HUMAN BEINGS HAVE a basic epistemic need to live in an environment that is meaningful, comprehensible, organized, and predictable.¹ They strive to perceive their world in a meaningful way in which events, people, and things or symbols are not understood as isolated stimuli but are comprehended in an organized way, one that provides meaning to the new information.² This sense of understanding is essential for one to feel that the world is predictable and controllable.³ When this factor is absent, human beings experience stress and often act abnormally. This rule applies to individuals as well as collectives. That is, individuals strive not only to order and understand their individual world but also their collective world. A meaningful life for many people often derives from their membership in a particular group, and ultimately one's individual life is inextricably interwoven within collective structures, events, and processes. That an individual's experiences are often determined by their membership in the collective is vividly illustrated by the Israelis and the Palestinians.⁴

People construct their world in a way that is functional for their needs, shunning uncertainty on both the individual and collective levels. Our focus in this chapter is on the collective level as we set out to show that society members construct shared "societal beliefs," defined as enduring beliefs on issues of special concern for a particular society and which contribute to a sense of uniqueness among its members.⁵ Societal beliefs, organized around thematic clusters, refer to characteristics, structure, and processes of a society and cover the various domains of societal life. Generally they concern societal goals, self-images, conflicts, aspirations, conditions, norms, values, societal structures, images of out-groups, institutions, obstacles, problems, and so on. Essentially,
they constitute a shared view of a society’s perceived reality and, as such, provide the collective narrative of that society.

Following Bruner, we conceive of collective narratives as social constructions that coherently interrelate a sequence of historical and current events; they are accounts of a community’s collective experiences, embodied in its belief system and represent the collective’s symbolically constructed shared identity. The collective narrative of a society provides a basis for common understanding, good communication, interdependence, and the coordination of social activities, all of which are necessary for social systems to function. The beliefs comprising the collective narrative are often featured on the public agenda, are discussed by society members, serve as relevant references for decisions that leaders make, and influence choices and courses of action. Societal institutions actively impart these beliefs to society members and encourage their acquisition.

This chapter analyzes narratives that are constructed in times of conflict, focusing particularly on the Israeli–Jewish narrative of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. We elaborate on the intractable nature of the conflict, which serves as a context for the evolution of the particular narrative. We describe the ethos of conflict and collective memory, which constitutes the essence of the narratives of societies involved in intractable conflict. We describe the main functions of this narrative and their consequences. Finally, we discuss implications for reconciliation and peace education interventions.

The Context of Intractable Conflict

Intractable conflicts are defined as those that are protracted, irreconcilable, violent, of zero-sum nature, total, and central; parties involved invest their major resources in such conflicts. This chapter describes the context of intractable conflict as the major experience responsible for the evolution of its narrative. Specifically, it concentrates on the Israeli–Arab conflict or, more accurately, on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, analyzing the Jewish side.

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is centered on the contested territory known as Palestine, an area that two national movements claim as their homeland. For more than ninety years Palestinian nationalism and Zionism, the Jewish national movement, have clashed recurrently over the right for self-determination, statehood, and justice. Moreover, for many years the conflict was perceived as one of national identity. Palestinians and Jews each believed that acceptance of the other’s identity would negate both their own case and their own identity.

Each side believed that if it were to be considered a nation, the other could not be considered as one. Acknowledging the other’s nationhood was seen as accepting that group’s right to establish a national state in the contested land, which in turn was believed to weaken one’s own claim for the same land. Thus the issue of the territorial claims touches on the very fundamental issue of national survival.

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict started as a communal confrontation between the Jews and Palestinians living in British-ruled Palestine and evolved into a full-blown interstate conflict between Israel and Arab states during the war of 1948. Since the 1967 war, with the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the conflict continues on both interstate and communal levels. According to Sandler, each new phase involved intensive violence, was followed by the introduction of new parties to the conflict, and led to the development of new patterns of hostile interaction.

For a long time the conflict seemed irreconcilable and total. The dispute concerned elementary issues involving the basic existential needs of each side, and so finding an agreeable solution for both parties was impossible. In various attempts to resolve the conflict peacefully, Israel’s minimum requirements exceeded the Arabs’ maximum concessions, and vice versa. Therefore, it is not surprising that the sides involved perceived the conflict as being of zero-sum nature, and mobilized all possible efforts and backing within the group and the international community in order to win it.

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has been violent almost from the start. At first, economic boycotts, demonstrations, strikes, and occasional violence erupted, reaching a climax in the Palestinian rebellion of 1936–1939. Following the UN decision in 1947 to divide the land between the Jews and the Palestinians, a full-scale war broke out which claimed many thousands of lives, including civilians. Also, of great significance, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians became refugees. Through the years at least four additional wars were fought—in 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982—and, between them, violent activities erupted continuously. They included military engagements, infiltration of hostile forces, terrorist attacks, bombardments, air raids, and so on. Between 1987 and 1991 Palestinians in the areas occupied by Israel in 1967 waged an uprising (intifada); in 2000 the Palestinians began their second intifada, called the Al-Aqsa intifada.

It should be noted that even though some intractable features are still present, the nature of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict changed after Egyptian president Anwar Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem in 1977. The peace treaty with Egypt in
1979, the Madrid conference in 1991, the agreements with the Palestinians in 1993 and 1994, and the peace treaty with Jordan in 1994 are watershed events in the peace process, and have greatly affected Arab–Jewish relations. The eruption in 2000 of violent confrontations between Israeli Jews and Palestinians was a major setback to the peace process and has had an important influence on the quality of intergroup relations between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East.

