# The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict

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# Collective Memory of Physical Violence: its Contribution to the Culture of Violence

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Many social scientists suggest that intergroup conflicts are an inevitable part of human social life (for example, Coser, 1956; Levi-Strauss, 1958; Burton, 1969; Galtung, 1969; Mitchell, 1981). Indeed, the history of civilisation is filled with continuous and numerous intergroup conflicts,* and the twentieth century has witnessed some of the most vicious and atrocious inter-ethnic and international conflicts in history (see, for example, the list of conflicts published by Richardson, 1960; Beer, 1981).

Intergroup conflicts are not of a unitary type; one way to evaluate them is to categorise them according to their intensity and severity. In this vein, Kriesberg (1993, 1998) suggested the classification of conflicts on an intractable–tractable dimension. At the intractable pole of the dimension are conflicts in which engaged parties resist a peaceful resolution and perpetuate vicious cycles of violence. At the tractable pole of the dimension are conflicts in which the parties involved use institutionalised and acceptable avenues of confrontation, routine negotiations to resolve disputes and avoid violence. Intractable conflicts are characterised by seven features: (1) they persist for a long time – at least a generation; (2) they are violent, involving killings of military personnel and civilians; (3) the parties involved perceive their conflict as irreconcilable; (4) various sectors of participating parties have vested economic, military and ideological interests in the continuation of the conflict; (5) the conflicts are perceived as zero sum in nature; (6) the issues in the conflicts concern basic needs which are perceived as essential for the parties' survival; and (7) the conflicts occupy a central place on the agenda of the parties involved (Kriesberg, 1993, 1998; Bar-Tal, 1998).

Those features should be seen rather as continuous variables, whereas any one case of conflict can be described and evaluated along each

dimension. The total value of the seven features may indicate that a conflict is extremely intractable, but the weight of the features may vary among themselves and even change from conflict to conflict. Nevertheless, it is the basic premise of the present chapter that the longevity of the conflict together with its violent nature are two interwoven, salient characteristics which underlie the conflict's viciousness and intractability (see Brecher, 1984; Gochman and Maoz, 1984; Goertz and Diehl, 1992). The present chapter will elaborate on the societal–psychological implications of these two characteristics. In general, it is proposed that when in prolonged conflicts people are killed or wounded, then these experiences frequently and dramatically change the nature of the conflict and constitute weighty obstacles to its peaceful resolution. The conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, and Israeli–Arab conflict can serve as two examples of the detrimental effects of the longevity and violence on their resolution. These two characteristics will now be discussed.

## Longevity

The length of the intractable conflict is of special importance. There is a major difference between conflicts which last a short time and conflicts that persist for at least a generation, sometimes decades and even centuries. The long duration of the conflicts implies that attempts to resolve them have failed and they often are perceived as irreconcilable. In addition, over the years, the parties involved have accumulated increasing amounts of prejudice, mistrust, hatred and animosity. However, the important implication of the longevity relates to the evolvement of collective memory. Over the years, groups involved in conflict selectively form collective memories about the conflict. On the one hand, they focus mainly on the other side's responsibility for the outbreak and continuation of the conflict and its misdeeds, violence and atrocities; on the other hand, they concentrate on the self-justification, self-righteousness, glorification and victimisation. This collective memory is institutionalised and maintained by the groups in prolonged conflict, who transmit it through the political, social, and cultural channels and institutions. This memory is also imparted to the new generations through the educational systems and is incorporated in the societal ethos, thus contributing to the group's social identity (Bar-Tal, 2000). An example of a long intractable conflict is the Israeli–Arab conflict, or more specifically, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which has lasted about a century. The long duration of this conflict has had a determinative

effect on the emerging cultures of both societies, which are greatly imprinted by the ongoing hostility.

