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Abstract

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Keywords: *classical realist approach, conflict resolution, identity, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, public opinion, symbolic and concrete demands*

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Rotem Nagar and Jacob Shamir

Abstract

Researchers have recently leveled criticism at the realist approach to conflict resolution by pointing out the importance of symbolic aspects of this issue. Few studies, however, have hitherto focused on symbolic demands in conflicts. The present study examines the role of symbolic as well as concrete demands in conflict resolution, and is therefore innovative in this regard. A demand is categorized as “concrete” if it is based on an interest that is viable and applicable, in that it involves tangible resources that may change hands or be divided. A “symbolic” demand, on the other hand, pivots on either refraining from or taking action rather than on a tangible result. With reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this research suggests that the relationship between symbolic and concrete demands can serve as a tool for achieving conflict resolution – not only by compensating for symbolic demands with concrete demands and vice versa but also by balancing between the symbolic and the concrete aspects within the same demand. These findings may have valuable implications for the use of symbolic discourse as an instrument to transform conflicts.

Introduction

According to the classical realist approach to conflict resolution, the parties’ actions are motivated by the desire to advance their interests and maximize their gains, and therefore symbolic aspects of the issue are deemed irrelevant. During the last two decades, however, realist researchers have conceded that, within the boundaries of the realist research of negotiations, symbolic aspects should not be dismissed altogether – albeit recognizing them only as part of a game whose object is to maximize gains (Zartman, 1983). This approach has, in turn, incurred criticism, on the grounds that conflicts can be better understood through the prism of symbolism rather than realism (Faure, 1999; Kaufman & Bisharat, 2002). Thus, in investigations of conflict resolution, the importance of symbolic issues in conflicts has recently come to the forefront.

To the extent that symbols are at the heart of conflicts, matters of honor and guilt may be more important than even the central resource of the village life – the land (Nader & Todd, 1978). Issues that accumulate throughout a conflict have symbolic value that may “defy simple, rational understanding” (Faure, 1999, p. 20) and pertain to human suffering and honor, rather than to land and houses that have been lost forever (Kaufman & Bisharat, 2002).

Conflicts are based on key rights and/or demands that arise from basic identity metaphors and narratives (Zartman, 1983; Ross, 2001). Accordingly, human rights have become an integral part of conflict resolution (Gaer, 1997; Kaufman & Bisharat, 2002). Conflicts have also come to involve sacred values (such as justice), which are perceived as absolute and uncompromisable (Atran et al., 2007; Atran & Axelrod, 2008; Wade-Benzoni et al., 2002). It is not surprising, therefore, that barriers in fundamental political conflicts often include differences in the sacred values and narratives of the sides (Susskind et al., 2005; Bazerman et al., 2008). Conversely, a symbolic gesture recognizing the values of the “other” may facilitate the negotiation and even resolution of a charged conflict. Moreover, symbolic meanings may have a powerful effect on the actions of the negotiating parties (Faure, 1999). Indeed, in international politics, nations’ behavior is not based solely on considerations of power and sheer interests, but often involves aspirations for justice as well (Welch, 1993).

In conflicts accompanied by turbulent emotions and disagreements over prestige, the solution to the crisis may lie in a symbolic remedy (Cohen, 1997). However, to secure just and legitimate peace, the symbolic sacrifice may not be enough: more matters must be settled, including recognition of the “other” as an entity with an identity, history and culture (the so-called “thin recognition”) and understanding the basic characteristics of the “other” (“wide recognition”) (Allan & Keller, 2006). Recognizing the rights of the “other,” even on the declarative level, may provide the basis for a constructive negotiation and demonstrate a symbolic willingness to settle the conflict (Kaufman & Bisharat, 2002). Yet, in spite of the findings that point to the importance of symbolic aspects in conflict resolution, few researchers have examined the effect of symbolic demands on international political processes. The present study seeks to fill this void by developing an approach in conflict research that acknowledges the limitations of the realist models and examines the role of symbolic demands, as well as their relation to concrete demands, in conflict resolution processes. In addition to offering a new theoretical perspective on this issue, we focus on the practical implications of the analysis of conflict resolution processes, and especially the use of symbolic discourse as an instrument to transform conflicts.