The conflict has continuously been on both sides’ public agenda. The involved parties learned to live with a harsh and violent reality. Until the death of President Yasser Arafat, it was almost impossible to imagine an alternative to the conflict. Coping with it became a way of life for both the Israelis and Palestinians.

In extreme cases, the seven characteristics of intractable conflicts described earlier are explicit and salient, inflicting threat, stress, pain, exhaustion, and cost in human and material terms. Those affected must adapt in both their individual and social lives. From a psychological perspective, this adaptation requires the meeting of two basic challenges.

First, basic needs must be fulfilled, such as the needs for mastery, safety, and positive identity, which are all diminished during an intractable conflict. Of special importance is the satisfaction of the need to understand the conflict in a way that can provide a coherent and predictable picture of the situation. As noted, individuals try fully to comprehend the situation so as to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity.10

Second, psychological adaptations are necessary to cope successfully with the ordeals posed by intense conflict, and with all of the concomitant adjustments and challenges that such coping entails on both the personal and societal levels. Among the many challenges posed by such conflict is to ensure that the survival of group members. Parties to the conflict must prepare themselves for a long struggle, and this effort requires the recruitment of human and material resources. Thus, adapting psychologically strengthens coping strategies such as loyalty to society and country, and engenders high motivations to contribute, persistence, withstanding physical and psychological stress, readiness for personal sacrifice, unity, solidarity, maintenance of a society’s objectives, determination, courage, and endurance.

To meet these basic needs and be able to cope, society members construct an appropriate psychological repertoire, which includes shared beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and capacities. Of special importance in this psychological repertoire are narratives that pertain to collective memory and to the ethos of conflict. The narrative of collective memory focuses on the society’s remembered past. In contrast, the ethos of conflict narrative, denoting the configuration of central societal beliefs, deals mainly with a society’s current goals, capacity, and experiences. The next two sections discuss these narratives.

Collective Memory

The collective memory narrative has a number of characteristics. First, it does not necessarily tell a true history but rather describes a past that is useful for the group to function and even exist. It is a story that is biased, selective, and distorted, that omits certain facts, adds others that did not take place, changes the sequence of events, and purposely reinterprets events that did take place. In short, it is a narrative constructed to fit the current needs of the group.11 As Wright stated, with regard to Great Britain: “Far from being somehow ‘behind’ the present, the past exists as an accomplished presence in public understanding. In this sense it is written into present social reality, not just implicitly as History, National Heritage and Tradition,” but restores the “essential and grander identity of the ‘Imaginary Briton.’”12 The narrative of past events, moreover, not only undergoes major revisions to suit present day needs but is often invented years after the events have actually taken place. Thus, for example, Walker claims that the memories of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne in Northern Ireland were invented for political purposes in the nineteenth century.13 A second characteristic of the collective memory narrative is that it is shared by group members and is treated by many as truthful accounts of the past and a valid history of the group. Third, the body of a collective historical narrative appears to entail both memories of past events (for example, the conquests of William of Orange, the siege of Masada, and the battle of the Alamo), as well as memories of more recent, conflict-related events. These more recent memories, some of them personal memories that intertwine with the collective memory pool, turn into historical memories the longer a conflict lasts. They exert a powerful force in shaping present-day attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors.

It follows that opposing groups in a conflict will often entertain contradictory and selective historical narratives of the same events. Also, whereas one group might emphasize certain events, the other may not even include them in its set of collective memories. By including or omitting certain historical events and processes from the collective memory, a group characterizes itself and its historical experiences in unique and exclusive ways.14 Thus, the narrative of
collective memory is perceived by group members as self-characterization. It tells the particular story of a group’s past and outlines the boundaries for a group’s description and characterization. In short, the narrative of collective memory relating to an intractable conflict provides a black-and-white picture, and enables parsimonious, fast, unequivocal, and simple understandings of the history of the conflict.

In terms of contents, the narrative of collective memory touches on at least four important themes that influence the perception of the conflict and its management. First, it justifies the outbreak of the conflict and the course of its development. It outlines the reasons for the supreme and existential importance of the conflicting goals, stressing that failure to achieve them may threaten the very existence of the group. It also disregards the goals of the other side, describing them as unjustified and unreasonable.

Second, the narrative of collective memory of intractable conflict presents a positive image of one’s own group. The contents of the narrative can pertain to a variety of positive acts, traits, values, or skills that characterize a society. It reflects the general tendency toward ethnocentrism documented in different groups, but in times of intractable conflict it gains special significance. Groups involved in such conflicts engage in intense self-justification, self-glorification, and self-praise.

Third, the collective memory narrative legitimizes the opponent. Since societies involved in intractable conflicts view their own goals as justified and perceive themselves in a positive light, they attribute all responsibility for the outbreak and continuation of the conflict to the opponent. The narrative focuses on the violence, atrocities, cruelty, lack of concern for human life, and viciousness of the opponent. It describes the adversary’s inhuman and immoral behavior, and presents it as intransigent, irrational, far-reaching, and irreconcilable. The adversary’s character precludes any possible peaceful solution, and therefore the conflict cannot be resolved. All of these beliefs show the opponent to be an existential threat to the group’s survival.

Fourth, this particular narrative presents one’s own group as a victim. This view develops over a long period of violence as a result of a society’s sufferings and losses. Its formation is based on beliefs about the justness of the goals of one’s group and on one’s positive self-image, while emphasizing the wickedness of the opponent’s goals and delegitimizing the opponent’s characteristics. In other words, focusing on injustice, harm, evil, and the atrocities of the adversary, while emphasizing one’s own society as just, moral, and human leads society members to see themselves as victims. Believing one is the victim implies that the conflict was imposed by an adversary who fights not only unjustly but immorally.

