New History, thick recognition and relationship transformation

Through the investigation into understandings of identity construction in conflictual settings and the development of the concept of thick recognition, this book has addressed the linkage between the transformation of intractable conflicts and understandings of history. The analysis unpacked the Israeli history debates and divided them into two cycles of narrative constellations, social interactions and narrative elaborations. It was clear that the twists and turns of the debates had clear connections to the general domestic political climate at the time, as well as to the relationship between the conflict’s two main parties. Thus, links between changes in historical understandings and constructions of identity as well as relationship and conflict transformation have been probed. The research served to increase our understanding of processes of identity change in intractable conflicts as commemorative narratives were linked to important narratives of identity and conflict in the present. Hence, the importance of the construction and reconstruction of historical understandings in intractable conflicts has been highlighted.

The over-arching aim of this book was to provide understanding of how different and shifting accounts of history inform relationships between parties in intractable conflicts. It developed the concept of thick recognition and moved it into the setting of intractable conflicts, in order to provide further insight into possibilities of transforming them. I have suggested that commemorative narratives can be analyzed along the lines of the way they describe views of the self, the other and their separating boundary. This enables comparative analyses of the
extent to which different narratives contain narratives of thick recognition. Once that is established, it is possible to analyze elaborations on recognition and how these tie into processes of conflict transformation. The theoretical chapters developed the concepts of memory agents and official memory institutions, which are understood as crucial in that process. Memory agents have the ability to influence memory institutions through their actions; this visualizes how the interplay in the lower order of power has influence on formulations of identity on the higher order.

The empirical analysis showed that the Israeli debates over history can be related to processes of conflict transformation; it also pointed to circumstances that facilitated and inhibited the introduction of New History in Israeli society. The study scrutinized Israeli commemorative narratives regarding the 1948 War and investigated the dynamics of the debates over history, which regarded core aspects of Israeli national identity as well as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Below, the results emanating from the Israeli case study are related to the concepts of conflict transformation, thick recognition and identities in conflict. Facilitating as well as inhibiting circumstances for the transformation of relationships in intractable conflicts are also discussed. The empirical analysis contributed three significant findings, which feed back into theories of conflict transformation:

1. The processual approach helped to fine-tune the understanding of how narratives of thick as well as thin recognition interplay with the development of conflict. As identities and conflicts are understood as processual and non-linear, more positive and peaceful relations can never (unfortunately) be seen as end states, but processes that can take more positive or negative directions. The findings are illustrated in Figure 8.1. The figure illustrates how inhibiting circumstances can lead to recognition closures, which in turn leads to (often destructive) conflict transformation. Facilitating circumstances instead tend to lead to

![Figure 8.1](image)

*Figure 8.1* Facilitating and inhibiting circumstances and their trajectories into conflictual relations