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Chapter 7

Hope(lessness) and Collective (In)action in Intractable Intergroup Conflict

Smadar Cohen-Chen, Martijn van Zomeren and Eran Halperin

Intractable intergroup conflict is an extremely severe, violent, and protracted form of intergroup conflict (Bar-Tal 2013; Coleman 2003; Kriesberg 1993). Such conflicts include a number of unique characteristics that set them apart from other types of intergroup conflicts. One such characteristic is the perception of irresolvability, which is closely associated with the development of hopelessness. According to the seminal work of Daniel Bar-Tal (1990, 2007, 2013), this lack of hope becomes, over time, an inherent part of the psychological infrastructure of the conflict and thus helps to perpetuate intractable conflict by inducing indifference and inaction. Hope, on the other hand, has been suggested as an important emotion within conflict resolution (Bar-Tal 2001; Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal 2006, see also Jarymowicz, this volume) because it induces constructive and goal-directed behavior (Stotland 1969). We suggest that one behavioral manifestation of hope may be action to achieve social change, or in this context, to achieve peace.

Collective action (e.g., demonstrations, petitions, and riots) has played a major role in countless processes of social change and political contexts. An abundant psychological literature has led to theoretical frameworks for scholars to examine and analyze collective action, and thus better understand this phenomenon (Becker et al. 2011; Klandermans 1997, 2004; Mummendey et al. 1999; Simon and Klandermans 2001; Sturmer and Simon 2004; van Zomeren et al. 2008; Wright et al. 1990; for a review see van Zomeren et al. 2012). However, such frameworks may have limited applicability to explain collective action in intractable conflicts because of

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an innate catch-22. That is, while objectively it may seem as if both parties' best interest lies in peace, collective action towards achieving it is highly uncommon in such situations because the intractability of the conflict removes all hope and scope for such social change. Indeed, conditions imposed on the weak group often restrict any viable form of collective action, while members of both the weak and the strong groups are reluctant to violate a preference for the status quo driven by the beliefs of the ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal 2007, see also Cohrs et al.; Oren, vol. 2; Sharvit, vol. 2; Nahhas et al., vol. 2). Thus, collective action in the context of intractable conflict may, at first glance, appear to be rare, not to say impossible.

However, in this chapter, we offer some hope that collective action may not be such an impossibility. We begin by reviewing existing research on intractable conflicts, focusing mainly on the role of hope and despair in such contexts. Next, we present literature on collective action, and discuss its importance in promoting social change, particularly in situations of intractable conflict. Finally, we examine what makes collective action within the context of intractable conflicts unique and rare, comparing and distinguishing it from traditional forms of collective action. We address both sides' hope and scope for change within the unique context of intractable conflict. We end by concluding that hope and collective action in intractable intergroup conflicts may come in small steps, but that they are not impossibilities.

Hope(lessness) and Intractable Conflicts

As mentioned earlier, one of intractable conflicts' main characteristics is that they are deemed irresolvable (Bar-Tal 1998; 2007; Kriesberg 1993; 1998). This general and consensual perception of the conflict's irresolvability drives feelings of hopelessness, a detrimental emotional state within the context of such conflicts. Over time, the lack of hope, experienced due to recurring and failed attempts to resolve the conflict, seeps into the national narrative (Bar-Tal 2007; see also Nets-Zehngut, vol. 2), becoming an integral part of the psychological infrastructure of the conflict. This serves to remove responsibility for the disastrous situation, and uphold positive perceptions of the in-group as always aspiring for peace (Bar-Tal 2000). This raises the question of how hope can be induced and mobilized to change the conflict generally, and more specifically the general and consensual perception of the intractableness of the conflict.

