of negative information validate and reinforce it. This negative repertoire is thus individually stored, frozen, and continuously accessible.

Because most of the members of the society in conflict are involved with it (actively or passively, directly or indirectly), this repertoire is often widely shared, especially during its intractable stage. This infrastructure is expressed in the major societal channels of communications and eventually permeates into cultural products such as books, plays, and films. Thus, on one hand, societal communications and cultural products reflect the beliefs, attitudes, and emotions experienced by the members of the society, and at the same time, they also transmit, disseminate, and validate them (e.g., Ross, 1998). The younger generation is exposed to this infrastructure through family, educational institutions, and through the societal channels of communication, including the mass media. The acquisition of and participation in this sociopsychological infrastructure is an important indicator for membership in and identification with a society. By adulthood, many members share the same beliefs, attitudes, values, and emotions. As a result they have a similar experience of reality and tend to endorse or take a similar course of action.

In view of its important functions during intractable conflict, the institutionalization of the sociopsychological infrastructure is of paramount importance. The process of institutionalization of the infrastructure is suggested to be characterized by four features: (a) *Extensive sharing*, the beliefs of the sociopsychological infrastructure and the accompanying emotions are widely held by society members. Society members acquire and store this repertoire, as part of their socialization, from an early age on. (b) *Wide application*, institutionalization means that the repertoire is not only held by society members but also put into active use by them in their daily conversations, being chronically accessible. In addition, it appears to be dominant in public discourse via societal channels of mass communication.

Moreover, it is often used for justification and explanation of decisions, policies, and courses of actions taken by the leaders. Finally, it is also expressed in institutional ceremonies, commemorations, memorials, and so on. (c) *Expression in cultural products*, the institutionalization of the sociopsychological infrastructure also occurs through cultural products such as literary books, TV programs, films, theaters, plays, visual arts, monuments, and so on. It becomes a society's cultural repertoire, relaying societal views and shaping society members' beliefs, attitudes, and emotions. Through these channels it can be widely disseminated and can reach every sector of the public. (d) *Appearance in educational materials*, the sociopsychological infrastructure appears in the textbooks used in schools and even in higher education. They in turn are used as tools of socialization. This element of institutionalization is of special importance because the beliefs presented in the educational textbooks reach all of the younger generation. Moreover, educational textbooks are perceived as epistemic authority, providing truthful account of the past and present. Given that education is compulsory in almost all societies, whole new generations are exposed to and learn from their books.

Thus the sociopsychological infrastructure is consolidated, perseveres, and endures even in the face of contradictory information. The contradictory information is rejected and the society uses control mechanisms to ensure that the sociopsychological repertoire evolved in conflict will not change. Among the societal mechanisms that are used to control and maintain the sociopsychological infrastructure of conflict are continuous dissemination of information that supports the dominant repertoire, governmental censorship on information, dissemination of disinformation, use of punishments against providers of alternative information, control of mass media, delegitimization of alternative information and its sources, closure of archives, encouragement and reward of cultural products supporting the sociopsychological repertoire of conflict, and more. Though these mechanisms are mostly used by the formal institutions of the society, individuals may practice many of them informally too by developing self-censorship, for instance, or through using sanctions against other society members, groups, or organizations who provide information negating the sociopsychological repertoire of conflict. Eventually this infrastructure becomes a hegemonic and dogmatic, societal repertoire that is underlined by epistemic motivation for specific content and resistant to change during the intractable conflict.

Consequences of the Sociopsychological Infrastructure

The sociopsychological infrastructure, which evolves in the context of intractable conflict and is characterized with the above-described features, has serious consequences. It affects the way information is handled—in a way similar to how dogmatic

conceptions and theories affect human functioning (e.g., Neisser, 1976; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). More specifically, on the psychological level, sociopsychological repertoire affects the way incoming information is anticipated, selectively attended to, encoded, interpreted, recalled, and acted on.[10] The handling of information is characterized by top-down cognitive processing. That is, it is affected more by what fits the contents of the societal beliefs and less by the details of incongruent information (see, for example, Jervis, 1976; Vertzberger, 1990; White, 1970).

In its essence, the sociopsychological infrastructure can be viewed as *a syndrome of animosity* because it leads to a number of general symptoms, all associated with the intractable conflict. On a general psychological level, it leads to selective collection of information, which means that society members tend to search and absorb information that is in line with the repertoire and omit contradictory information, which is viewed as invalid. But, even when ambiguous or contradictory information is absorbed, it is encoded and cognitively processed in accordance with the held repertoire through bias, addition, and distortion. Bias leads to focus on the consistent part of the absorbed information, disregarding the inconsistent part, or to interpretation of ambiguous information in line with the held repertoire. Addition goes beyond the absorbed information to add parts from the held repertoire that change the information to be consistent with the repertoire. Distortion indicates a change of the absorbed information, even when it is unambiguous, to adapt it to the contents of the held repertoire. It is thus not surprising that the above-described information processing leads to such phenomena as double standards, fundamental attribution error, reactive evaluation, perception of self-uniqueness, self-focus, false consensus, and disregard of empathy for the rival (see as an example, Hunter, Stringer, & Watson, 1991; Maoz, Ward, Katz, & Ross, 2002).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the described conceptual framework in Figure 1 presents its major elements and depicts the direction of the processes that take place in the society involved in intractable conflict.

