Chapter 1
Violence in Prolonged Conflicts and Its Socio-psychological Effects

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Introduction

Violent conflicts between groups are inseparable part of human societies, and have been so for centuries. Recently, scholars have counted at least 240 armed conflicts between the years 1946 and 2008 (Harbom and Wallensteen 2009). Between 1990 through 1996 alone more than 90 armed conflicts took place (Jentleson 1996). Examination of the chronological development of these conflicts reveals several characteristics that may explain the persistence of these conflicts and their violent nature.

Violence in Conflicts

Protracted conflicts are defined as those that persist over a long period of time, despite a series of interventions that typically result in unacceptable settlements (Putnam and Wondolleck 2003). Violence in protracted conflicts usually involves a wide range of aggressive acts, beginning with destructions of properties, refugees' movement, imprisonments, expulsions, through killings and injuries as part of the "normal" violent encounters between the rivals, but also tortures and rapes, and ending with wide scale ethnic cleaning, mass killing and even genocide. Undoubtedly, as the events become harsher and more severe, they cause very severe reactions. Exposure to such violent events has detrimental effects on human beings.

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In addition to violence, prolonged conflicts always involve economic hardship. Such conflicts often lead to destruction that has economic implications. Second, protracted and violent conflicts require tangible spending in military means that, by definition, are at the expense of investments on other spheres of collective life. This may lead to a decrease of economic growth, unemployment and other economic-based hardships. As a result, members of such societies often suffer from economic deprivation. In addition, for many groups involved in vicious and long lasting conflicts, the conflict entails, among other expressions, severe limitations on movement, organization, the practice of religion, the manifestations of cultural identity, and the support of a particular ideology.

Although the reasons for the outbreak of conflicts differ considerably, it can be stated that in general such conflicts begin with a collision between needs or goals of 2 groups (see Bar-Tal 2013). These needs are viewed as existential by both groups. After a conflict erupts, several processes commence and lead to the continuation and/or escalation of the conflict.

Processes of Escalation and Continuation of Conflicts

As noted above, the initial stage of a severe conflict is characterized by a clash between the needs of 2 groups. The needs of one group collide with the needs of the opposing group, yet the first group views its goals as existential. In addition, grievances, objections, and contentions, as well as aspirations, claims and desires of one group are very often not responded with understanding by the other group, but with dismay, rejection, and even are countered with stronger actions. This sets the stage for the evolvement of a violent and protracted conflict.

As a reaction to the objection of needs, the side that raised the grievances or claims resorts to more serious steps in order to make the conflict more salient and more costly to the rival. In return, these steps are met with severe reactions and both sides raise the level of confrontation, entering into spiral cycles of reactions and counter reactions. Escalation also means that at this stage each side is determined to achieve its goals and neither side is ready to compromise, thus turning the conflict into zero-sum and insolvable.

A major qualitative change in the conflict occurs when the parties resort to *violence*. In some cases, the violence appears in the very early stages of the conflict when a party decides to use it in order to win the conflict or to signal its serious intentions. In all these situations, the dominant belief that the other party will yield only under pressure of violence is very central in the group that initiated the violence. Hostile acts are intensified, and include not only verbal rhetoric but acts that can be, as noted earlier, of wide variety. These actions are indicating the adherence to original goals with an attempt to overcome the rival by harming him. The mere use of violence is a very influential element that changes the nature of the conflict. Brubaker and Laitin (1998) observed: *Violence is not a quantitative degree of conflict but a qualitative form of conflict, with its own dynamics* (p. 426).

Why the Common Use of Violence in Protracted Conflicts?

Several factors can explain why parties resort to violence and continue with violent acts, even after these acts have claimed their toll (Bar-Tal 2013; Brubaker and Laitin 1998; Elcheroth and Spini 2011). Thus, in many conflicts use of violence is perceived as a *necessary evil*, mandatory in order to achieve the goals of the party. The party does not see any other way to achieve its goals but with use of violence. In conflicts that are over existential goals, related to the social identity of the group, or are viewed as of zero-sum nature, the use of violence is almost inevitable. This is due to the fact that when contentions are of such a large scale, they are scarcely satisfied by the other party. As a result, the claiming party has no choice but to resort to violence, as the rival party will not satisfy its needs without being forced to do so. In turn, the rival party has no choice but to answer with escalation, as it sees no way to satisfy the claiming party.

Violence also erupts often in conflicts in which one party is *not recognized as a legitimate* side to contentions, when there is a *great disparity of power* and when one side believes that it can *ignore the demands* of the other side, when there is *no institutionalized ways* to deal with the grievances, or when a party believes that using violence is the best way to achieve its goals. Hence, violence erupts in cases where a strong party decides to use it (e.g., the attack of Manchuria by Japan in September 1931), or when a weak party decides that only with violence it can demonstrate its determination and harm the strong rival (e.g., the anti-Apartheid organizations of the African National Congress [ANC] and the Pan Africanist Congress [PAC]).