## Physical violence

The other important characteristic of intractable conflict is physical violence. Physical violence includes the killing and wounding of human beings as a result of the hostile activities carried out by the parties involved. While the killed and wounded are almost always members of the military forces, physical violence is often inflicted on civilians who do not directly participate in combat. Also, particularly important in the context of inter-ethnic or international conflict is the fact that although individuals perform violent acts, the violence is initiated and carried out within a social system. That is, the social system provides the rationales and the justifications for the violence, system's organisations train the individuals to carry out violent acts, and social mechanisms and institutions glorify the violent confrontations. In the case of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the violence has claimed many lives. For example since 1948 approximately 20,000 Israeli Jews have been killed and many more have been wounded. The number of killed Arabs, including Palestinians, is probably considerably multiplied.

In sum, the combination of longevity and violence is a well-established prescription for the intractability of the conflict. The human losses and the evolvement of collective memory, a process that incorporates the memory of those who fell in the conflict, underlie the development of the culture of violence that characterises protracted and violent conflicts. Before continuing, however, it is necessary to elaborate why physical violence has such profound effects on the nature of intergroup conflict.

## The meaning of physical violence

The meaning of physical violence is related to the sanctity of life, the emotional meaning of the loss of life, the irreversibility of those losses, the desire for vengeance and the need to rationalise violence. Each of these points will be discussed separately.

### Sanctity of life

The maintenance of life is perhaps one of the most sacred and universal values in human culture. Alternatively, killing, or severely physically hurting another human being is considered with some exceptions the

most serious violation of the moral code (Donagan, 1979; Kleinig, 1991). The commandment 'Thou shall not kill' is a widely accepted precept and is probably one of the most important for most, if not all, societies (Feldman, 1992). Societies tend to adhere to this commandment devoutly, creating norms and enacting laws, to preserve it. In modern times, the right to life has become a basic principle; under most circumstances, no person is allowed to take the life of another person. Taking a human life, especially of the innocent, is an unforgiven sin, in almost all situations. Those who violate the moral and legal codes regarding the sanctity of life are severely punished. Some societies even take the life of the killers, which is viewed to be the most severe punishment that can be meted out to the transgressor.

As long as the conflict is limited to verbal statements and even hostile acts are without human loss, the conflict remains on a lower level of confrontation. However, once one party in the conflict kills and/or wounds a member of the other group, or both sides suffer losses, the conflict moves to another phase. In this context of taking the life of soldiers, despite them being trained to kill and preparing to be killed, is perceived as a violation of a moral code (Osgood and Tucker, 1967). Thus, the killing or wounding of military personnel leads to the escalation of a conflict. In this vein, of special importance is the harming of innocent civilians, which is viewed by the parties as particularly painful because it is considered to be a severe violation of the moral code. These cases fuel even further the conflict, forcing the parties to take special action to prevent further violence to them and to punish the perpetrators. The described dynamics are well reflected in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both sides – the Israelis and the Palestinians – are very sensitive to human losses inflicted by the other side and at the same time, mutually delegitimise each other, by claiming that the other side does not respect the sanctity of life.

## Emotional involvement

Violence increases the emotional involvement of the parties engaged in intergroup conflict. Group members are deeply and emotionally touched when compatriots are killed and wounded, especially when the loss is sudden, untimely and intentionally inflicted by other persons. In principle, the closer the relationship to the injured or deceased, the more intense is the emotional reaction. But, in the case of violent, intergroup conflict, even when those killed are not personally known, the personal relevance of the human losses is intensified. The killed and/or wounded are perceived as compatriots, kin, as group members, who have been

harmed. That is, in these cases, the physical violence is perceived as a group matter and group members view the losses as group losses, with the victims acquiring a social identity within the group's perception of the events.

