Passive Reconciliation in the Context of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

Rafi Nets-Zehngut

Protracted conflicts are a worldwide phenomenon (Coleman, 2000; Kriesberg, 2000) that inflict wide-scale and severe damage (physical, economic and psychological) on the parties involved (Coleman, 2000; Lira, 2001; Staub and Bar-Tal, 2003). A major psychological aspect of these conflicts is the formation of a psychological repertoire among the parties to a conflict, composed of three elements: a collective memory of the conflict, an ethos of the conflict and an emotional orientation toward the conflict – all of which are expressions of negative and antagonistic attitudes to the rival (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004; Bar-Tal and Teichman, 2005).

Protracted conflicts at times reach a resolution phase, whereby a peace agreement is signed by the parties. But research suggests that signing a peace agreement does not ensure peace and is often the starting point of reconciliation rather than its successful conclusion.

Reconciliation requires that the psychological repertoire of the conflict be addressed and transformed in the post-conflict phase, so that its elements (i.e., memories, attitudes and emotions) will become less negative (and hopefully at least partly positive) towards the rival. Such a change can ensure proper implementation of the peace agreement and stable peace between the parties (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004; Lederach, 2000; Montville, 1993; Staub, 1998). Without a transformation of the psychological repertoire, its antagonistic elements can cause the parties to reactivates the conflicts and jolt the social climate in the national and the international arenas (Bar-Tal and Bennink, 2004; Kriesberg, 2000).

Scholars of conflict resolution pay great attention to an active reconciliation process which includes aspects such as engaging with the history of the conflict, an apology and reparations offered by the perpetrating party (Hayner, 1999; Montville, 1993). However, reconciliation can also be the result of another process, termed here “passive reconciliation,”
whose impact can be significant. In this latter process, the desired transformation of the psychological repertoire occurs due to the healing effect of time and cooperation between the parties on “practical” matters. This process is termed passive reconciliation because reconciliation is reached without a conscious and active effort of the parties. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the passive reconciliation process and then to examine its role in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict: first, whether such reconciliation did take place; and if so, what were its characteristics and outcome?

This chapter starts with a short review of the literature dealing with the aftermath of conflicts and the active reconciliation process, followed by a theoretical construction of the passive reconciliation process. Finally, it examines whether a passive reconciliation process has been taking place between the Israelis and the Palestinians since the signing of the 1993 Oslo Agreement until the end of 2004.

**Active and passive reconciliation**

Protracted conflicts are long, extremely violent and related to issues of major importance to the involved parties (Bar-Tal, 1998; Kriesberg, 2000). In order to cope with the difficult reality, the parties to the conflicts develop a “psychological repertoire of the conflict.” This repertoire includes three elements: (1) A _collective memory of the conflict_, which is composed of an account of the events of the conflict provided to the members of a society (Cairns and Roe, 2003; Connerton, 1989). This account is usually biased, where the rival is portrayed in a very negative manner and the injustice, harm, evil and atrocities allegedly conducted by him are highlighted (Bar-Tal, 2003). (2) An _ethos of the conflict_: a configuration of shared central societal beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society at present and for the future. These beliefs justify the group’s objectives, provide self-esteem, foster patriotism and de-legitimize the enemy’s goals and beliefs (Bar-Tal, 1998, 2000). (3) A _collective emotional orientation_: emotions evoked by the conflict, shared by society members and affecting them strongly – most notably fear, hatred and anger (Bar-Tal, 2001; Volkan, 1988).

Reconciliation is often regarded as the solution for protracted conflicts, causing the psychological repertoire of the society members to be less negative towards the rival. It consists of mutual recognition and acceptance, invested interests and goals in developing peaceful relations, mutual trust, positive attitudes as well as sensitivity and consideration of the other party’s needs and interests (Bar-Tal and Bennink, 2004).