In addition, the use of violence carries with it *a strong message*. The effects of the symbolic meaning of the violence go far beyond the actual loss of life that is the natural result of the violence. The violence signals the rival that it neither has the deterrent power nor control, that the party has a very strong will, commitment and determination to achieve its goal, that the party is not frightened and even expects retribution, that the party has the power to use violence and therefore resorts to extreme means. The use of violence is thus a powerful message that is well understood by the parties in conflict. Moreover, violence erupts when a party believes that it can *speed the achievement* of the goals by making the conflict very salient and costly to the other party. Also, society members participating in collective violence believe that their participation eventually advances collective well-being and achievement of goals (Ginges and Atran 2008).

Any analysis of violence in conflicts has to note that there are differences in defining violence. Groups greatly differ in this regard, trying to define violence according to their own goals and needs. In fact, one of the important psychological warfare that a group in conflict carries out includes different framings of its own and its rival's violence. Each group in conflict tries to present the violence of the other group as illegitimate, violating basic moral codes, planned, mal-intentional, and carried out because of evil inherent dispositions. At the same time it tries to hide its own violence, minimize its consequences, present it as a result of situational

circumstances, and needed due to the behavior of the opponent (Bar-Tal et al. 2014; Staub 1989; Wohl and Reeder 2004).

Societal Consequences of Violence

Violence transforms the nature of the conflict meaningfully, sowing seeds for an emergence of vicious cycles of violence, for several reasons. First, the *goals of the conflict change:* from gaining the original goals, to harming the opponent and to stopping the opponent's violence. Thus, the goals of violence become somewhat separated from the goals of the conflict. Each side wants to stop the violence of the other side as a goal by itself and launch a revenge for the harm inflicted (Bar-Tal 2013). Pruit and Kim (2004) suggest that escalation indicates that the parties transformed their orientation. They moved from the wish to achieve goals to the desire to harm the opponent. In this line, Elcheroth and Spini (2011) make a convincing argument that the violence not only produces intensive animosity and hatred that feeds into the escalation of the conflict, but also transforms the involved groups into *confrontational societies*.

In long conflicts, groups may use a wide range of violent acts in order to stop the violence of the other group. Many parties increase the level of violence considerably, assuming that its increase will lead to cessation of violence by the rival group. In reality, however, the escalation frequently leads to spiral increases of violence as each side increases its own violence as a response to the violence of the other side. This leads to continuous violence that can be called *cultural violence* (Bar-Tal 2003; Galtung 1990).

Second, the violence leads to a *change in society norms*. Violence has an imprinting effect on the society that contributes to the escalation of the conflict (Elcheroth and Spini 2011). Once violence begins and enters into a vicious cycle, societies members develop new norms towards violence, harming and killing, which go well beyond the defined codes of moral behavior. First, together with the delegitimization of the rival and own perception, the victim develops a rational that "permits" harming the enemy. Following this, performance of acts of violence desensitizes the performers, leads to moral disengagement and, as a result, parties become capable and motivated to carry violence of wider scope and increased immorality (Bar-Tal et al. 2009). It becomes habitual and routinized activities that individuals can carry and involved societies tolerate and even encourage (Archer and Gartner 1984). Moreover, Lickel et al. (2006) proposed that use of violence leads to vicarious retribution: in-group members feel morally justified to avenge the harm incurred by an in-group member, by harming any member of the out-group. Cohrs and Boehnke (2008) have summarized general findings that bear on public support for violence. Generally, public attitudes toward use of violence are more supportive if society members: (1) perceive that an adversary poses a collective threat (2) feel angry and outraged, and (3) had suffered harm.

A third consequence of the violence is the development of an *encapsulated environment of conflict*. Ongoing information about the conflict flows continuously in societies engulfed by protracted conflicts. This information is mostly negative and touches on such topics as performed violent acts, various future threats, economic negative prognosis, and restrictions of freedom. It creates an encapsulated environment in which the participating society members live. They hear about the conflict, its effects and implications in all spheres of life on a daily basis. The conflict, with its events and processes, becomes an inseparable part of the lives of society members, through personal experiences and through absorption of information. This daily life reflects the banality of the conflict life.

Personal Consequences of Living in a Society in a Protracted Conflict

The violence embedded in protracted conflicts causes individuals to be exposed to such violence. This can be as a result of direct participation in violence (e.g., as soldiers or fighters); as being victims of harm inflicted on civilian population; as directly observing violence; or as society members that are provided information about violence of the conflict through various channels of communication. All these experiences are not mutually exclusive, and a person can be exposed to various forms of violence, through different ways.