In modern societies, this perception and emotional involvement is a consequence of socialisation processes in modern societies, which extend the concepts of kinship (that is, patriotism, nationalism) towards personally unknown society members (for example, Fox, 1994; Billig, 1995; Johnson, 1997). More specifically, societies make special efforts to inculcate patriotic and nationalistic feelings through methods that include the use of fictive kin terms such as 'sons', 'brothers and sisters', 'brotherhood', 'motherland', or 'fatherland' in reference to members of the society and the land (see for example, Halliday, 1915; Johnson, Ratwik and Sawyer, 1987). Through this method, members of a society are encouraged to form a sense of belonging, feelings of closeness and a sense of mutual responsibility and solidarity. It is, therefore, not surprising that individuals are personally touched when members of their society fall as a consequence of violence in the context of intergroup conflict.

In most cases, the whole society mourns those killed in intergroup conflict. They are considered as society's martyrs, because they fell as a result of societal cause. Their death, thus, is viewed as the group's loss and, therefore, group members feel emotional involvement. It should be noted here that the loss of compatriots frequently turns the conflict into relevant experience for many society members. It is so, because many issues of disagreement between the parties in conflict are difficult to understand and are irrelevant to the lives of society members, but death of compatriots is an experience that concerns every society member and turns the conflict into concrete reality. The conflict then becomes a relevant part of society members' lives and absorbs a new personal meaning.

The above description is well founded in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Almost every group member, killed by the other side, causes the Israeli Jews and the Palestinians to be greatly emotionally involved. The death touches every group member, and those killed in the conflict are considered to have made a sacrifice for the benefit of the entire group.

## Irreversibility of the situation

Loss of life has particular importance in the conflict process because of its irreversibility. That is, while suitable compensations and compromised

solutions can be found for various disagreements, nothing can compensate for death. Therefore, the conflict escalates in tandem with the human costs incurred. The parties involved in the conflict find it difficult to justify compromises in view of the human losses. Although comprises were possible prior to the deaths, the parties now find it difficult to justify such an option. Their positions become fixated, a situation that perpetuates the conflict.

## The desire for vengeance

Killings within the context of intergroup conflict serve as a basis for vengeful acts. 'An eye for an eye' is a basic norm in many societies, and may even be considered a moral requirement. That is, the society's members feel an obligation to harm physically members of the group in conflict, in retribution for the inflicted violence. Thus, once group members are killed, it is difficult to settle the conflict peacefully, before avenging those killed. Turney-High (1949), when analysing the causes of primitive warfare, pointed out that:

Revenge is so consistently reported as one of the principal causes of war that it requires detailed analysis. Why should the human personality yearn to compensate for its humiliation in the blood of enemies? The tension-release motive plays a part here: Revenge loosens the taut feeling caused by the slaying or despoiling of one's self, clan, tribe, nation. Even the hope for revenge helps the humiliated human to bear up, enables him to continue to function in a socially unfavorable environment.... Revenge, or the hope of revenge, restores the deflated ego, and is a conflict motive with which mankind must reckon with universally. (pp. 149–50)

As Turney-High implies, the call for vengeance is not unique to primitive societies. It is a universal phenomenon. Members of a society demand vengeance when society suffers human loss as a result of intergroup conflict. For example, Rutkoff (1981) quotes French poems written during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, that call for revenge. One of them reads:

Revenge will come, perhaps slowly
Perhaps with fragility, yet a strength that is sure
For bitterness is already born and force will flow
And cowards only the battle will ignore. (Cited p. 161)

In the case of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the human losses usually stiffen the opinions of both sides, causing demands to punish the other side. The losses in intergroup conflict are almost always perceived as unjustified; moreover, there is an identified, concrete and specific perpetrator (the other party in conflict) who has to be punished for his act. That is, vengeance is perceived as a matter of national or ethnic obligation, an expression of responsibility to those that were killed. It is, therefore, seen even as a matter of national honour to punish the opponent, so as to 'prevent' future losses by showing the perpetrator that violence against the group will not be tolerated. In fact, Scheff (1994) suggested that vengeance is one of the most important psychological bases for international conflict. In his view, vengeance is a result of the denial of emotions such as shame, guilt or alienation. These emotions are especially aroused in situations when parties in conflict incur human loss. According to Scheff (1994), in most cases the parties deny these emotions and raise their voices for vengeance.