It should be stressed that although the described sociopsychological infrastructure, which evolves in intractable conflict (i.e., societal beliefs of collective memory and of ethos of conflict, collective fear orientation, collective hatred orientation, and collective anger orientation), enables better adaptation to the conflict conditions, it also maintains and prolongs the conflict. During the intractable conflict, the societal psychological infrastructure helps the society members to satisfy their basic needs to cope with the stress and to successfully withstand the enemy. But at the same time, this infrastructure becomes a prism through which society members construe their reality, collect new information, interpret their experiences, and then make decisions about their course of action. That is to say, involvement in intractable conflict tends

to "close minds" and stimulate tunnel vision, which excludes incongruent information and alternative approaches to the conflict.

In effect, the sociopsychological infrastructure that emerges in times of conflict, with its particular characteristics, serves as a major factor for the continuation of the conflict and a barrier for resolving it; in fact it is part of the vicious cycle of the intractable conflict (see also Sandole, 1999). Considering that this process occurs simultaneously to the two parties in the conflict, it is obvious how the vicious cycle of violence operates. As the conflict evolves, each of the opponents develops a sociopsychological infrastructure, which initially fulfills important functional roles, on both the individual and collective levels. With time, however, this infrastructure comes to serve as the major motivating, justifying, and rationalizing factor of the conflict. Any negative actions taken by one side in the conflict then serve as information validating the existing sociopsychological infrastructure for the other side and in turn magnify its motivation and readiness to engage in conflict. The behaviors of each side confirm the held negative sociopsychological infrastructure and justify harming the opponent.

These vicious cycles of intractable conflict are detrimental to the well-being of both the individuals and societies involved, as well as posing a danger to the world. Because, as we have seen, the sociopsychological infrastructure plays an important role in these cycles, it is of vital necessity to change this repertoire, if we want to change the relations between the rival groups. Such change is a necessary condition for advancing a peace process and stopping the violence (Bar-Tal, 2000b). This is a crucial challenge in view of the behavioral consequences that this infrastructure has in situations of intractable conflict, leading to violence, loss of human life, ethnic cleansing, and even genocide.[11]

Notes

1. The conception has served as a basis for an extensive analysis of Israeli Jewish society involved in Israeli-Arab conflict (e.g., Arviv-Abramovich, 2004; Bar-Tal, 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2003, 2007; Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Bar-Tal, Jacobson, & Klieman, 1998; Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Ben-Amos & Bar-Tal, 2004; Gopher, Bar-Tal, & Raviv, 2004; Halperin, 2006; Oren, 2005; Oren & Bar-Tal, 2004, 2006; Oren, Bar-Tal, & David, 2004; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998; Sharvit, 2006a, 2006b; Sharvit & Bar-Tal, 2007; Zafran, 2002; Zafran & Bar-Tal, 2003). Also, much of the research done within this society can be viewed as supporting this conceptual framework (e.g., Bar-Gal, 1993; Bar-On, 2000; Barzilai, 1996; Ben-Ezer, 1978; Cohen, 1985; Domb, 1982; Firer, 1985; Kelman, 1999; Lazarus, 1982; Podeh, 2002; Sagy, Adwan, & Kaplan, 2002; Shohat, 1989; Urian, 1997; Wolfsfeld, 1997; Zerubavel, 1995).

2. Israeli Jewish society was recently analyzed according to the present conception by Bar-Tal (2007).

3. The term *intractable* became popular in recent years among social scientists (see, for example, Coleman, 2000, 2003; Lewicki, Gray, & Elliot, 2003, and www.crinfo.org).

4. This idea is based on conceptual and empirical literature, which suggests that successful coping with threatening and stressful conditions requires construction of a meaningful world view (e.g., Antonovsky, 1987; Frankl, 1963; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Taylor, 1983).

5. Beliefs, defined as propositions that express human thoughts about any subject, are basic units of knowledge's categories (see Bem, 1970; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Kruglanski, 1989).

6. Narrative is viewed as a social construction that coherently interrelates a sequence of historical and current events; it is an account of a community's collective experiences, embodied in its belief system and represents the collective's symbolically constructed shared identity (Bruner, 1990).

7. The extent of sharing depends also, of course, on personal and the societal factors; these, however, will not be discussed in this article.

8. The proposed eight themes of the ethos were found in the public opinions of the Israeli Jewish society between 1967 and 2000 and served as their organizing scheme (Oren, 2005). They also were found to be central motifs in the Israeli school textbooks (Bar-Tal, 1998a, 1998b).

9. A fundamental question can be asked whether meeting the above described challenges is indeed functional for a society. The present analysis is done from the perspective of the involved societies in intractable conflict whose goals are to withstand the rival and survive the conflict. The analysis applies to a situation when both societies are engulfed in violent confrontation, without seeing any possibility of engaging in peace process. Obviously, the intractable context changes, when the prospect of peace process appears. Then, as will be noted, the psychological infrastructure becomes a barrier to conflict resolution and detrimental to peace process.

10. This proposition is based on the robust findings in social and political psychology that demonstrate the influence that have stored important beliefs (for example, ideology, or stereotypes) on human cognitive functioning (e.g., Iyengar & Ottati, 1994; Lau & Sears, 1986; Ottati & Wyer, 1993; Silverstein & Flamenbaum, 1989; Smith, 1998; Taber, 2003).

11. Social sciences have devoted much effort to study the needed changes that facilitate peaceful solution of intractable conflicts. But still conflicts continue and the challenge remains. The discussion of the required changes is beyond the scope of the present article.

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