Thus, for example, Jewish-Israeli collective memories as presented in school textbooks describe the waves of Jewish immigration as an expression of national aspiration to build a state for Jewish people in their ancient homeland. The immigrants fought land from Arab landowners to build Jewish settlements with the will to live peacefully beside Arabs. The collective narrative focuses on Arab violence aimed at Jews and portrays it as vicious riots and massacres. According to the accepted narrative, Arabs rejected any compromise to settle the conflict, and in 1947 even rejected the UN decision to divide the country into two states—Jewish and Palestinian; instead, they initiated a war against the Jewish minority which drew in seven additional Arab states that invaded the newly established state of Israel. On the other hand, the schoolbooks have not mentioned, until recently, the massive, often “encouraged” departure of Palestinians-turned-refugees during the 1948 war or the atrocities carried out by the Israeli army, for example, in Qibya or Kfar Qassem. Nor are initial attempts by Arabs to sense Israel’s willingness to negotiate a peaceful settlement even mentioned in school textbooks. All the major wars are described as defensive—wars in which Israel successfully repelled Arab aggression.

**Ethos of Conflict**

In addition to the narrative of collective memory, societies also evolve a narrative about the present that we call an ethos. “Ethos,” defined as the configuration of central societal shared beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society, gives meaning to the life of a particular society. The ethos narrative provides the epistemic basis for the present direction of a society, its major aspirations, goals, means, concerns, and images. The narrative indicates to society members that their behavior is not just random, but represents a coherent and systematic pattern of knowledge. This narrative implies that the decisions of society’s leaders, the coordinated behavior of the members of society, and the structure and functioning of the society are all based on coherent and comprehensive beliefs that justify and motivate members of society to accept the system and to act in a coordinated manner.

The evolution of the ethos narrative is influenced by the conditions in which the society lives over a long period of time and the collective experiences that shape the society during this period. We suggest that under prolonged conditions of intractable conflict societies develop a particular ethos of conflict.
that provides a clear picture of the conflict, its goals, conditions, and requirements, as well as an image of one's own group, and of the rival group. This narrative is supported by the collective memory narrative, and the same themes appear in both. At the peak of intractable conflict, the beliefs are often shared by the majority of society members, but the extent of sharing may increase or lessen with a change in the nature of the conflict. The extent of sharing also depends on various societal and political factors. In general, societies may differ in the degree to which members share societal beliefs about a conflict.

In view of the intractable nature of the Arab–Israeli conflict, the Israeli Jews evolved an ethos during the late 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s that was functional for the demanding, stressful, costly, and prolonged situation of that time. This narrative enabled the Israelis to adapt and successfully cope with the conflict's painful consequences. That ethos of conflict narrative, it has been suggested, consisted of eight themes of societal belief, which are discussed in the following sections.  

The Lust of the Israeli Goals

This theme concerns the rationale behind the goals that led to the conflict and particularly the justification of those goals in terms of their importance. The Jews' return to Eretz Israel (Land of Israel), with the aim of establishing their own state after 2000 years of exile, was inspired by the nationalist ideology of Zionism. This ideology provided Jews with goals and a justification for them. These goals centered first on the establishment of a Jewish state in the ancient homeland of Eretz Israel. Historical, theological, national, existential, political, societal, and cultural arguments were used to justify those goals. They included arguments such as the following: that the Jewish nation was founded in Eretz Israel, the ancient Land of Israel; that during many years of ancient Jewish history Eretz Israel remained the Jews' homeland; that during their exile Jews maintained close spiritual and physical ties with Eretz Israel, continuously aspiring to return to it; that the continuity of Jewish life never ceased in that ancient land; and that the persistent experience of anti-Semitism in the diaspora, resulting ultimately in the Holocaust, highlighted the need of the Jewish people for a secure existence in their old homeland. The conquest of the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights in the 1967 war greatly augmented the territorial dimension of the Israeli goals. In the aftermath of the war, many Israeli Jews believed that Israel had the right to retain these territories. Their shared beliefs pertained to the Jewish people's exclusive rights to Judea, Samaria (i.e., the West Bank), and the Gaza Strip, and to the security importance of the Golan Heights, parts of the West Bank, and the Sinai.

In the context of justifying these Israeli goals, attempts were made over the years to refute Palestinian claims. The contested territory was often described as being sparsely populated by Arabs, who, moreover, had only moved there in recent centuries. The Palestinian national identity was also denied, the claim being made that they were Arabs, part of the Arab nation, and that their national Palestinian identity was a relatively new development. Finally, Palestinians' claims of attachment to the land was questioned by describing the land as desolate, neglected, and desertlike—that is, until the Jews came back to cultivate it. Only then did the Arabs return.

These societal beliefs motivated the members of Israeli–Jewish society to fight for their goals and to endure the stresses, sacrifices, and costs of intractable conflict.

Security

Throughout this enduring conflict the Israeli Jews have always believed that the security of the country and its Jewish citizens was seriously threatened. Therefore, achieving a sense of security, one of the basic Zionist reasons for returning to Israel and establishing a Jewish state, became the central need and value. Security acquired the status of a cultural master-symbol in the Israeli–Jewish ethos. Israeli society became a "nation under arms" or a "nation in uniform," living always, in a "dormant war.