## Need for rationalisation and delegitimisation

Physical violence against human beings requires an explanation for those who carry it out as well as for its victims (for example, Grundy and Weinstein, 1974). It stems from the basic need to live in a meaningful and predictable world, as well as in a just world (Katz, 1960; Lerner, 1980; Reykowski, 1982). In view of the ascribed sanctity to life and its violation, which takes place in physical violence, the participants need to justify these. The performers require reasons to carry out the violent acts and the victims need reasons why they must incur losses. As 'the victims' retaliate and become perpetrators of physical violence against their adversary, a cycle of victimisation and rationalisation of that state begins to evolve.

McFarlane (1986), for example, provided an anthropological analysis of the explanations used by people in rural areas of Northern Ireland for the violence of the Catholic–Protestant conflict. To explain the abnormal acts of violence such as murders, bombings, and so forth; the villagers insisted that these violent acts were aberrations performed by outsiders. The relevance of his findings is of importance for the present analysis as those justifications, explanations and rationales are based on the contents that delegitimise the opponent (Eldridge, 1979; Mitchell, 1981; Bar-Tal, 1990a; Worchel, 1999). Delegitimisation is defined as a categorisation of social groups into extreme negative categories that essentially deny their humanity (Bar-Tal, 1989). Such a classification suggests that the adversary is evil, malevolent, immoral and inhuman. This is the most

economic and comprehensive way to explain why human lives are taken and why they should continue to be taken. Bar-Tal (1998) provided an illustrative analysis of mutual delegitimisation between the Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Both nations have resorted to a list of different delegitimising labels and have used different social institutions to propagate this delegitimisation.

## Summary

The above analysis suggests why violence constitutes a significant element in intergroup conflict: violence changes the nature of the conflict because the loss of human life and the performance of violent acts have special meaning for society's members. Violence often escalates the level of intergroup conflicts; when it continues for many years, violence has a crucial effect on the society as the accumulation and sedimentation of such experiences in collective memory penetrates every thread of the societal fabric. The collective memory of physical violence serves as a foundation for the development of a culture of violence. In turn, the culture of violence preserves the collective memory of the human losses, as well as the perceived cruelty, mistrust, inhumanity and evilness, of the enemy. By doing so, it rationalises the continuation of the conflict and makes an imprint on the reality perceived by society members. The relationship between collective memory and the culture of violence is discussed in the next section of the chapter.

## Collective memory and culture of violence

As indicated, a culture of violence develops in response to the experiences of physical violence accumulated during intergroup conflicts, and is based on the subsequent evolved collective memory that preserves those experiences and their meanings. This development is almost inevitable in view of the human losses that the society incurs through decades of conflict and the participation of its members in the violent acts. These powerful experiences touch society members emotionally, involve them, and permeate societal products, institutions and channels of communication, which then serve to maintain them as collective memory. With time, a cultural pattern evolves that has at least three identifiable facets: (a) the formation of societal beliefs that concern intergroup violence; (b) the appearance of rituals and ceremonies that commemorate the slain compatriots; and (c) the erection of monuments to honour the victims.

## Societal beliefs

Societal beliefs, defined as cognitions shared by a society's members on subjects and issues that are of special concern to the particular society and that contribute to the sense of uniqueness and social identity, are developed and disseminated in light of the significant experiences of society members (Bar-Tal, 2000). The contents of societal beliefs may concern societal goals, collective memories, self-images, aspirations, images of out-groups, and so forth. They are organised into thematic clusters, with each theme consisting of a number of beliefs. They often feature on the public agenda, serve as a salient referent for decisions made by the leadership and influence courses of action.

When physical violence continues for a long time, it contributes significantly to the formation, dissemination and maintenance of four themes of societal beliefs, that are part of the society's ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000): beliefs about the conflict; beliefs about the delegitimacy of the opponent; beliefs about the victimisation of the own group; and beliefs about patriotism. Other societal beliefs might issue in the process of an intractable conflict, as Bar-Tal (2000) suggested in his analysis of the ethos of conflict, but these four beliefs are apparently formed in direct response to the human losses resulting from physical violence. Each of the societal beliefs will be discussed in turn.