Violent and prolonged conflicts inflict severe and harsh negative experiences, such as threat, pain, exhaustion, grief, trauma, misery, insecurity, fear, hardship, and cost, both in human and material terms (see for example, Collier 1999; de Jong 2002; Hobfoll et al. 1989; Kalyvas 2006; Milgram 1986). Such conflicts demand extensive psychological investment in their continuation, which could lead to state of chronic fatigue and exhaustion. Milgram (1986) proposed that the effects of these experiences should be evaluated on the basis of their duration, intensity, multiplicity, palpability, probability and personal relevance. Thus, it is possible to say that they have more effects on the participating society members the more durable the conflicts, the more intense they become, the more often they occur, the more repeatedly they take place on a wider scale, and the more probable their occurrence is.

In cases of prolonged and violent conflict all these parameters exist. The negative experiences are not limited to a defined period of time, but last for years, decades and sometimes even centuries. In most cases, society members cannot predict when the conflict will end or even when it will deescalate. Moreover, the negative experiences are, from time to time, even of very high intensity and are repeated time after time often on a very wide scale, as there is no member who does not experience them – at least vicariously. In many cases, almost every society member was either hurt, suffered economic hardship, observed violence, and had

someone close who suffered or experienced the violence through mass media and personal stories. Thus, the negative experiences are relevant to almost all, if not all, society members involved in these protracted and violent conflicts.

Chronic Threat

One of the salient characteristics of protracted and violent conflicts is chronic threats. These threats may pertain to loss of life, injuries and loss of housing or jobs. Many of these threats are continuous and disturb the flow of normal life. Also, these conflicts often lead to behaviors that violate moral codes. Thus, society members may experience distress as result of guilt and shame. These feelings pose threat to positive social identity as well as to personal esteem. Society members do not have to perform immoral acts themselves in order to feel threats to their identity, as it is enough to be members of the group in which other members carry these acts to be in a state of threat. All these deprivations lead to negative psychological reactions, such as feelings of distress, exhaustions, hardship, misery and suffering.

In this analysis it is possible to rely on the conceptualization of Stephan et al. (Stephan and Renfro 2002; Stephan et al. 2008), who proposed that 2 types of threats play a major role in intergroup relations: *realistic* and *symbolic threats*, on the group and individual levels. *Realistic threats* refer to beliefs about possible human losses, or about losses and harms of a territory, resources, economy, power, status, or general welfare. *Symbolic threats* refer to world views about harms in religious, political, moral, and/or cultural system of beliefs, attitudes and values. Thus, experiences of threat in their large scope are a dominant factor that has major implications on the life of societies involved in protracted violent conflicts.

The following sections will detail some of the major consequences of contexts of prolonged and violent conflicts with its psychological conditions of threat (Bar-Tal and Halperin 2013). The heart of these consequences lies in the fact that participants in violent conflicts are exposed to violence and threats.

Psychological Distress

Numerous studies conducted in various conflict settings around the world documented the prevalence of stressful experiences that such conflicts entail, as well as the adverse effects of these experiences have on the mental health of members of conflict societies. *Posttraumatic reactions* and *depression* are the most commonly investigated psychiatric responses to conflict-related violence exposure. Studies indicate that exposed adults show higher levels of distress, expressed in posttraumatic reactions (Besser et al. 2009; Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; de Jong et al. 2001; Galea et al. 2002; Muldoon and Downes 2007)

and depression (Bolton et al. 2002; Canetti et al. 2010; Galea et al. 2002). These reactions are not limited to adults, who are often active participants in conflicts, but characterize exposed children's reactions (Almqvist and Broberg 1999; Dyregrov et al. 2000; Lavi and Slone 2011).

It is important to note that while most studies show a relation between exposure to conflict-related events and distress, studies exemplifying resilience in the face of such events are also prevalent. For instance, a study conducted in Israel that examined the effects of conflict-related trauma exposure on posttraumatic and depressive reactions did not find such a relation (Bleich et al. 2003). In addition, the relative focus given to posttraumatic and depressive symptoms has been accompanied by a parallel focus on a wider range of positive and negative effects, such as optimism, help-seeking, coping (Bleich et al. 2003), posttraumatic growth (Hall et al. 2010) insecure attachment (Besser et al. 2009), and chemical use/abuse (Vlahov et al. 2004). These studies demonstrate both the wide ranging effect of exposure to such events and that the effects are pervasive and not confined to posttraumatic and depressive reactions. In sum, psychological distress that results from exposure to violence in conflicts leads to a broad marker of painfully experienced emotions, cognitions and behaviors, which may consequently lead to deterioration in functioning and to other health problems.

