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978-0-521-86708-5 - Intractable Conflicts: Socio-Psychological Foundations and Dynamics

Daniel Bar-Tal

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INTRACTABLE CONFLICTS

This book provides a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and holistic analysis of the socio-psychological dynamics of intractable conflicts. Daniel Bar-Tal's original conceptual framework is supported by evidence drawn from different disciplines, including empirical data and illustrative case studies. His analysis rests on the premise that intractable conflicts share certain socio-psychological foundations, despite differences in context and other characteristics. He describes the full cycle of intractable conflicts – outbreak, escalation, deescalation, and peace building through reconciliation. Bar-Tal's framework provides a broad theoretical view of the socio-psychological repertoire that develops in the course of long-term and violent conflicts, outlines the factors affecting its formation, demonstrates how it is maintained, points out its functions, and describes its consequences. The book also elaborates on the contents, processes, and other factors involved in the peace-building process.

Daniel Bar-Tal is the Branco Weiss Professor of Research in Child Development and Education at Tel-Aviv University. His primary research interests are political and social psychology, particularly the socio-psychological foundations of intractable conflicts and peace building. Professor Bar-Tal is the recipient of a number of major awards, including the Otto Klineberg Intercultural and International Relations Prize of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, the Golestan Fellowship at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences, the Peace Scholar Award of the Peace and Justice Studies Association, and the 2011 Lasswell Award and 2012 Nevitt Sanford Award of the International Society of Political Psychology. He has published widely in the areas of conflict and peace studies. His 2005 book *Stereotypes and Prejudice in Conflict*, coauthored with Yona Teichman, received the Alexander George Award from the International Society of Political Psychology.

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Preface

I have spent almost all my life in the natural laboratory of a conflict, living under the conditions of intractable conflict between Jews and Arabs, especially Palestinians. As an adolescent and then as a soldier, first in the regular service and then for almost 35 years in the reserves and as a civilian, I personally experienced the tremendous costs of living under the conditions of intractable conflict. This recognition was reinforced by my opportunities to live for years outside the environment of the conflict. In these periods I realized that many members of society living continuously in a confrontational context become so used to their way of life that they do not even think that there is a possibility to live differently. They experience the normality and the banality of violence, not being aware of the price they pay individually and collectively. But even more striking to me was the recognition that many of those living under the conditions of intractable conflict are often unaware of the particular worldview imparted by authorities to mobilize members of society to participate in the conflict. They think that it is an inseparable part of collective life to adhere to conflict goals, to delegitimize the rival, to view themselves as eternal victims and as moral soldiers – not realizing that this worldview is a result of their indoctrination. More importantly, I recognized the dramatic effects of living under threat. In my view, this is one of the most potent mechanisms leading to closed-mindedness. With time, many of the society members involved in violent conflicts are not only greatly affected by the perceptions of threats; they also cannot differentiate where real threats end and where threats manipulated by the authorities begin. Indeed, this distinction is difficult to make, as threat perception is in many cases a subjective evaluation.

These realizations led me to devote almost my entire career to the study of the socio-psychological foundations and dynamics of intractable conflicts. In the course of personal development, visiting places of bloody intergroup

confrontations, and reading much about other conflicts, I became confident that the society of which I am part is not unlike other societies involved in intractable conflicts and that these other societies also develop similar processes and the same general socio-psychological repertoire.

In the early 1980s I began to elucidate these processes and the socio-psychological repertoire associated with intractable conflict. The first ideas were about the opposing narratives that rival societies construct in order to mobilize society members and rationalize the initiation and continuation of the conflict. Through the years I began to assemble pieces of the puzzle by elucidating various elements and processes of the socio-psychological dynamics of intractable conflicts. In finding and exposing each piece, I attempted to view it from a general perspective as well as from the particular perspective of the Israeli Jewish society. Over the years, the pieces of the puzzle have multiplied, and the picture they provided has expanded. This inductive process has allowed me to develop a comprehensive and holistic view. The book is the result of this ongoing process. It focuses mostly on ideas that I have developed and less on reviews of the literature. It illuminates the general view of intractable conflict, because a specific book about Israeli society's "living with the conflict" was written in Hebrew and published in Israel in 2007. The present book, while drawing upon the knowledge I have collected through the years and upon the many relevant publications, offers extended and elaborated observations organized in a comprehensive, systematic, and holistic conceptual framework with new illuminations.

Because this book is intended for a wide audience, it uses illustrations from different conflicts, though with special emphasis on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the Israeli Jewish perspective with which I am familiar. My hope is that a book shedding light on the socio-psychological aspects of intractable conflicts will be of interest not only to academics but also to a wider audience, including decision makers and practitioners.

Although I began collecting materials and writing this book in 2004, it was a sabbatical at Brandeis University in 2010–2011 that provided the perfect time to bring this long journey to an end. I am very thankful to the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and especially its director, Professor Leonard Saxe, who provided me with this golden opportunity.

But I must acknowledge that this project is inspired tremendously by work with those who were originally my students but who soon became my colleagues and friends. They were, and many are, still part of a group that has met regularly for the past 15 years to present their own work, discuss various issues related to conflict and peacemaking, and hear lectures. Coming from different departments and different universities, they became a cohesive and

professional collective that turned into a supportive and friendly group as well as a social network. My friend and colleague Amiram Raviv helped me lead this wonderful group, and I am indebted to him for his long-term friendship and cooperation.

I cannot begin to imagine my professional life without such colleagues, as they are very dear to me. They offer not only inspiration but also the best critiques and evaluations of my work. In addition, each of them through his or her academic work has contributed greatly to expand the conceptual framework presented in this book. Many of them worked with me while pursuing their master's theses and doctoral dissertations, postdoctoral study, and many other projects that extended the knowledge about intractable conflicts. I list them in alphabetical order: Guy Abutbul, Dalia Aloni, Rinat Arviv-Abromovich, Hadas Baram, Shiry Dagan, Ohad David, Talie Fried, Shai Fuxman, Corinna Gayer, Amit Goldenberg, Uri Gopher, Betty Goren, Nimrod Goren, Dana Guy, Eran Halperin, Dennis Kahn, Neta-ley Kolonimus, Shiri Landman, Eyal Levin, Tamir Magal, Eman Nahhas, Meytal Nasie, Rafi Nets-Zehngut, Neta Oren, Ruthi Pliskin, Roni Porat, Michal Reifen, Yigal Rosen, Nimrod Rosler, Noa Schori-Eyal, Eldad Shahar, Ronni Shaked, Keren Sharvit, Ofer Shinar, Anat Trope, Doron Tzur, Soli Vered, and Anat Zafran. Some of them – Rinat Arviv-Abromovich, Shai Fuxman, Nimrod Goren, Eran Halperin, Shiri Landman, Tamir Magal, Rafi Nets-Zehngut, Neta Oren, Nimrod Rosler, Keren Sharvit, and Ofer Shinar – read at least one chapter of this book and some even three, providing helpful comments that allowed me to improve the final manuscript. My friends and colleagues Maria Jarymowicz and Eran Halperin had an important part in my revision of Chapter 6 about emotions. Dario Paez, Dario Spini, and Ervin Staub provided valuable feedback on the Epilogue. I am grateful to all of them.

Finally, but not the least, this work would be impossible to do without the help and encouragement of my immediate family, my wife, Svetlana, and my daughter, Galiya. They endured the many days I spent before the computer with only warm words of support. I love them and thank them for the privilege of spending my life with them.