## Societal beliefs about the conflict

These beliefs contain, in the main, the collective memories that evolved from the experiences related to conflict. They include the causes for its outbreak, the reasons for its lack of resolution, the major events that shaped the conflict, particularly malevolent acts perpetrated by the adversary and the sacrifices that the ingroup incurred during the conflict, including its heroes' sacrifices. These beliefs are one-sided and selective (see for example, the analysis of the Israeli and the Palestinian beliefs in Bar-Tal, 1990b). They serve the needs of the society's members to view themselves as just, righteous, humane and moral, and provide explanations of the present situation. Connerton (1989) pointed out 'our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past. We experience our present world in the context which is causally connected with the past event and objects.' (p. 2) In short, the beliefs encased in collective memory help to make sense of the present reality. But, in order to fulfil this function, the past is reconstructed and re-appropriated to serve the current needs and attitudes of society's members (Kammen, 1991; Halbwachs, 1992).

## Societal beliefs about delegitimising the opponent

Human losses through intergroup conflict, especially losses of innocent civilians, and the necessity to inflict harm on the opponent, facilitate the formation of societal beliefs about delegitimisation (Bar-Tal, 1989, 1990a). Delegitimising societal beliefs fulfil several important epistemic functions. First of all, the related beliefs explain to society why it has incurred such human loses, especially among civilians. Epithets such as 'murderers' or 'vandals' point to the reasons why the adversary can perform such inhuman, immoral and atrocious acts against the 'human beings' belonging to the ingroup. At the same time, these beliefs also justify the ingroup's acts of violence, its revenge! Because of their inhuman qualities, the opponents should be punished for their violent acts and/or they should be physically prevented from performing future acts of violence. Both arguments rationalise violence against the opposing group, including its civilian population.

For example, as noted in the context of the violent Israeli–Palestinian conflict, both parties extensively participated in labelling. Israeli Jews labelled the Palestinians as terrorists, murderers, Nazis, anti-Semites, or blood thirsty, while the Palestinians used such labels as sadists, Nazis, imperialists, colonialists, terrorists, or aggressors to delegitimise Israeli Jews (see Bar-Tal, 1988). The Vietnamese supporters of the Viet Cong and Americans carried out similar delegitimisation during the Vietnam war, which claimed many thousands of human lives (White, 1970).

## Societal beliefs about the group's own victimisation

As the number of human losses grows, societies develop beliefs about being victimised by the opponent. These beliefs focus on the losses, the harm, the evil and atrocities committed by the adversary while they delegate the responsibility for the violence solely to the 'other'. This self-perception focuses on the sad and wretched fate of the group and frames its victims as martyrs. The dead and wounded become the salient, concrete evidence of the group's status as a victim.

For example, in the context of the violent Northern Ireland conflict, both the Catholics and Protestants perceive themselves as victims of the other party. The two groups focus on the terrorism of the other side, the harm, the evil and atrocities committed by the violent acts, and blaming the opponent (Hunter, Stringer and Watson, 1991; Wichert, 1994). The same focus can be found in the case of the Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Both groups perceive themselves as victims in the conflict. This self-assigned status is not necessarily indicating weakness. On the contrary, it provides strength *vis-à-vis* the international community, which usually

tends to support the victimised side in the conflict, and it often energises society members to avenge and punish the opponent.