Hope is rooted in envisioning a future goal which is perceived as positive and to which the person attaches importance (Snyder 2000; see also Jarymowicz, this volume). This visualization is followed by a positive change in mental state regarding the future goal (Beck et al. 1974; Snyder 2000; Stotland 1969; Lazarus 1999). Though hope has not been defined as a basic emotion (Averill 1994), it has been pointed at as one of the core emotions needed for human survival, since it drives goal-directed behavior, thinking and planning ways to achieve the imagined situation in question (Stotland 1969). Planning and developing pathways both energizes and directs behavior (Staats and Stassen 1985), and when combined with a sense of urgency regarding those paths, these become action to achieve those goals (Snyder 2000).

Empirical research regarding hope's behavioral tendencies has found it to lead to cognitive flexibility and creativity (Breznitz 1986; Clore et al. 1994; Isen 1990), risk-seeking behavior (Anderson and Galinsky 2006) and problem-solving abilities (Chang 1998; Snyder et al. 1996). As such, a lack of hope may breed inaction, while a sense of hope may enable creative ways to change something about the conflict that holds those involved hostage. Thus, it would seem that when considering a context of intractable conflict, hope has the potential to generate movement by allowing individuals to think about novel ways to achieve peace.

More specifically, Bar-Tal (2001) has discussed the importance of hope within the context of conflict resolution, since it involves conceiving of new paths and behaviors toward the positively viewed goal of ending the conflict, including motivating people to hold conciliatory attitudes. Coleman et al. (2007) discuss the paradoxical cycle of hope and despair in intractable conflicts, in which, though the situation is ever-changing in its volatility, its very essence is seen as constant and unchanging. Subsequently, people and societies involved in the conflict adopt this perception of the conflict as stable, further feeding into its hopelessness and despair.

Hope has also been examined empirically within this context, evidencing its importance in promoting peace. In Northern Ireland, trait hope (Snyder et al. 1991) was found to be positively associated with a higher inclination to forgive the out-group indirectly through the trait inclination of dissipation or rumination (Moeschberger et al. 2005). Halperin and Gross (2011) conducted a nationwide survey among Jewish Israelis during the 2008 war in Gaza and found that the experience of hope regarding the end of the conflict was positively associated with willingness to provide humanitarian aid to Palestinians. Halperin et al (2008) showed that in Israel, hope was positively associated with legitimizing perceptions of the out-group. In Israel, experimentally induced hope led participants to support concession making during negotiations with Palestinians (Cohen-Chen et al. 2014, 2015). Thus, these studies indicate that hope has an important role in promoting peace-supporting attitudes in intractable conflicts.

However, while research on the role of hope in intractable conflict exists, less attention has been paid to action tendencies and behavior associated with hope in such contexts. As stated, hope has been found to predict and motivate behavior (Staats and Stassen 1985) and action (Snyder 2000). This is a hopeful message for those involved in and studying intractable intergroup conflict. That is, perhaps even within intractable intergroup conflict situations, hope may have a key role in motivating collective ways to change the situation, giving rise to collective action to achieve social change.

Collective Action and Social Change

Aside from political (top-down) processes, conflict resolution can also be fostered through psychological (bottom-up) processes. A good example of the latter is the phenomenon of *collective action*, which is typically defined as any action that individuals engage in on the group's behalf to achieve group goals (van Zomeren and

Iyer 2009; Wright et al. 1990). Indeed, individuals' engagement in collective action can change political agendas and instill values, as well as empower members of nations and societies (e.g., the Civil Rights Movement). Put differently, collective action reflects people's capacity to create social change as a group, taking control of their destiny and pursuing the betterment of their position on a large scale.

There seems to be consensus in the broad literature on collective action that it is predicted by at least a triad of motivational variables (for a meta-analysis see van Zomeren et al. 2008): Group identification (Tajfel 1978; Ellemers 1993; for a review see Sturmer and Simon 2004), perceptions and emotional experience of group-based injustice (e.g., group-based anger; for a review see Van Zomeren et al. 2012), and perceptions of the group's efficacy to achieve its' goals (Hornsey et al. 2006; Klandermans 1984; 1997; Mummendey et al. 1999; Wright and Lubensky 2009). Thus, to the extent that individuals identify more with a group, feel more anger on its' behalf and believe more in its' efficacy to achieve group goals, individuals should become more motivated to engage in collective action.