Assigning the highest priority to the value of security, the society did all it could to motivate its members to serve in the armed forces, and to encourage the best qualified to volunteer for the most important institutions and units, for example, the air force, the commando units, the Mossad, or the General Security Services. All channels of communication and agents of socialization paid tribute to the security forces. Service in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) was viewed as an entrance ticket to Israeli society, and refusal or evasion of service was socially frowned upon. Those who volunteered to serve in special institutions or units were accorded high prestige. The top-ranking officers were ascribed a special status that allowed them not only to act as authorities on a wide range of issues but also to be accepted into any field upon retirement, including politics, industry, business, the civil service, and even cultural institutions and education. At the same time, a legacy of wars and battles was developed and heroism was glorified. Military heroes received special honors,
and society commemorated those who had fallen in military service, gave financial support to their families, and aided those who had been injured in the line of duty.28

The fundamental societal beliefs of the ethos delineated the conditions that were assumed to ensure security. First, Israel had to develop military power of the highest quality to deter Arab aggression. Second, Israel had the right and duty to use its armed forces to defend itself against Arab threats and even to initiate military acts, including war, to prevent possible Arab attacks on Israel. Third, Israel should not rely on help from foreign military forces or be dependent on international public opinion or the views of foreign leaders and international organizations—the UN, for example. Fourth, land was regarded as the country’s most important national strategic asset.

In sum, these societal beliefs were functional for the violent confrontations of the conflict, since they assigned a high priority to security, provided a rationale for societal decisions and actions, and motivated members of society to participate in the conflict and accept and cope with stressful conditions.

Positive Collective In-group Images

The societal beliefs of positive collective in-group images involve the attribution of positive traits, values, intentions, and behaviors to one’s own society. Israeli Jews viewed themselves as a “new people,” reborn in the land of Israel.29 Initial positive stereotypes saw Israeli Jews as tenacious, hard-working, courageous, modern, and intelligent, and then as moral and humane. With respect to the first set of traits, various stories and myths were amassed about the Jews’ behavior in times of peace and war, while their morality and humanity referred to their behavior toward Arabs. This positive in-group presentation also invoked the Jewish heritage, Jewish culture, religion, and traditions were regarded as being at the heart of Western civilization and morality. Certain segments in the society regarded Jews as the “chosen people” and a “light unto the nations.” These beliefs encouraged moral strength and feelings of self-worth.

One’s Own Victimization

Beliefs about one’s victimization and unjust Arab aggression offer a positive in-group image and a delegitimization of Arabs. Beginning with early encounters with Arabs, attempts to harm Jews physically, halt their immigration, or prevent them from settling in the homeland were considered by the Israeli Jews as evidence of victimization.30 Their beliefs that they were victims were greatly reinforced when, following the establishment of the state of Israel, Palestinians and the Arab states tried to annihilate the new state, and continued to attack it. The wars that were fought, the Arab embargo on trade with Israel, and the terrorist attacks on Israeli and non-Israeli Jews all confirmed to the Israeli Jews their status as victims. These contentions also suited the Jewish belief in their own persecution.31

During the ongoing conflict, the belief in their own victimization gave the Israeli Jews the moral incentive to fight Arabs, to seek justice, and to turn to the international community for moral, political, and material support.

Delegitimizing the Opponent

Intractable conflict fosters the evolution of negative stereotypes and especially negative societal beliefs that deny the adversary group—in this case, Arabs—its humanity. Indeed, the process of mutual delegitimization has been one of the bitter manifestations of the long years of conflict between Israeli Jews and Arabs.32 For many decades Israeli Jews referred to Arabs as a general category, without differentiation.33 From the very beginning the encounters between Jews, mostly from Europe, and Arabs, living in Palestine, fostered negative stereotyping.34 Arabs were labeled as primitive, uncivilized, savage, and backward. In time, as the conflict deepened and became more violent, they were perceived as murderers, bloodthirsty, treacherous, cowardly, cruel, and wicked. After the establishment of the state of Israel, these delegitimizing beliefs about Arabs still prevailed and were transmitted through institutional channels.35 Arabs were also blamed for the continuation of the conflict, for the eruption of all of the wars and military clashes, and for intransigently rejecting a peaceful resolution.36

Arabs were also characterized as striving to annihilate the state of Israel and to drive the Jewish population into the sea. During the height of the conflict, from the 1940s to the 1970s, all Arabs were perceived as one undifferentiated entity, and all Arab nations were seen to display a uniform attitude toward the state of Israel. Only after the peace treaty with Egypt did the Jews differentiate between Arab nations. This differentiation has continued to develop as Israel has built separate relationships with different Arab nations. But “Arab” continues to be used widely today as a general label, often with derogatory overtones. Palestinians, who were identified as a separate nation only in the late 1970s, were perceived as an enemy of the Jewish people, and many of the delegitimizing terms were also applied to them. In fact, for decades they
were referred to as "Arabs." With the Oslo Accords, the delegitimizing views became more differentiated, but the eruption of the second intifada brought back the delegitimizing labels.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{Patriotism}

During the intractable conflict, Israeli Jews made a special effort to convey beliefs that would instill patriotism.\textsuperscript{38} In the context of the conflict, extreme sacrifices were asked of Israeli Jews, including economic hardship and prolonged military service and reserve duty. Patriotic beliefs called for various forms of dedication, such as settling in outlying or desolate areas, volunteering for the security forces, and working for society's welfare. These beliefs even called for the ultimate sacrifice, the readiness to die, as part of the violent confrontation with the Arabs, which included Palestinians. Those who acted as models of patriotism were glorified, while those who left the country (labeled "deserters") or did not fulfill their duties to the state (e.g., by not serving in the army) were stigmatized. Such patriotic beliefs increased cohesiveness and mobilized the members of Israeli society to participate actively in the conflict and to endure hardship and even loss of life.\textsuperscript{39}

\textbf{Unity}

Beliefs in unity have helped Israelis to ignore internal disagreements and conflicts so that society is united in the face of external threats. Israeli-Jewish society strove to foster unity and build a sense of belonging and solidarity by emphasizing beliefs about the need for unity. Common tradition and religion were emphasized, and an attempt was made to minimize the ethnic differences within a society whose members came from various parts of the world. Unity was also reinforced by setting specific lines of agreement; those who expressed opinions or exhibited behavior outside the accepted consensus were frowned upon.\textsuperscript{40} The consensus pertained particularly to societal beliefs about the Arab-Israeli conflict, and also to the justness of Israel's goals and the means of ensuring security.\textsuperscript{41}

Beliefs about unity strengthen society from within, augment a sense of commonality and solidarity, and allow energy to be directed toward coping with the external enemy.