## Societal beliefs of patriotism

Human loss instigates the intensification of societal beliefs of patriotism, which in turn emphasizes commitment, pride and loyalty towards the ingroup and the country (Bar-Tal, 1993). In response to the scope of the losses, these beliefs call for mobilisation and sacrifice. They may even demand the willingness to die for one's country, a necessity when societies are involved in a violent conflict. Without the willing participation of individuals, violent conflicts cannot continue. Societies thus make special efforts to impart patriotic beliefs to its members, beliefs which inspire the readiness to make their ultimate sacrifices for their homeland. As a tribute to these sacrifices, the killed and wounded are revered and memorialised in patriotic myths and rites. Some are portrayed as heroes, as models. New generations are then socialised in their light. In this respect, patriotic beliefs explain and justify the sacrifices the society members are called upon to suffer.

An example of the attempt to impart patriotic societal beliefs during violent conflict can be found in Israeli society. In view of the continuous violence, living in Israeli society requires much devotion, commitment and sacrifice (Galnoor, 1982). Different channels, methods and institutions have been used to develop commitment and loyalty to the state and the Jewish people (Eisenstadt, 1973). They nourished a heritage of wars and battles and glorified heroism (for example, Sivan, 1991). Military heroes received a special place in the social Parthenon and the society commemorated those fallen in military service in public ceremonies. This approach was extended to the treatment of Jewish history. Historical fighter-heroes and their patriotic acts were presented as models for identification and admiration (for example, Liebman and Don-Yehiya, 1983).

The evolution of these four themes of societal beliefs about conflict delegitimisation of the opponent, self-victimisation and patriotism is, then, directly related to the intensity and length of the violence endured. As the violent conflict becomes protracted, these beliefs become embedded in the societal repertoire and enter the collective memory. They are frequently presented through societal channels of communication. Thus, as for the public agenda, they are disseminated through cultural, educational and societal institutions. That is, these described societal beliefs become 'enduring products' which appear as recurrent themes in literature, textbooks, films, theatrical plays, paintings and other

cultural products (Bar-Tal, 2000; Winter, 1995). In consequence, they become more and more central to the personal repertoire of the society's members. These beliefs, therefore, represent the epistemological pillars of the culture of violence, as they are widely disseminated, maintained through time and imparted to the new generation.

## Memorial to the conflict

Human losses from violent conflict generate the appearance of monuments and cemeteries, specialised, permanent sites dedicated to preserving collective memories (see Ignatieff, 1984; Winter, 1995). These sites combine three important characteristics: they are located in a particular defined place, their construction consists of durable structures providing symbols for the society's members and they materialise the collective memory. As such, they become an inseparable part of the culture of violence. As Mosse (1990) pointed out:

> War monuments commemorating the fallen, symbolised the strength and manliness of the nation's youth and provided an example for other generations to follow. (p. 35)

Indeed, memorials fulfil important functions to perpetuate the memory of the fallen and inspire the remaining society members with the will to continue the conflict and fight the enemy. In a specific case, Levinger (1993) pointed out that 900 of the war monuments in Israel were constructed to immortalise fallen soldiers. These monuments, in her opinion, have an ideological function, including justification of the war, heroism and martyrdom. Similarly, Almog (1992) pointed out that Israeli war memorials serve as didactic tools to convey messages of commitment to the heritage by those who fell, namely, commitment of the people to continue to protect the nation and to hold on to the land for which the fallen have sacrificed their lives (p. 63). In essence, this message supports continuation of the conflict. In a brochure edited by Shamir (1976), and published by the Israeli Ministry of Defence, the contributors discuss various aspects of this practice. The major points presented in this brochure touch upon the societal obligation to immortalise the fallen soldiers, the ways of doing so, the special power entitled to the bereaved families and the will expressed by the fallen soldiers to continue in their footsteps to secure the existence of the Israeli state (see also Witztum and Malkinson, 1993).

The monuments and cemeteries, then, are constant and enduring reminders about the losses suffered in conflict, the sacrifices made by patriots and heroes and the malevolence of the opponent. In one sense and during certain periods they represent concrete investments in the continuation of the conflict.