However, collective action does not occur on its own accord and is certainly not a given. Research on individuals' motivations to undertake collective action typically selects research contexts in which collective action is already ongoing, or at least quite likely to occur (Van Zomeren 2013). As such, the research is often somewhat separated from its underlying theoretical assumption that collective action is often simply not an option for individuals. Indeed, social identity theory (Tajfel 1978; Ellemers 1993) suggests that collective action should occur only under societal circumstances that allow for individuals' imagination of a different future (thus allowing hope for the attainment of a fairer future) and a sense of instability and thus scope for social change (Tajfel 1978; see also Ellemers 1993; Mummendey et al. 1999; Van Zomeren et al. 2012). This means that without hope and scope for social change, collective action should not occur. This resonates with our line of thought that collective action is rare in intractable intergroup conflicts precisely because such conflicts are defined by a lack of hope and scope for a positive change.

We believe that this state of affairs (i.e., hope- and scopelessness) converges with the state of affairs found in intractable intergroup conflicts. Two important pointers follow from this observation. First, this may already explain, at least to some extent, why collective action in intractable intergroup conflict is rare, if not absent altogether. Second, this implies that finding a way to *up-regulate* hope (e.g., Cohen-Chen et al. 2014, 2015) may remove an important barrier to collective action and translate an inactive state of affairs to a more active one. Indeed, it stands to reason that once hope is reinvigorated (or at least kept alive), the triad of motivations that predict the undertaking of collective action can be mobilized to increase chances of the occurrence of the collective action. Put differently, hope may be an important *precondition* for individuals to be(come) motivated for collective action in the first place. In this way, an analysis of how hope can bring about collective action in the context of intractable intergroup conflict is not only an important theoretical development, but also points to important practical implications.

Collective Action in Intractable Conflict

As a first step toward applying this hopeful insight, in this section we conceptually analyze how collective action within the context of intractable conflict differs from collective action in nonintractable intergroup conflicts. The purpose of this enterprise is to map these phenomena in order to better understand how hope serves to combine and even integrate the two. We do so by asking a number of core questions, starting with the definition of the group's disadvantage.

What Is the Group's Disadvantage?

Typically, the group's disadvantage addressed by collective action can be viewed as based either in the situation itself (e.g., a group having an external problem that can be solved without changing one's identity; Klandermans 1997; van Zomeren et al. 2008; Walsh 1988), or in the group itself (e.g., societal discrimination, based in a negative group identity; these can only be changed by changing something about one's group). Van Zomeren et al. (2008) suggest that individuals find it harder to engage in action against structural disadvantages because of their internalized sense of disadvantage, coupled with the resistance met when trying to change the in-group.

In intractable conflict, the disadvantage can be defined as a (extreme form of) structural disadvantage (Jost and Hunyady 2002; Major 1994; Sidanius and Pratto 1999; Sidanius et al. 1978; van Zomeren et al. 2008), since it derives from the nature of the relations, as well as the psychological consequences of the conflict. Specifically, the disadvantage includes less or no access to resources, opportunities, and equal rights (such as freedom of movement, expression, etc.). Moreover, there are threats to security and mental well-being, such as extreme levels of fear and anxiety (Bar-Tal 2001, 2007). Thus, the disadvantage can be defined as the instrumental and emotional consequences that intractable conflict has on both groups involved in the conflict. In this sense, intractable conflicts represent a unique type of structural disadvantage that make it comparable at a *general* level with more traditional types of collective action, but clearly different at a more specific level.

Since collective action occurs when there are cognitive alternatives to the status quo, structural instability enables people to imagine these alternatives. However, intractable conflicts are perceived as being irresolvable by those involved (Bar-Tal 2001; Coleman 2011; Kriesberg 1993, 1998), a belief which hinders willingness to partake in collective action. This observation already suggests that structural instability, a precondition for collective action to even be possible in people's minds, is blocked in the context of intractable conflicts.