Loss of Resources

The 'conservation of resources theory' (COR theory) (Hobfoll 1988, 1989) is an example of particular theory that deals with the effects of exposure to violence, may serve as an explanation to the exposure-distress link described above. COR theory is based on the tenet that people strive to obtain, retain, and protect their resources. Resources are defined as objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that people value. Exposure to traumatic events increases psychological distress because it results in both major and rapid loss of personal and social resources. Resistance to the effects of stress is due to having or investing resources. Persons who lack additional resources are less capable to obtain new resources and are therefore more vulnerable to further losses and to the effects to stressful situations. One additional main feature of COR theory is that resources gain salience during times of actual or threatened loss (Hobfoll 1989, 2002). Empirical studies have shown that loss of resources mediates the relation between exposure to conflict-related violence and psychological distress (Canetti et al. 2010).

This cycle of resource loss may itself be a multi-step process. First, exposure to violence may result in loss of objective resources. People may lose friends and family, employment opportunities or the ability to work due to destruction of workplace settings, safety going to work, and downturns in the economy. Resources can be lost directly due to exposure to violence, for example, when family or close

friends are killed or injured or where places of employment are destroyed. Also, the threat of violence has an effect, for instance, when individuals may restrict their social relationships due to fear of going out. These objective losses are, in turn, linked to loss of what has been termed higher level of management resources (Thoits 1994), specifically, generalized self-efficacy and perceived social support. As both objective resources and perceived management resources diminish, people are more likely to develop psychological distress in the form of posttraumatic reactions, depression, and other psychological symptoms. They are also more likely to perform other unhealthy behaviors in terms of increased chemical use/abuse and increased smoking. Those who are able to sustain greater generalized self-efficacy and perceived social support will, however, be less likely to develop psychological distress, and will be less likely to increase their use/abuse of chemicals and smoking.

In particular, generalized self-efficacy and perceived social support will have both direct effects limiting psychological distress, and compromised health behavior. These management resources also have stress-moderator effects, limiting the otherwise deleterious impact of exposure to violence. Further, when multiple acts of violence occur, even those who originally had strong resource reservoirs are likely to experience increased levels of resource loss – resource loss cycles. Nevertheless, those with greater self-efficacy and social support will still have more favorable outcomes.

In addition to psychological distress, literature accumulated on the effects of exposure indicated several more cognitive-oriented effects: higher levels of mistrust, negative emotions and threat perceptions.

Mistrust

The continuation of the conflict leads to heightened levels of mistrust between the individuals of rival parties (see Bar-Tal et al. 2010). Mistrust denotes lasting expectations about future behaviors of the rival group that affect welfare of the in-group and does not allow taking risks in various lines of behaviors (Bar-Tal et al. 2010). These expectations refer to the intentional negative behaviors of the rival group that have an effect on the welfare and well-being of the in-group, as well as to the capability that the rival groups has to carry these negative behaviors. Since these 2 lines of expectation are orthogonal, in cases of severe conflict the group expects only harming acts and does not expect any positive behaviors by the rival. Attribution of mal-intentions of the rival to stable dispositions with the rival's high capability leads to very high level of mistrust.

Mistrust is an integral part of any prolonged and violent conflict, at least in its initial escalating phase. It can develop without eruption of violence, on the basis of the deteriorating relations during the outbreak of the conflict. It develops because the parties do not see any possibility to reach an agreement and embark on the path of serious confrontation (Webb and Worchel 1986). The use of violence increases

levels of mistrust greatly. In fact, violence continuously validates mistrust of the rival because of the intentional harm inflicted on the group.

At the same time, mistrust forces carrying out negative defensive behaviors such as retribution for the harm already afflicted. But it also may lead to preemptive violent acts with the intention to prevent possible harm by deterring the rival. Mistrust also closes a possibility of any meaningful channel of communication that can advance peaceful solution to the conflict. In all cases of protracted conflicts, mistrust is part of the hostility syndrome that, together with violence and delegitimization of the rival, leads to its escalation.

Emotions in Times of Conflict

Participation in conflict with its exposure to violence and threats leads to negative emotions (Halperin et al. 2011). In the early stages of escalation of a conflict, emotions of anger, fear and hatred are highly characteristic. Perception of events as unjust, unfair or as deviating from acceptable societal norms leads to *anger* (Averill 1982), and so do appraisals of relative strength and high coping potential (Mackie et al. 2000). Anger is related to attribution of blame to the out-group (Halperin 2008b; Small et al. 2006), support of continued military responses (Cheung-Blunden and Blunden 2008; Huddy et al. 2007; Lerner et al. 2003; Skitka et al. 2006), appraisal of future military attacks as less risky (Lemer and Keltner 2001) and forecast of more positive consequences of such attacks (Huddy et al. 2007).