\textbf{Peace}

Societal beliefs about peace center on the society's ultimate goal, namely, peace. During the intractable conflict with the Arabs, Israeli-Jewish society cherished peace as a value, conceived of it as a dream, a prayer, a belief in utopian images. Israeli Jews were thus stereotyped as a peace-loving people forced by circumstances to engage in violent conflict. They were seen as being ready to negotiate and achieve peace, whereas the Arabs, who rejected any peaceful resolution and even refused to have direct contact with Jews, were viewed as the sole obstacle to progress. Such beliefs inspired hope and optimism, strengthened the Israeli Jews' positive self-image, and contributed to an empathic self-image in the outside world.

Societal beliefs of collective memory and ethos of conflict complement each other and together constitute a holistic narrative that society members share. Some themes appear prominently in both narratives, such as just goals in the conflict, a positive self-collective view, a self-image as victim, and delegitimization of the other side. These themes, which constitute the epistemic basis of the conflict, provide the focal points that contribute to the continuation of the conflict.

\textbf{Functions of the Conflict Narratives}

Narratives are not only responses to political events, serving to provide a comprehensible explanatory cognitive schema; they also actively affect the events by assigning them meaning and thus shaping the political process.\textsuperscript{42} The reciprocal relationship between political events and a collective narrative takes center stage during a conflict, a time when both the epistemic and political functions of narratives are most needed.\textsuperscript{43} Indeed, when one side acts in a conciliatory manner and the other, in light of its narrative-guided perceptions, rejects the move as a public opinion stunt and politically motivated trap, political escalation follows. There are six major functions that narratives of ethos and collective memory accomplish in times of intractable conflict.

First, as noted, collective narratives illuminate the conflict situation. An intractable conflict is extremely threatening, bringing on stress, vulnerability, uncertainty, and fear.\textsuperscript{44} Because of the ambiguity and unpredictability of the conflict situation, individuals need fully to comprehend the conflict in order to draw a meaningful and predictable picture of the situation.\textsuperscript{45} Narratives fulfill these demands, providing information and explanations about the nature of the conflict, answering vital questions: Why did the conflict erupt? What was its course? Why does it continue, and why can it not be resolved peacefully? What is the enemy's responsibility and contribution? How did the in-group act...
in the conflict? What are “our” goals in the conflict, and why are they existential? What challenges face society?

Second, narratives justify the acts of the in-group toward the enemy, including violence and destruction, allowing group members to carry out misdeeds, cause intentional harm, and institutionalize aggression toward the enemy. This function of the narrative resolves group members’ feelings of dissonance, guilt, and shame. Human beings who behave normally do not usually harm other human beings. Sanctity of life is one of the most sacred values in modern societies. Killing or even hurting other human beings is considered the most serious violation of the moral code. In an intractable conflict, however, groups hurt each other in severe ways, resorting even to atrocities, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. Narratives allow this violence; they enable individuals to attribute their immoral behavior to external factors.

The belief that we are the victims and they are the perpetrators, a self-perception of righteousness and superiority, is justification to harm the other side. Such self-images place one on a higher moral ground, clearing one side of responsibility for acts of violence against the other. In this way one legitimizes one’s actions.

Third, narratives create a sense of differentiation and superiority. They sharpen intergroup differences by describing opponents in delegitimizing terms while glorifying one’s own group. Since societies involved in intractable conflicts view their own goals as justified and perceive themselves positively, they attribute all responsibility for the outbreak of a conflict and its continuation to the opponent. This narrative focuses on the violence, atrocities, cruelty, lack of concern for human life, and viciousness of the other side. It describes the opponent as inhuman and immoral, and depicts the conflict as irrational, far-reaching, and irreconcilable, thus precluding a peaceful solution.

Fourth, narratives inspire mobilization and action. They justify the goals of the conflict and focus on the delegitimization, intransigence, and violence of the opponent, thus implying the necessity of the group to exert all of its efforts and resources in its struggle against the enemy. Such beliefs arouse patriotism, which leads to a readiness for sacrifice in order to defend the society and the country, and to avenge the enemy’s past violence. Narratives also remind group members of violent acts in the past to indicate that these acts could recur. The group should therefore carry out violent acts to prevent possible harm by the enemy and to avert perceived danger and threat.

Fifth, as mentioned above, narratives affect political events by assigning them particular meanings. One group sees its own political concessions and

compromises, such as Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s conciliatory moves at the Camp David summit in the summer of 2000, as great sacrifices, while the other side, looking through the lenses of its own narrative, dismisses such moves as a smoke screen. Viewing such efforts as insincere, frustration and a sense of betrayal set in and outbursts of violence soon follow. The outbreak of the second intifada soon after the failure of the Camp David summit is a case in point.