## Rituals and ceremonies related to conflict

Rituals and ceremonies related to the violent conflict, which commemorate particular battles, wars and especially fallen members of the society, are another expression of culture of violence. Rituals and ceremonies consist of speeches, acts (such as parades, guards exchanges), music, decorations and displays presented at a particular time and place for the purpose of communicating the meanings attached to the conflict. They symbolically express beliefs, values and attitudes towards the violent conflict. They glorify battles and wars, the heroism of those who participated in the events, the martyrdom of those who fell, the malevolence of the enemy and the necessity to continue the struggle in fulfilment of the patriotic 'will' of the fallen.

Thus, in times of conflict, and especially intractable conflict, rituals and ceremonies contribute to the continuation of the conflict. Their contents fuel public animosity towards the enemy while urging the society's members to fulfil their patriotic duties in the conflict. As such, they serve as an important socialisation and cultural factor, ideologising the conflict. Although ostensibly, meant to perpetuate and invigorate the collective memory, rituals and ceremonies, together with the monuments and cemeteries come to eternalise the collective memory of the society in effect shed light on the present. Monuments and cemeteries acquire with meanings through the rituals and ceremonies performed in their space. For example, Ben-Amos (1993) in analysing the place in French collective memory of four national monuments in Paris, pointed out that their importance lies in the meaning ascribed by the ceremonies conducted at the sites. In other words, the encounter between the monument and the ceremony (depending on the particular generation), significantly contributes to the construction and maintenance of the collective memory for the specific period in which it transpires.

In this vein, Handelman (1990) provided a detailed analysis of the official state ceremony performed in Israel on Memorial Day. This day is dedicated to those who 'sacrificed their lives for the existence of the State', both soldiers and civilians. The ceremony constructs a sense of belonging to one large family whose sons were lost in conflict. It

reminds individuals of their duty not to forget the fallen and their acts. Recently, in an extensive piece of work, about the commemoration of the fallen in Israel during 1948–56, Azaryahu (1995) pointed out the linkage between the ceremonies and the sites (that is, military cemeteries and war memorials) and the evolving nature of the official state rituals. He emphasised that during the years investigated, which were at the peak of the Israel and Arab conflict, the rituals had special importance to impart patriotic commitment to the Israelis. They came to transmit the legacy of heroes' sacrifice, needed in view of the continuation of the violent conflict.

## Conclusions and implications

This chapter suggests that violence and longevity contribute to the intractability of conflicts. The fact that a society incurs human losses, especially those losses that occur over a long period of time, is a powerful experience in itself and attains a special meaning for society's members. As a result, with time, a culture of violence evolves which makes the conflict more resistant to peaceful resolution. Cultural products evolve especially in response to physical violence, which claims human loss of societal compatriots and motivates the society's members to carry out acts of physical retribution. Specifically expressions of a culture of violence, which consists of societal beliefs about delegitimation of the opponent, societal beliefs about the conflict, the group's victimisation and about patriotism, as well as the sites of memorials and the practice of rituals and ceremonies dedicated to the conflict fuel the continuation of the conflict.

Cultural products (memorials and rituals and ceremonies) are necessary outcomes of violent conflict. In contrast, societal beliefs concerning conflict, delegitimisation and victimisation may be formed under circumstances other than violent conflict, and patriotic beliefs develop under all conditions due to society's need to survive. However, in the context of protracted violent conflict, all four societal beliefs flourish intensively and extensively. That is, these beliefs preoccupy a central place in the societal repertoire, are incorporated within the collective memory and are disseminated as the violence continues over an increasing number of years. Within a culture of violence, memorial sites, rituals, and ceremonies support the four societal beliefs, making them more accessible, relevant and concrete. On the other hand, the societal beliefs provide the conceptual framing for the creation of memorial sites, rituals and ceremonies. That is, the beliefs provide the

contents elaborated in the rituals and the ceremonies, which serve as a prism through which society members attach meaning to the acts and the artefacts.