Perceived threat and danger to individuals and/or their environment or society lead to the development of *fear* (Gray 1989; Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal 2006). Fear is related to increased risk estimates and pessimistic predictions (Lerner and Keltner 2001), appraisal of low strength and low control over the situation (Roseman 1984), and to a tendency to avoid confrontation and to create a safe environment (Frijda et al. 1989; Huddy et al. 2007; Lerner et al. 2003; Roseman et al. 1994). Once fear is evoked, it limits the activation of other mechanisms of regulation and stalls consideration of various alternatives because of its egocentric and mal-adaptive patterns of reactions to situations that require creative and novel solutions for coping. Empirical evidence shows that fear has limiting effects on cognitive processing. It tends to cause adherence to known situations and avoidance of risky, uncertain and novel ones; it tends to cause cognitive freezing, which reduces openness to new ideas and resistance to change (Clore et al. 1994; Isen 1990; Jost et al. 2003; Le Doux 1995, 1996).

Finally, fear motivates defense and protection from events that are perceived as threatening. When defense and protection are not efficient, fear may lead to aggressive acts against the perceived source of threat (Bandura and Walters 1959). That is, when in fear, human beings sometimes tend to cope by initiating fight, even when there is little or nothing to be achieved by doing so (Blanchard and

Blanchard 1984; Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Sütterlin 1990; Jarymowicz 2002; Plutchik 1990).

Hatred in times of conflict is directed at the rival group and denounces them fundamentally and all inclusively (Sternberg 2003). It is a secondary, extreme, negative emotion (Royzman et al. 2005; Sternberg and Sternberg 2008) with a potentially destructive impact on intergroup relations (Halperin 2008b; Petersen 2002; Volkan 1997). It is the most destructive emotional sentiment that influences beliefs, attitudes and behaviors at the stage of conflict outbreak. It is associated with very low expectations for positive change and with high levels of despair. This is because it involves appraisal of the behavior of the out-group as stemming from a deep-rooted, permanent evil character. As with anger, hatred automatically increases support for initiating violent actions and for escalating the conflict (Halperin 2008a; Staub 2005).

Political Extremism

The distress and negative emotions that result from exposure to conflict-related violence are not the final consequence of this exposure. The relation between exposure to violence and political extremism has also been studied. In the context of the effects of conflict-related violence, political extremism has been largely defined as beliefs that express support for less liberal-democratic values, norms or attitudes: what is generally termed right-wing authoritarianism (Canetti-Nisim 2003). Interestingly, exposure does not affect political extremism directly. Recent explorations reveal that being exposed to such violence does lead to political extremism, but only through the mediation of negative emotions such as hatred (Halperin et al. 2009) and through psychological distress and threat perceptions (Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009). As will be detailed below, these extreme views serve a psychological need, as they justify the personal sacrifices that are a part of the conflict. These views also contribute to further escalation of the conflict and lead to its perpetuation.

Deprivation of Needs

The experiences by group members living under conditions of prolonged and violent conflict also lead to a deep deprivation of their needs. Fulfillment of physiological needs is a precondition for human survival; yet, the fulfillment of psychological needs has a crucial role for human functioning as individuals and as a part of a collective. Deci and Ryan (2000) defined psychological needs as *nutriments that are essential for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being* (p. 229).

First, in times of violent and prolonged conflict, society members live under continuous situation of uncertainty and ambiguity. They do not know when the next round of violence will take place, when an act of violence will occur, when something bad will happen to them or to someone dear to them. They live in a world that not always has a meaning to them. Questions regarding the goals of the rival and its violent behavior arise, as well as questions regarding goals of their own group and wisdom to engage in the conflict. In such a context, individuals often feel they do not have a control over the situation and they do not have mastery over their fate. They feel they live in an unpredictable setting of helplessness and hopelessness.

The deprived psychological needs are various: epistemic needs, mastery needs, safety needs, needs to be right (justice needs), and positive personal and social identity. Thus, prolonged and violent conflicts lead to a state of deprivation of these needs and to threats of further deprivation, which create difficulties, hardship and suffering (Azar 1986; Burton 1990; Galtung 1996; Staub 1989; Staub and Bar-Tal 2003).

Positive Influences

In parallel to the harsh effects of conflicts, the context of violent conflicts also raises feelings of resentment, a striving for justice, feelings of determination and a sense of solidarity. Also, during these conflicts collective life is marked by continuous confrontation that requires mobilization and sacrifice of the group members. These experiences may be called positive as they play a major role in energizing and mobilizing society members to take part in the protracted conflict. These experiences lead to achievement of goals and collective self-efficacy and sense of accomplishment. They underlie a feeling of pride and satisfaction that are very important for enhancement of motivation and mobilization.

Societal and Personal Coping with the Challenges of Living in a Violent and Prolonged Conflict

From a socio-psychological perspective, adaptation to violent and prolonged conflicts requires meeting 3 basic challenges: coping with stress, satisfying deprived needs and facilitating the confrontation with the enemy by constructing a meaningful, coherent, and systematic perspective of the conflict (Bar-Tal 2007, 2011).