Finally, narratives contribute to the formation, maintenance, and strengthening of social identity, which is crucial to any society or group. Individuals must identify themselves as group members for the group to exist, a condition widely accepted by social scientists. A concept of self consists of a collection of self-images that includes both individuating and social categorical characteristics. The former represent personal identity and the latter social identity. Social identity is an identification, to varying degrees of importance, with different groups. It is based on a self-categorization process in which individuals group themselves cognitively as the same, in contrast to other classes of collectives. On this basis, the uniformity and coordination of group behavior emerge.

Clearly self-categorization is fundamental to define oneself as a member of a society, but it is only the initial phase; one must also accept additional beliefs that provide meaning to one’s social identity. Individuals, as thinking creatures, cannot be satisfied with mere self-categorization as a way to become a member of society. An elaborate system of beliefs is needed that justifies and explains their belonging to the group, describes their characteristics and concerns as society members, and explains the meaning of their social identity. The narratives of collective memory and of ethos of conflict fulfill this important function. They provide the contextual basis for social identity.

In view of the important functions that narratives fulfill during intractable conflict, attempts are made to institutionalize them, a process characterized by four features:

1. Extensive sharing. The beliefs of the narratives are widely held by society members, who acquire and store this repertoire as part of their socialization from an early age.
2. Wide application. Institutionalization means that society members not only believe in the narratives but also put them into active use. They surface in daily conversations, are referred to by leaders, and are employed in societal channels of mass communication.
3. **Expression in cultural products.** Institutionalization of the narratives is also expressed in cultural products such as films, TV programs, books, theatrical plays, and so on. They are part of a society’s cultural repertoire, relaying societal views and shaping attitudes. Through these channels such beliefs are broadly disseminated, reaching every public sector.

4. **Appearance in educational materials.** Narrative beliefs are included in the textbooks used for school socialization. A significant element of institutionalization for these beliefs is then disseminated to the society’s younger generation. Moreover, the perceived authority of school textbooks lends an element of truth to such societal beliefs. Given compulsory school attendance in most societies, new generations are exposed to these beliefs and the narratives become part of the political, social, cultural, and educational context of society.

Institutionalizing the narratives consolidates them and facilitates their perseverance and durability, even in the face of contradictory information. Opposing arguments are rejected, and society uses control mechanisms to ensure that its members do not change the narratives or entertain alternate beliefs. During an intractable conflict these beliefs become part of a rigid repertoire resistant to change.

**Consequences of the Narratives**

Collective narratives are socially and psychologically shared constructs and therefore have consequences affecting how information is handled, in much the same way as strongly held conceptions and theories influence perceptions, and anticipatory schemata shape the selection and interpretation of information. This influence is particularly apparent during intractable conflicts when uncertainty reigns and events need to be processed and interpreted in light of a wider conceptual framework, namely, the narrative that pertains to the conflict.

The consequences of a narrative have to do with the ways one anticipates incoming information and selectively processes, encodes, interprets, recalls, and acts upon that information. When members of a society strongly adhere to a narrative, which is typical in a time of intractable conflict, they tend to absorb what fits the content of the narrative and dismiss the information that opposes it.

As Rapoport describes, society members often expect that their hypotheses about their adversary will be confirmed. For example, anticipating that a rival group will be negatively disposed to them, they act accordingly. Because they suspect the adversary of negative intentions and behavior, they themselves act toward the rival group in a negative way, instigating hostility and animosity, and thus confirming the initial expectations and creating a vicious circle of resentment.

Narrative-guided expectations are realized in a sequence of steps that begins with paying selective attention to certain information and excluding other information incongruent to the narrative. Sensitivity toward narrative-congruent information is heightened, leading to increased bias against certain other kinds of information—a bias fueled by people’s apparent proclivity to confirm rather than deny expectations. This pattern is influenced by hatred of the opposition and the creation of emotionally laden linguistic labels, such as “Arabs.”

Acceptable information is encoded in ways that allow it to be assimilated into preexisting schemata. Once encoded, the information is processed more elaborately and rehearsed more frequently than information that does not fit expectations. The information thus becomes more resistant to being disproved, increasing a group’s confidence in the truth of the information as selected, encoded, and processed.

The information is also interpreted by more sophisticated theories such as the idea of a collective narrative. Believing that those on the other side are “conservatives,” people interpret the opposing views on contentious issues as more extreme than their own, displaying what has been termed “naive realism.” The peace-oriented gestures of both Palestinian and Israeli leaders are another case in point. These gestures are consistently rejected by the other side as no more than political maneuvers, such as the one made by President Bashar Assad of Syria in late 2003 and by Israel’s president Ariel Sharon in early 2004. Both offers, interpreted as ill-intended, were dismissed outright as not worthy of serious consideration.

Finally, information that conforms to the narrative is better remembered and more easily recalled. Spread repeatedly through various channels of communication, the narrative is ever present in the minds of society members. Bodenhausen has shown that people can better recall information that is incongruizing, rather than explicatory, regarding a negatively stereotyped group, as a function of the way that the evidence was initially processed. Banaji and Bhaskar’s findings support this claim, namely, that new information congruent with prior-held knowledge is better recalled.
Finally, it should be stressed that although the narratives that evolve in a conflict situation enable those involved to adapt better to conditions of intractable conflict, these narratives also maintain and prolong the conflict. They become a prism through which society members construe their reality, collect new information, interpret their experiences, and make decisions about their course of action. Participation in an intractable conflict tends to “close minds” and facilitate a tunnel vision that precludes a consideration of contrasting information and alternative approaches to conflict resolution.

Implications for Reconciliation

Clearly, any move by society members toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict and eventual reconciliation requires changing the collective narratives. This in turn requires the adoption of a psychological point of view that serves not only to understand the conflict but also to examine possible avenues for reconciliation and associated dilemmas. These issues are discussed at greater length elsewhere.