Herein lies the role of hope, defined as the legitimate possibility to imagine alternatives to the existing status quo, as a bridge between intractable conflicts (which

are inherently perceived as stable) and collective action (which requires a perception of instability). Thus, inducing hope in intractable conflicts (Cohen-Chen et al. 2014, 2015) becomes imperative in creating conditions fostering collective action and civic engagement. And while the fact that decisions are made by leaders and not society members can decrease hope, collective action is an important method used by societies and groups to convey attitudes regarding the conflict to their leaders and decision makers. Typically, the argument made in the collective action field is that *conflict* is necessary to obtain improved outcomes (likely involving negative attitudes), since it induces collective action to achieve change. But due to the conflict context, collective action is a means for the people to encourage decision-makers to make peace, ultimately leading to positive attitude change and a reduction in conflict.

When referring to scope for change, defined as the potential for achieving change in the first place, the different parties in the conflict are directing their actions at the same audience, while they each have different *scope* for collective action. For the weak side of the conflict (e.g., in the Israeli–Palestinian case, the Palestinians, who direct their action at Israel), normative collective action has no (or at least very minimal) scope for change. Therefore, they engage either in non-normative collective action (riots and terror attacks), or do not engage in action at all. However, there is no action directed at their own system (the Palestinian government), and so they have very little scope, and therefore very little hope for change. For the strong side of the conflict (Israel) there is scope for change, but it is directed at group members' own system. Thus, the audience for both sides is the same (Israel). The deviant subgroup (leftists in the Israeli case), have scope in collective action since they are the in-group and can take part in collective action. However, their scope is also limited as they risk excluding themselves from the in-group by engaging in collective action against their own group. Taken together, it seems that intractable conflicts lead both sides to experience disadvantage, while their inherent perception of stability hinders collective action. In such cases, hope may serve as an underlying condition for the emergence of collective action and mobilization for peace.

Who Is the Disadvantaged Group?

Typical collective action contexts suggest that the disadvantaged group engaging in collective action is a low status group suffering from societal inequality (Wright et al. 1990). However, in intractable conflicts, the disadvantage based in the conflict's consequences is experienced by both parties in the conflict. This is an important distinction because it also points to the idea that both sides' actions to work toward the same goal through collective efforts will be of pivotal importance in achieving social change. More specifically, the weaker side is disadvantaged with respect to resources, opportunities, and rights, as well as security, and can on this basis feel relative deprivation on behalf of their group (for a meta-analysis and

review, see Smith et al. 2012). Members of the stronger side, however, may feel deprived of something they feel entitled to, such as security and well-being (Leach et al. 2007; Leach and Smith 2006). According to this logic, the strong side of the conflict can also hold victimhood beliefs about the group (Schori-Eyal 2014; Schori-Eyal and Klar, vol. 2; Vollhardt et al., this volume), and therefore may not necessarily perceive itself as the strong side. It may justify its aggressive policies as self-defense or self-preservation. For example, many Israelis believe Israel is under existential threat and is using every resource it has to defend itself (Dupuis et al., this volume).

Thus, while in traditional forms of collective action one group is clearly disadvantaged, in intractable conflict both sides can be viewed as disadvantaged groups, because they subjectively feel deprived. However, the bases on which these groups claim relative deprivation may differ (e.g., resources vs. security). As such, this phenomenon moves beyond the traditional view of collective action as the disadvantaged standing up against the advantaged. This raises a third question of who the relevant and responsible out-group is in this unique type of intergroup conflict, which has important implications for understanding collective action for change.

Who Is Responsible for the Disadvantage and How Is It Sustained?