Coping with Stress

Learning to cope with stress, fears, and other negative psychological phenomena that accompany violent and prolonged conflict situations is an essential challenge of living (Mitchell 1981). Societies involved in these conflicts are required to live under difficult conditions of violence, human loss, threat and danger, demands for resources, and other hardships for extended periods of time. Therefore, one of the challenges that involved societies face is the development of appropriate psychological mechanisms, on both individual and collective levels, for coping with these difficult conditions of stress.

Satisfying Deprived Needs

During prolonged and violent conflicts it is necessary to satisfy needs that remain deprived, such as psychological needs of knowing, feeling certainty, mastery, safety, and positive identity (Lederer 1980; Staub 2011). If people are to function properly as individuals and society members, their needs must be fulfilled (Maslow 1954). Specifically, as described, epistemic, safety, mastery and positive self-evaluation needs are especially compromised due to the continuation of a violent conflict, and they need to be met (Maslow 1954; Tajfel 1981).

Facilitating the Confrontation with the Enemy by Constructing a Meaningful and Coherent Perspective on the Conflict

Adaptation requires development of socio-psychological conditions that will be conducive to successfully withstanding the rival group, that is, to try to win the conflict or, at least, not to lose it. Successful withstanding enables groups to maintain intense conflict with an opponent over time, with all concomitant challenges and adjustments that this context entails on a personal and societal level. Groups have to prepare themselves for a long struggle and this requires recruitment and mobilization of society members and immense investment in material resources. For these purposes, they first need to develop well-grounded justification for the conflict as well as a system of socio-psychological conditions such as care, loyalty, commitment to a society and country, adherence to the society's goals, high motivation to contribute, persistence, readiness for personal sacrifice, unity, solidarity, determination, courage, and endurance.

Evolvements of Functional Socio-psychological Repertoire

In view of the described above, societies develop a *functional socio-psychological repertoire* that allows meeting the above 3 challenges. This repertoire includes shared beliefs, attitudes, affects and emotions and provides the necessary condition for successful adaptation to the conditions of prolonged and violent conflict (Bar-Tal 2007, 2011).

This view on functioning of a constructed societal belief system is based on previous works indicating that in times of stress and deprivation there is need to form a world view that provides meaning. The concept of *finding meaning* is commonly defined as an ability to integrate experiences into a world view that is coherent, comprehensible and makes sense of the situation (Davis et al. 1998). Numerous theories have addressed the role of meaning in the coping process and its relationship to an organizing worldview. Some of these theories have provided general definitions of the concept of meaning and outline worldviews that provide meaning, whereas others have developed and elaborated particular worldviews that contribute to meaningful coping.

Frankl (1963, 1978) developed his approach partly on the basis of his experiences in a concentration camp during the Holocaust. Frankl observed that a central characteristic of individuals who were able to cope and survive under extremely difficult conditions was the ability to *transcend* their immediate survival concerns and find meaning and purpose in their struggles and suffering. According to his approach, believing that there is a person, idea or value that is worth fighting for, as well as being able to identify opportunities in given situations, are crucial factors that facilitate both survival under extremely difficult conditions and high quality of life in more normal circumstances.

Similarly, according to Antonovsky (1987), who worked in Israel with stressful conflict experiences, the most important factor that contributes to successful coping with traumatic events and prevents their adverse effects on health is a *sense of coherence*. In his view, sense of coherence is a general cognitive orientation comprised of 3 themes: comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. *Comprehensibility* is defined as the extent to which individuals perceive information that they encounter as making sense as well as being consistent, structured, clear, and predictable. *Manageability* refers to the extent to which individuals perceive the resources at their disposal or at the disposal of legitimate others as adequate for meeting the demands posed by stimuli in their environment. *Meaningfulness* refers to the extent to which individuals experience life emotionally as making sense, and believe that certain life domains are worthy of an investment of effort, energy, and commitment even if they pose difficulties and demands. In other words, a sense of meaningfulness involves seeing difficult stressful situations as a challenge rather than a burden.

According to Taylor (1983), most people are capable of adapting and coping successfully with difficult threatening events. Coping with threatening events requires a process of *Cognitive Adaptation*, which involves 3 component processes.

The first process is *a search for meaning* in the threatening event, which involves attempts to understand the causes of the event, its significance, its symbolism for the individual and its implications for the individual's life in the present and future. Finding meaning facilitates the second process of cognitive adaptation, which is *a sense of mastery* and control over the threatening event and a belief that it can be prevented from recurring. The third process involved in cognitive adaptation is *self-enhancement*. Threatening events often take a toll on individuals' self-esteem, and therefore the process of adaptation involves the restoration of positive self-esteem. Self-enhancement is achieved by focusing on the positive consequences of the threatening events and by making downward comparisons, i.e., comparing one's own condition to the conditions of those who are even less fortunate.

