

# National Identity and the Role of the "Other" in Existential Conflicts: The Israeli-Palestinian Case<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

One of the most pervasive phenomena in the relationship between societies and between different entities within a society—defined in terms of race, religion, ethnicity, or some other characteristics—is the placement of certain groups into the category of the “other.” Categorizing these groups as the other makes them vulnerable to varying degrees of distrust, prejudice, hatred, and demonization. It makes it easier to exclude them from one’s own moral community—the community whose members share a sense of mutual moral obligation and accord each other respect, caring, and protection. Moral exclusion creates the conditions for social and economic discrimination and, in the extreme, for ethnic cleansing and genocide. The rejection and exclusion of groups categorized as “the other” is a phenomenon with a long and often bloody history that still affects the contemporary world, including—more often than we like to admit—enlightened, democratic societies.

The reasons for placing a given group in the category of other vary. I believe, however, that a key element in all cases is the perception of the out-group (or the mutual perception of two groups in conflict) as a threat to one’s own group’s interests, status, or identity. These three types of threat are typically intertwined. Conflicts of interest—whether they take the form of economic competition between ethnic groups within a society or territorial disputes, as in the Israeli-Palestinian case on which I will be focusing—are often suffused and intensified by conflicts of identity. Majority populations in European countries, including the Netherlands, may perceive ethnic minorities—such as immigrants from Muslim countries and their descendants—as intrusions on and threats to their own identity: their social values, their worldview, their way of life. Minority populations, in turn, may perceive the secular majority as rejecting their religious orientation and cultural values and thus threatening their own unique identities. Each group, in response to the identity threat it experiences, may exclude the other from its own moral community, placing it in the category of the “other.”

My remarks will address the relationship between collective identity and the role of the “other” in a rather different context, but I hope that they will have some relevance to the ongoing

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debate within your own society over the definition of national identity—not only, I might add, in relation to ethnoreligious minorities but also in relation to the emerging European identity.

My work and that of my colleagues as scholar-practitioners has focused on analysis and resolution of protracted, seemingly intractable conflicts between national, ethnic, religious, 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 some thirty years has been with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and my analysis will draw primarily on that experience (see Kelman, 1999b).

Using the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a case in point, I shall examine 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. I will start by describing the struggle over national identity between the two peoples, which has led 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. Next, I will argue 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, as I will proceed to argue, such changes *need* to be and *can* be "negotiated" between the two groups. One venue for negotiating identity is provided by the problem-solving workshops between Israeli and Palestinian elites that my colleagues and I have convened for many years.

### **The Struggle over National Identity**

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—which 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 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. 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, 1999a).

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.

The sense of existential threat and the consequent negation of the other gain additional strength when the ethnic differences correspond to religious differences. In such a situation, the other comes to be seen as a threat to the *ultimate* meaning of personal and collective existence. Moreover, an unlimited violent response to the threat is often justified by obedience to the highest authority.

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 populations, however—and in some respects even for large majorities—such definitions still prevail and tend to reassert themselves when negotiations break down.

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 proven 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. The Israeli rhetoric, for a long time, treated Jerusalem as an exclusive property of Israel, although public opinion data (e.g., Segal, 1999) suggest some flexibility that was also reflected in the Israeli offers at the Camp David and Taba negotiations in 2000 and 2001. Palestinians have been prepared to concede West Jerusalem to Israel, but they have treated the Old City and particularly the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif as an exclusive property of their state.

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 political, 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 similarities 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 sometimes radically, as historical circumstances change, crises emerge, opportunities 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 *possibility* of resolving a conflict that has become increasingly costly to the parties. The mounting costs and dwindling prospects of governing Algeria for the French, of maintaining apartheid for white South Africans, of the occupation of Palestinian territories for Israelis, and of the armed struggle for the Palestinians created the *necessity* for changes in identity: Algeria as an integral part of France, South Africa

under exclusive white control, Israel within the borders of Greater Israel, and Palestinian repossession of the entire 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, including the problem-solving workshops that my colleagues and I have conducted: In the course of Israeli-Palestinian workshops, for example, participants 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 programs, and that the other has positive goals beyond destruction of their group (Kelman, 1987). They were enabled to enter into the enemy's perspective, 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—i.e., 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 comprised of 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.

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 regard as the most important breakthrough of the Oslo agreement (Kelman, 1997c)—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, 1998). A workshop is a specially constructed, private space in which 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. Workshops have the dual purpose of producing *change*—in the form of new insights and ideas—in the individual participants, which they can then *transfer* into the political process at the levels of both public opinion and decision making. 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, Nadim Rouhana and I 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, we convened a Joint Working Group on Israeli-Palestinian Relations, which met regularly over several years and—for the first time in our program—produced several 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 (Alpher, Shikaki, et al., 1998; Joint Working Group, 1998, 1999).

Much of the discussion in our workshops, from the beginning in the 1970s and through the 1990s, 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 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 earlier 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 shared elements of identity with the other opens the way to political solutions based on sharing territory and resources. In recent workshops, for example, mainstream Israelis and Palestinians have been able to agree on a formula for sharing Jerusalem: a united city containing the capitals of both states.

(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 the 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 the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state over recovering the lost land in its entirety. Israelis—even on the right of the political spectrum, as demonstrated by the disengagement from Gaza—are giving 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. A concept paper of our Joint Working Group on Israeli-Palestinian Relations on “The Palestinian refugee problem and the right of return” (Alpher, Shikaki, et al., 1998) provides a good illustration of such an effort to negotiate identity. It pointed to the possibilities and difficulties of the negotiation of identity and suggested directions for achieving further progress (see Kelman, 2001, for further elaboration).

## **Conclusion**

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as in Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, and 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.

However, 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. The rapid deterioration of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in the aftermath of the failed Camp David talks in the summer of 2000 demonstrates the severity of these obstacles. The tentative changes in the identities of the two sides that I described have proven rather fragile. The rhetoric has returned to negation of the other's identity, to exclusivist and monolithic formulations of each group's own identity, to assertion of maximalist goals, and to a hardening of the old narratives. This does not mean, however, that the changes that have taken place over the years have been completely undone. The parties have reverted to the old analysis and rhetoric because they have lost their belief in the other side's commitment to a peaceful solution and readiness to make the compromises required for such a solution. If that belief can be revived—if a new working trust between the two sides can develop—the identity changes that have begun to take shape are likely to reassert themselves. Indeed, I would propose that they must and can be mobilized to help revive the peace process.

In this spirit, our current work is directed toward framing proposals for a negotiated final-status agreement between Israelis and Palestinians in a way that reassures the two populations that the agreement does not represent an existential threat and offers them a vision of a better common future for both peoples in the land they share. To this end, the agreement needs to be framed in terms of a principled two-state solution, based on a historic compromise,

flowing from the recognition that the land belongs to both peoples who must find a way of sharing it for their mutual benefit.

What is important to keep in mind is that the development of a new, transcendent identity 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. Parties engaged in a deep-rooted conflict can abandon relatively *marginal* elements of their identity in order to accommodate the identity of the other only if the *core* of their identity is safeguarded and confirmed in the process. 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. Indeed, I have come to define reconciliation between former enemies as a change in each group's identity, whereby it accommodates the identity of the other in a context in which the core of its own identity is affirmed.

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