Collective action typically requires a high status (or advantaged) group that the disadvantaged can blame and hold responsible for their group's disadvantage (van Zomeren et al. 2008). Therefore, the collective action is directed towards the group who seeks to protect and maintain the status quo. The key implication of this view is that the two groups are in direct competition for resources (as emphasized in realistic conflict theory) and societal status (as emphasized in social identity theory; e.g., Tajfel and Turner 1979). By contrast, in intractable intergroup conflicts, the strong side of the conflict may be primarily responsible for the disadvantage, but there is also some responsibility of the weaker side in maintaining it (for inflicting suffering, violence, etc.). Intractable conflict, thus, assumes an asymmetrical but nevertheless bidirectional intergroup conflict that will not be resolved simply through the collective action of just one party. In a way, both sides have veto power over the conflict's continuation, as well as its resolution. Sometimes, the strong group's willingness to concede is overridden by the weak group's veto power. Thus, as the disadvantage itself is somewhat shared, so is the responsibility for the conflict's continuation.

In a similar vein, a traditional view of collective action indicates that the status quo advantages the high status group in terms of resources or power relations. Yet because both groups involved in intractable conflict can perceive themselves as disadvantaged (with at least some legitimate basis), the issue of advantage is more complex in such contexts. For the weak side of the conflict, for example, the disadvantage in maintaining the status quo is quite clear, since the status quo involves

a lack of resources, opportunities, and rights. This leads to a strong and widely accepted aspiration for change. This arguably reflects the typical view of collective action as the attempt of those who lack power to gain power.

Yet, the picture is more complex with regards to the strong side of the conflict. Indeed, one advantage of sustaining the status quo is that it *upholds the ethos of conflict* (Bar-Tal 2000). The ethos of conflict is a prism through which members of society perceive the conflict. It is a way to address conflict-related challenges and serves as a defense mechanism, protecting the group's positive self-image and enabling them to deal and live within the context of an intractable conflict (Bar-Tal 2000; Bar-Tal et al. 2009). Wide acceptance on the strong side that they are disadvantaging the out-group would contradict themes in the ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal 2000), resulting in a dissonance many would find hard to overcome.

Another reason for aspiring to maintain the status quo is the fact that the high-status group also suffers to some extent (though on different bases than the weak side) which leads many people to support the status quo since they believe the existing situation could be worse and is at least bearable. Thus, a lack of cognitive alternatives to the status quo justifies its maintenance; this “advantage” is sustaining a livable situation and is driven by a lack of belief in a better future. Thus, the comparison made by members of the high status group is in fact not an intergroup one (which is most predictive of collective action; Smith et al. 2012), but a *temporal* one. Instead of comparing their situation to that of another group, the high status group compares the existing situation to an alternative and often hypothetical situation which is far worse. Both these processes explain, at least to some extent, why the strong side wants to maintain a violent conflict which otherwise appears as a strong lose/lose construction. It also explains why attribution of responsibility occurs in both directions.

Engaging in Collective Action on Whose Behalf?

As noted, collective action in intractable conflicts holds an inherent, twofold, catch-22. On the one hand, the weak side is deprived of resources, making it difficult to engage in effective collective action given the action's embeddedness in the conflict. Many times there are conditions that do not allow for collective action (at least normative), such as segregation or military rule. Nevertheless, there is a catch-22 for the stronger side as well. That is, in order to deal with the deprivation of security needs, the ethos of conflict is developed. This psychological infrastructure, through which the conflict is perceived, helps society members cope with security threats by justifying the in-group and mobilizing people to continue fighting. As long as the threat persists, societies continue to adhere to the ethos, and engaging in effective collective action would violate the ethos of conflict. This national narrative includes the belief that there is no hope (the conflict is irresolvable). This theme within the ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal 2000, 2013; Cohrs et al. Chap. 3; Tropp, Chap. 12; Jost et al. Chap. 4; Oren vol. 2; Sharvit