According to *Terror Management Theory (TMT)*, humans have developed sophisticated intellectual capacities, which enable self-awareness and recognition of the inevitability of death (Greenberg et al. 2008, 1997; Solomon et al. 1991). This recognition gives rise to the *terror of death*, but also encourages creation of a mechanism for managing and controlling this terror. One of the human mechanisms of *terror management* is culture, which includes beliefs about the world, nature and reality that are shared by humans belonging to various groups. The world view constructed in a culture allows individuals to perceive the world and human existence as meaningful, orderly and stable, and instills standards of significant values that give reasons to live.

Living up to these standards contributes to individuals' sense of self-esteem by means of a cultural promise of literal or symbolic immortality. Symbolic immortality is provided by identifying with collectives that are larger and longer lasting than the individual, as well as with their system of beliefs. Hirschberger and Pyszczynski (2010, 2011) applied this line of thoughts to situations of violent conflicts and pointed out that in times of threats individuals tend to support coherent and simplistic militaristic views that fuel the continuation of the intergroup conflict. In this line, a study by Landau et al. (2004) showed that in the USA increased salience of mortality in view of threats (9/11 terror attack) led to bolstering of adherence to symbols and policies that constitute the dominant cultural worldview, propagating a patriotic position.

Socio-psychological Infrastructure

Thus, in line with the above described approaches it is suggested that society members develop a specific *socio-psychological repertoire* that allows them to view the conflict situation in a comprehensive, coherent and meaningful way. This repertoire supplies an understanding as to fundamental questions regarding the conflict: what is the conflict about, why it erupted, why the rival opposes the goals of the in-group and resorts to violence, why the in-group has to struggle violently for the goals, what is the difference between the in-group and the rival,

why the conflict continues for such a long time, what are the conditions that facilitate coping with the rival, and so on.

With time, this repertoire turns into a *socio-psychological infrastructure*, which means that the shared repertoire gradually crystallizes into a well-organized system of societal beliefs, attitudes and emotions and penetrates into institutions and communication channels of the society. This socio-psychological infrastructure consists of 3 central interrelated elements: collective memories, ethos of conflict and collective emotional orientation (Bar-Tal 2007, 2011).

Collective memory consists of societal beliefs that present the history of the conflict to society members (Cairns and Roe 2003; Connerton 1989; Halbwachs 1992; Wertsch 2002). This narrative develops over time, and the societal beliefs describe the conflict's eruption and its course, providing a coherent and meaningful picture (Devine-Wright 2003). *Ethos of conflict* is defined as a configuration of central societal shared beliefs that provide particular dominant orientation to a society and give meaning to the societal life, under the conditions of prolonged and violent conflict[1] (Bar-Tal 2000). It supplies the epistemic basis for the hegemonic social consciousness of the society and serves as one of the foundations of societal life in times of protracted conflict (Bar-Tal et al. 2012). *Collective emotional orientation* refers to the characterizing tendency of a society to express 1 or more particular emotions under the conditions of prolonged and violent conflict (Bar-Tal 2001; Bar-Tal et al. 2007).

Recently, Sharvit (2008) carried studies within the present conceptual framework and showed experimentally that when individuals are exposed to stress, they adhere to societal beliefs of ethos of conflict in an unconscious way. She suggested that the reasons for this high accessibility and easy activation of the ethos beliefs among Israeli Jews are their acquisition at an early developmental stage and the constant exposure to it due to its frequent expressions in societal channels of communication. These findings held true across all the sectors of the Jewish Israeli society, including liberal-dovish middle-upper class.

Lavi et al. (2014) carried a wide scale study which examined the effect of ethos of conflict among Israeli Jews and Palestinians in the territories under the rule of the Palestinian Authority. Results of this study show that in violent and stressful context of prolonged conflicts, the ethos of conflict has a protective function. As

[1] Ethos of conflict is composed of 8 major themes about issues related to the conflict, the ingroup, and its adversary: societal beliefs about (1) *justness of one's own goals*, which outlines the contested goals, indicates their crucial importance, and provides their explanations and rationales; (2) *security*, stresses the importance of personal safety and national survival, and outlines the conditions for their achievement; (3) *positive collective self-image*, concerns the ethnocentric tendency to attribute positive traits, values, and behavior to one's own society; (4) *victimization*, concerns the self-presentation of the ingroup as the victim of the conflict; (5) *delegitimizing the opponent*, concerns beliefs that deny the adversary's humanity; (6) *patriotism*, generates attachment to the country and society, by propagating loyalty, love, care, and sacrifice; (7) *unity*, refers to the importance of ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements during intractable conflicts to unite the society's forces in the face of an external threat; Finally, (8) *peace*, refers to peace as the ultimate desire of the society (Bar-Tal 2000, 2007; Rouhana and Bar-Tal 1998).

a kind of ideology, it enables society members to find predictability and meaningfulness, even when they are confronted with harsh events of violence, much like a system justifying beliefs (Jost and Hunyady 2003). In addition, ethos of conflict adherence may reduce experience of stress because it may affect the appraisal of violent events – that is, society members who adhere to ethos of conflict tend to believe that the conflict is mandatory, cannot be avoided, and therefore they accept the violence as consequences of the unavoidable conflict. Finally, adherence to ethos of conflict may also effect secondary appraisal (Lazarus and Folkman 1984), by fostering determination and a sense of control that assists in making post-event coping decisions. When exposed to violent events, society members with high ethos endorsement may believe that they are a part of a nation that has been coping with hardships for centuries, and thus has the stamina to continue coping.