Recently Bar-Tal elaborated on the type of psychological changes that he considers necessary for reconciliation. He specified the modification of five narrative themes formed during the conflict, namely, themes surrounding the groups’ goals, attitudes toward the rival group, ideas about one’s own group, relationship with the opponent, and peace.

The group’s goals. An important change for achieving reconciliation concerns the narrative regarding the justness of the goals underlying the outbreak and maintaining the conflict. If not abolishing this narrative altogether, the societal aspirations expressed in the narrative goals that caused the conflict need to be indefinitely postponed. New societal beliefs about goals must be formed—beliefs that propose new goals for the society that are shaped by the conflict resolution agreement and that focus on maintaining peaceful relations with the former enemy. These new beliefs also must rationalize and justify the new goals, including new symbols and myths.

The rival group. Another condition for reconciliation is a change in the perception of the adversary. In times of conflict, opponents are delegitimized in order to explain their aberrant behavior, as well as the outbreak and continuation of the conflict, and to justify the negative actions taken against them. Instead, opponents need to be legitimized and personalized: legitimization grants humanity to adversaries and allows them to be viewed as an acceptable group with which to maintain peaceful relations; personalization enables hostile groups to view their rivals as humane, trustworthy, individuals with legitimate needs and goals. The new beliefs also need to embody a balanced stereotype of the adversary that acknowledges both positive and negative characteristics. Finally, this new way of thinking should envision the opponent not only as a perpetrator of the conflict but also as a victim.

One’s own group. In a conflict situation each group tends to maintain a one-sided, glorified self-image that ignores and censors any information that may shed a negative light on the group. In the reconciliation process each group must take responsibility for its role in the outbreak of the conflict, its contribution to the violence including its immoral behavior, and its refusal to engage in a peaceful resolution. Simply put, the new societal beliefs need to portray one’s own group in a complex multifaceted way. As noted, acknowledging one’s own contribution to the conflict is essential for reconciliation.

Relationship with the opponent. Societal beliefs during a conflict support confrontation and animosity. To promote reconciliation, new beliefs need to stress friendship and cooperation, especially equality and mutual sensitivity to the needs, goals, and general well-being of the other. These new beliefs must present past relations within a new framework that revises the collective memory and synchronizes the former rivals.

Peace. Both parties in an intractable conflict yearn for peace but view peace in amorphous and utopian terms without specifying realistic ways to achieve it. New societal beliefs must be formed that recognize the multidimensional nature of peace, outline the true costs and benefits of achieving it, understand what it means to live in peace, and specify the conditions and mechanisms for its achievement—such as negotiating and compromising with the rival. Maintaining peace requires ongoing sensitivity and attention to the needs and goals of the other.

Acknowledging the past, particularly the injustices and harm each side has done to the other, is crucial for reconciliation. Collective memory holds a firm grip on people’s shared identities, beliefs, and attitudes toward the other. Such beliefs are not easily shaken, as they facilitate the group’s collective sense of purpose. Reconciliation, it is widely agreed, requires the formation of a fresh common outlook of the past, a change in collective memories. Once this common outlook is achieved, both parties move significantly closer to mutually effective peace. As Hayner noted: “Where fundamentally different versions or continued denials about such important and painful events still exist, reconciliation may be only superficial.”

Does allowing historical memories to surface facilitate or hinder reconcilia-
tion attempts? Devine-Wright argued that highlighting historical memories is not helpful as it can easily lead to entrenchment. 56 Maoz has shown, however, that historical memories may be unavoidable. 57 Sometimes, the stronger side in a conflict wants to look toward a bright future, evading the past if at all possible, while the weaker side wants to return to past events to emphasize the harm done to it. When the stronger group does not acknowledge the damage that it has done, reconciliation is jeopardized. 58

As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and To Reflect and Trust (TRT) workshops suggest, facing personal history that is embedded in collective history may well be a necessary step in attaining reconciliation. 59 In Bar-On's words: "Probably the acknowledgment and working through process of the Holocaust that took place in the original TRT group enabled the Jewish-Israeli members to acknowledge and start to work through their role in relation to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict." 60 Reconciliation implies that both parties not only go over what happened in the past but also truly acknowledge past events. 61 Indeed, recognition and acknowledgment is "given urgency by the supposed link between recognition and identity." 62

A related issue is the expectation of mutual legitimization of each side's collective narrative. Because a major outcome of collective narratives is the delegitimization of the other side's narrative, a major goal toward peace is to legitimize the narrative of the other group. 63 One may argue that when there are grave inequalities between the two sides, with one side feeling oppressed by the narrative-guided actions of the other, mutual legitimization is unattainable. 64 In some cases, therefore, progress can be achieved in the peace process only when modest goals are set. 65

Legitimization may not need to pertain to all of the components of the narrative. Different elements of collective narratives, as in all ideologies, have different degrees of significance. 66 The existence or abolition of a Jewish independent state in Israel is central to both the Israeli and Palestinian narratives; it is the precise issue on which the two most sharply disagree. Less important is the belief that members of the other side are inferior. Accepting the humanity of Israelis is clearly a far easier task for Palestinians than legitimizing the basic tenets of the Zionist narrative. Bar-Natan has recently found that developing interpersonal relationships between Jewish and Israeli-Palestinian youth through encounter groups generally makes Jewish participants more willing to have contact with Palestinians and more amenable to accepting the Palestinian perspective on the conflict. 67 Palestinian youth, on the other hand, while generally becoming more agreeable regarding contacts with Jews, do not grow more willing to accept the Israeli-Jewish narrative. Nevertheless, although legitimization was only partially achieved in these encounter groups, such interaction may be sufficient to pave the way for reconciliation.