vol. 2) supports the status quo by making it the *only* possible situation, while the belief in societal unity plays an important role in justifying the continuation of the conflict. Nevertheless, it is typically members of the advantaged group who engage in a combination of two types of collective action: The first is collective action on behalf of their own group's perceived interests to end the conflict (e.g., Israeli Jews protesting in-group or out-group actions that foster conflict). Importantly, collective action driven by a perception of peace as benefitting the in-group is based, at least partly, on hope; the perception that the conflict can be resolved, leading to action to achieve this goal. The second type is solidarity-based collective action (Van Zomeren 2013), in which the group acts on behalf of the other side (e.g., "Breaking the Silence" movement; www.breakingthesilence.org.il). Ultimately, this group perceives its actions as benefitting both sides, since they both have reasons to yearn for peace. However, people engaging in collective action for conflict resolution are often perceived as deviating from the national narrative (Asch 1952; Festinger 1950; Hornsey et al. 2003; Shamir 1997; Turner 1991), often leading to them being branded as traitors.

Additionally, the collective action literature suggests another alternative to the question on whose behalf individuals may act. That is, theory and research (e.g., Simon et al. 1998; Sturmer and Simon 2004; Van Zomeren et al. 2008) suggest that *politicized* groups (e.g., social movements and action groups) can galvanize support from individuals, provided that they are not aligned with only one of the parties involved and can motivate individuals from both sides on the basis of shared moral standards (e.g., Van Zomeren et al. 2011). For example, in the Israeli–Palestinian context the One Voice Movement (www.onevoicemovement.org) runs offices from both sides that work together and among their respective societies to promote conflict resolution, while presenting the self-interest in conflict resolution.

However, it may become unclear who is "negotiating" with whom and on whose behalf, which may hinder collective action for peace. This is due to three elements: First, it is a member of the advantaged group (e.g., Israeli leftists) who is engaging in collective action, deviating from the national narrative and acting in order to end the conflict. Second, the action is aimed towards their own in-group (e.g., Israeli government or mainstream), who are responsible for maintaining the status quo. Third, and importantly for our purposes, there are two benefactors from this action. In addition to the perceived gains for the in-group by ending the violent conflict, the out-group (often perceived as "the enemy" and widely delegitimized) is a major benefactor of efforts for change. Thus, members of the in-group may ultimately end up acting to some extent on behalf of the out-group against the policies and beliefs endorsed by their own group. This may discourage many people, who agree with the need to end the conflict, from actually taking a stand and acting. These people are often disinclined to engage in collective action, since it may be perceived as cooperating with the enemy. Importantly, as stated, actions such as this would constitute a breach of the belief in unity, a major theme within the ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal 2000).

Moreover, while some members of the in-group do choose to engage in collective action for peace, the *type* of action they partake in is also influenced by the fact

that they are in fact deviating from their group's conflict-related narrative. Here, since the target group is in fact the *in-group*, people may be reluctant to utilize various types of action so as not to hurt their in-group (physically and mentally) or relations with it. Often, they may be willing to use more "explaining" such as publishing their views in a newspaper or a social network, or participating in peaceful demonstrations, without using violence or force. These methods are characterized by moderate messages and restrained means, which are easily ignored or marginalized. Many of them utilize the in-group's narrative, and highlight the benefits of conflict resolution for the in-group rather than the out-group's needs or moral misgivings. Thus, while the disadvantaged side has little capacity to partake in collective action, subgroups within the advantaged party may compensate for this inability by acting on behalf of an interest they perceive as shared by both sides: peace.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we used Daniel Bar-Tal's many insights regarding intractable intergroup conflict as a distinctly different context from more traditional collective action contexts. By comparing these contexts systematically, we arrived at two core conclusions. First, collective action requires hope and scope for change, two elements which are, by definition, missing in intractable conflict settings. Second, this suggests that a glimmer of hope must be raised in order to move sociopsychological dynamics toward conflict resolution via the emerging opportunity to engage in collective action. Nevertheless, this hopeful insight from our analysis should not be understood as a solution to inaction in intractable conflict. Rather, we believe it offers a small but significant step to better understanding how to promote collective action for peace in intractable conflicts. Further examination and insight is needed to understand ways to utilize hope as a tool for mobilizing people to partake in collective endeavors to achieve peace and intergroup harmony.

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