Culture of Conflict

Eventually, the infrastructure of collective memory, ethos of conflict and collective emotional orientation becomes well institutionalized and disseminated and thus serves as a foundation to the development of a culture of conflict that dominates societies engaged in protracted conflicts (Bar-Tal 2013). A *Culture of conflict* develops when societies saliently integrate into their culture tangible and intangible symbols which are created to communicate a particular meaning about the prolonged and continuous experiences of living in the context of conflict (Geertz 1973; Ross 1998). Symbols of conflict become hegemonic elements in the culture of societies involved in protracted conflict. They provide a dominant meaning of the present reality, of the past, and of future goals, and serve as guides for practice. Solidification of the socio-psychological infrastructure, as an indication of the development of culture of conflict, includes the 4 following features:

(1) Extensive sharing: beliefs of the socio-psychological infrastructure and the accompanying emotions are widely shared by society members. Society members acquire and store this repertoire as part of their socialization from an early age on. *(2) Wide application*: institutionalization means that the repertoire is not held by society members only, but also put into active use by them in their daily conversations, being chronically accessible. In addition, it appears to be dominant in public discourse via societal channels of mass communication. It is often used for justification and explanation of decisions, policies and courses of actions taken by leaders. Finally, it is also expressed in institutional ceremonies, commemorations, memorials and so on. *(3) Expression in cultural products*: the institutionalization of the socio-psychological infrastructure also occurs through cultural products such as literary books, television programs, films, plays, visual arts, monuments, etc. It becomes a society's cultural repertoire, relaying societal views and shaping society members' beliefs, attitudes and emotions. Through these channels it can be widely disseminated and can reach every sector of the public. *(4) Appearance in*

educational materials: the socio-psychological infrastructure appears in textbooks used in schools and even in higher education as central themes of socialization.

In time, the learned, absorbed, shared and institutionalized culture of violence serves as *a prism* through which society members collect information and interpret new experiences. The vicious cycle of prolonged and violent conflict is established in this manner, as the new experiences and information are interpreted in light of the pre-held repertoire. Following this, new experiences validate the pre-held beliefs of collective memory, ethos of conflict and shared emotions which in turn lead to courses of action that trigger the same cycle with the rival. In many ways, the culture of violence prevents new perceptions of the conflict, preserves the ongoing perceptions, and thus perpetuates its continuation.

Conclusion

Conflicts between groups undergo a qualitative change when violent acts are being perpetrated. During these conflicts, violence is often considered a necessary unavoidable evil. Violent acts become the choice of action when one group does not see any other way to achieve its goals. However, turning to violence commences a spiral of deterioration that is very difficult to cease.

The continuation of a violent conflict and the violence it entails leads to several consequences on the personal and societal level. Such conflicts demand major economic and emotional investments, and have a harsh personal toll on populations of the area. This toll is collected in the form of chronically elevated levels of threat perceptions as well as mental health problems and negative emotions. In addition, societies in prolonged and violent conflicts come to develop a culture of conflict that has advantages of meeting basic challenges that societies involved in these conflicts face. However, the same culture of conflict has consequences to the protraction of the conflict and turning it into being intractable[2] (Bar-Tal 2013).

The processes described above occur simultaneously by the 2 parties in the conflict. Considering this co-occurrence can explain how the vicious cycle of violence operates. The conflict leads each of the opponents to develop this culture of conflict with a socio-psychological infrastructure. This development leads to emergence of "mirror image" of such an infrastructure, which indicates a great similarity of negative general beliefs and attitudes that each side holds about the conflict, the other side and own group (Bronfenbrenner 1961; Kelman 2007). With time, however, this infrastructure comes to serve as a major motivating, justifying and rationalizing factor of the conflict. Any negative actions taken by one side in the

[2] Intractable conflicts are characterized as lasting at least 25 years, over goals that are perceived as existential, being violent, perceived as unsolvable and of zero-sum nature, greatly preoccupying society members, with involved parties heavily investing in their continuation (see Azar 1990; Bar-Tal 1998, 2007; Kriesberg 1998).

conflict then serve as information validating the existing socio-psychological infrastructure for the other side and in turn magnify its motivation and readiness to engage in conflict. The behaviors of each side confirm the pre-held socio-psychological infrastructure and justify harming the opponent. Thus, the challenge for the societies involved in these conflicts and the international community is to stop this cycle of violence and embark on the road of peace.

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