The literature, however, is equivocal on whether contact between members of rival groups facilitates legitimization. 68 Pettigrew provided a list of necessary conditions, but ones difficult to meet, for successful contact between adversaries. 69 Yet, evidence shows that when at least some of these conditions are met, such as intensive interaction or the development of friendships, perceptions change and an adversary's narratives are seen as more legitimate. 70 More important, it has been found that participation in peace education programs, specifically by Palestinian youth, acts as a barrier to perceptions and feelings toward Jews caused by the ongoing intifada. 71

Reconciliation necessitates changing the narratives of collective memories by learning about the rival group's collective memory and admitting one's own past misdeeds and responsibility for contributing to the conflict. Acknowledgment of the past implies at least a recognition that there are two (legitimate) narratives of the conflict. 72 This recognition is an important factor in reconciliation, since the collective memories of each party about its own past underpin the continuation of the conflict and obstruct peacemaking. Through the process of negotiation, in which one's own past is critically revised and synchronized with that of the other group, new narratives can emerge. 73 Given time, this new historical account of events should substitute each side's dominant narrative of collective memory.

**Conclusion**

Societies are bound together by a number of factors, functions, and institutions; prominent among them is the collective narrative with its roots in shared historical memories which supports a narrative of the ethos. In times of conflict, the narratives of the collective memory and the ethos of conflict center around beliefs pertaining to one's righteousness, sense of victimization, delegitimization of the adversary, patriotism, one's desire for peace, and the like. These narratives fulfill crucial functions during the period of conflict. They range from the epistemic function of reducing uncertainties caused by the conflict to providing justification for the conflict situation and the actions taken to cope with it; from the motivational function of mobilization to the facilitation of patriotism; and from the provision of a sense of identity and purpose to that of a sense of uniqueness and superiority. Importantly, narra-
tives also affect actual political and social events and processes by providing their particular interpretations—determining, for example, if an action by the rival is serious or not, a threat, or a genuine gesture of good will, thereby affecting the actual response to these acts. In this sense, narratives that arise in response to the conflict partake in sustaining, even escalating it. Thus they play a part in the developed vicious cycle. Narratives evolve in times of conflict, and they also contribute to its continuation, which in turn reinforces their validity and prevents their change.

In this cycle, one of the consequences of collective narratives during conflict is the way that they affect the handling of conflict-related information such that it will be assimilated into narrative-related mental schemata and thus confirm its contents and beliefs. They determine selective attention, to the exclusion of narrative-incongruent information, information processing, interpretation, and memory. In other words, one can speak of narrative-directed informational bias. Another class of consequences is their effect on political and social events, and the prolongation of the conflict. A third consequence is the delegitimization of the other side's narrative, ethos, and current experiences. The focal point for reconciliation attempts becomes the attainment of the legitimization of the other side's narrative, including the acknowledgment of its history.

NOTES


34. Ian Lustick, Arabs in the Jewish State (Austin, 1982).

35. E.g., Adir Cohen, An Ugly Face in the Mirror: National Stereotypes in Hebrew


45. Burton, Conflict: Maddi, "The Search for Meaning."


53. K. Foster, *Fighting Fiction*.


63. Ross and Ward, "Psychological Barriers."

64. Bodenhausen, "Stereotypic Biases."

65. Banaji and Bhaskar, "Implicit Stereotypes and Memory."


67. Rapoport, *Fights, Games and Debates."


70. Bar-Tal, "From Intractable Conflict."


73. Salomon, "The Nature of Peace Education."

74. Bar-Tal, "Societal Beliefs in Times of Intractable Conflict."


FORGING ZIONIST IDENTITY PRIOR TO 1948—AGAINST WHICH COUNTER-IDENTITY?

DINA PORAT

There is a growing consensus that the identity of a group, whether a people or a nation, is forged not only from within but in relation to other groups against whom certain basic boundaries are defined. Indeed, part of the current widespread critique of Zionism focuses on its alleged historical failure or refusal to develop its identity vis-à-vis the counter identity of the Palestinian Arabs. While acknowledging the relative absence of this particular “other” in Zionist discourse, this chapter proposes that the real “other” decisive for Zionism was the diasporic Jews and everything they represented.

A 1995 collection of essays, The Shaping of Israeli Identity—Myth, Memory, and Trauma, mentions the presence of Arabs on 20 pages out of 238, and does so just en passant. The author of a 1997 research project on The Sabra—A Profile, 480 pages long, devotes 25 of them to the image of the Arab in the pre-1948 Hebrew high school textbooks. The same number of pages mentions Arab nationalism in the classic, The Making of Modern Zionism. The 1998 issue of Israel Affairs, entitled “In Search of Identity: Jewish Aspects in Israeli Culture,” does not mention an Arab impact on the identity dilemma.

In Story of My Life, Dayan described the moment that he understood the complexity of the situation: on the one hand he spoke Arabic and as a younger had close, sometimes even friendly, relations with his Bedouin neighbors (Arab-el-Mazarib) who lived close to Nahalal, the first Hebrew moshav—a collective agricultural settlement—in the valley of Jezreel. His father tried to instill in him the belief that Arabs were inferior and robbers and killers, but he liked their ways of life, appreciated them as workers, tied to the land, engrained in the landscape surrounding me. I had no doubt we could live peacefully with them. When, in the beginning of the 1930s, murders of Jews by the Ez el-Adin el-Kassani underground occurred in the valley, Dayan rode on his horse to the...