The culture of violence has a number of implications, which have a direct influence on the course of the intergroup conflict. First, the culture of violence fixates collective beliefs on the four societal beliefs we have discussed. The experience of loss from the conflict become engraved in the memory of a society member, while the beliefs provide the lenses through which the society explains that loss as it justifies its violence. In prolonged conflict, when the losses are heavy, the probability that one member will be personally acquainted with at least one fallen person grows; such experience ties them to the conflict. That is, the conflict becomes concrete and relevant to them.

But, society's members not only remember the fallen, they also remember why they fell and their unfinished mission of the fallen. With time, these memories are institutionalised in rituals and ceremonies, and thus is maintained and reinforced (Connerton, 1989; Halbwachs, 1992). In addition, as the conflict is protracted, more of the society's members personally participate in the violence. Participation strengthens the power of the experience and reinforces the centrality of the societal beliefs. It is thus not surprising that as the conflict continues, the experiences related to the violence enter the collective memory. In essence, the collective memory focuses on those experiences, which support the culture of violence. Society members, therefore, remember especially the violence of the opponent, how it was initiated, the atrocities, and, of course, their losses. In contrast, they tend to forget their own acts of violence.

Second, the human losses and the resulting culture of violence are in certain respects, investments in the continuation of the conflict. Because it is impossible to compensate individuals for loss of life, the society feels an obligation to adhere to its original goals, otherwise the sacrifices made will be viewed as being in vein. This logic applies especially to those who lose someone close to them. The survivors often resist compromise, which they perceive as a betrayal of the fallen. They often assume that early compromises could have saved lives, but since the society has decided to adhere to its original goals, sacrificing compatriots in the conflict, there should be continuation of this adherence.

From another perspective, societal beliefs serve as the cognitive and effective foundations of the conflict by providing explanations and justifications for its continuation. In essence, these beliefs represent the

ideological bases for the conflict. Society members who hold these beliefs are compelled to continue the violence once they have accepted its rationale. Furthermore, once these beliefs become embedded in the societal repertoire, it is difficult to change them. These beliefs of conflict, delegitimisation, own victimisation and patriotism arouse emotions (fear, hatred and anger towards the opponent, feelings of self-pride, esteem and pity) but also evoke behaviour geared to persevering it's own goals, avenging loses, hurting the opponent and sacrificing one's own life for the group.

Finally, and most patently, the evolution of a culture of violence instigates vicious cycles of violence. Violence leads to increasing violence, as the survivors are feeling a growing obligation to avenge the fallen. Clutondem, an ideology, which rationalises the continuation of the conflict gains in complexity and strength. During these cycles, it is often difficult to differentiate between the trigger and the reaction, as each act is eventually interpreted as either. Nevertheless, the parties in conflict always view their behaviour as acts of defence and reaction. Poole (1995), when analysing the distribution of violence in Northern Ireland, concluded that the vicious circle is a continuous process, having no end. Lulls may occur, but they come to an end:

– when the killing recommenced, it was concentrated in exactly the same places as before. The local social reproduction of a culture of political violence can apparently lie dormant for many years, even well into the next generations. However, it merely disappears from immediate view – and only until the next time. (p. 43)

This analysis is not meant to suggest that violent conflicts cannot be resolved peacefully. Many such conflicts were resolved after prolonged violence. Under unique conditions, which require further discussion, violence may sometimes facilitate conflict resolution in light of the human costs involved in the continuation of the conflict. The basic thesis of this chapter suggests, however, that when violence continues throughout the decades it constitutes a determinative factor *per se* in intergroup conflict. It changes the nature of the conflict. Therefore, it is of special importance to understand not only the specific acts of violence, but also the psychological and cultural bases which underlie them. These bases play a crucial role in violent conflicts because human beings, as thinking creatures, need to rationalise their acts. The present chapter is an attempt to contribute to the elucidation of these bases by focusing on the evolvement of the collective memory of physical

violence, which has a determinative role in the formation of culture of violence.

### Note

*Throughout the chapter the term intergroup conflict will be used, but it refers mostly to inter-ethnic and international conflicts.