Concrete and Symbolic Demands

The concepts of concrete and symbolic demands are based on Fraser's (1995) theoretical work. Fraser described a conceptual continuum between two types of demands for social justice: recognition and redistribution. Demands for distributive justice stem from socio-economic injustice linked to the economic structure. Demands for identity recognition

arise out of cultural injustice rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication. Unlike the paradigm of redistribution, cultural injustice aligns better with Webber's status groups than with Marx's classes. While, according to the redistribution paradigm, the solution is a new economic structure, the remedy suggested by the recognition paradigm is a symbolic change (Fraser & Honneth, 2003).

Fraser's model has sparked disagreement among scholars. Young (1997) contends that it represents a false dichotomy, and that redistribution and recognition are not mutually exclusive, but rather both stem from a demand for justice. Honneth (2001) censures Fraser's work, imputing to it Marxist economic reductionism, and arguing that redistribution is essential for justice but should be subsumed under the category of recognition. Economic injustice, on Honneth's view, is experienced as injustice stemming from disrespect, for example the violation of a complex order of recognition in society.

While conceding that recognition and redistribution are not "clear-cut" categories, we will argue – contrary to Honneth's (2001) approach – that the distinction between them is meaningful, and that therefore this dualism deserves a place in the study of political demands in negotiation. In line with Fraser (1995, 1998), we will attempt to demonstrate that an analytic distinction can be drawn between demands that are primarily symbolic, such as recognition, justice and apology, on the one hand, and demands that are inherently concrete, such as distribution of territory, water etc., on the other. Our working hypothesis to this effect is that demands set forth in negotiations can be located on a bi-polar continuum ranging from "symbolic" to "concrete." The mapping of the various demands, and the analysis of the relations between them, should be performed bearing in mind the uncertainties involved in delimiting the two categories and the possibility that any specific demand may be linked to both ends of the spectrum.

We categorize a demand as concrete if it is based on an interest that is viable and applicable, in that it includes tangible resources that may change hands or be divided. For a demand to be symbolic, its meaning must lie in the action of making it and not in a tangible result. While any specific demand might carry both a symbolic and a concrete connotation, we classify it as either symbolic or concrete depending on the phrasing. Thus "water" is arguably an emotionally charged term, but at the same time it is an important physical resource. Consequently, a specific suggestion regarding the use of water is considered a concrete demand. Similarly, while recognition is usually perceived as a purely symbolic act, a demand to accept the end of demands is, in itself, a legal political demand which has the

concrete significance of assuring the other side that no additional demands, concrete or symbolic, can be made. In this case, even though no material property has changed hands, the right to make demands has been forfeited, and this has strong concrete implications.

Methodology

In this study, the role of symbolic and concrete demands in conflict resolution is examined in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The situation investigated is rife with political symbolism due to the sides' strong emotional attitudes regarding questions of land, nation, security and survival. It has been argued that the failure of Israeli and Palestinian leaders to reach a solution is attributable to symbolic factors (Hermann & Newman, 2000).

Negotiations to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict epitomize a contrast between symbolic discourse regarding recognition and justice, on the one hand, and concrete discourse regarding resources in a framework of costs and benefits, on the other. Most researchers concur that the Palestinian side tends to perceive the conflict in terms of rights and frame its demands in terms of justice, focusing on key values (Albin, 2001; Allan & Keller, 2006; Peled & Rouhana, 2007). By contrast, the Israeli side purportedly frames the negotiation in terms of rational cost-benefit analysis centered on considerations of security and territory (Albin, 2001; Shamir & Shikaki, 2010; Sabet, 1998). It goes without saying that this difference in perception is reflected in the public and the political arenas; it determines the framing of the conflict management in public discourse and influences the assessment of possibilities for various solutions.

In this study, the symbolic and concrete aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations were examined using two methodological tools: (1) interviews with politicians and experts on both sides who had been involved in the peace process over the years, and (2) surveys to gauge the Israeli and Palestinian public opinion.

Politicians and Experts Involved In the Peace Process

Our choice of the sample was motivated by two considerations. First, the politicians and public figures we interviewed were familiar with the entire negotiation process and with the demands set forth by both parties over the years. Moreover, these were the key figures in the peace process: the ones who had led the negotiations and suggested wordings to resolve the disputed issues.

The respondents' preferences for concrete versus symbolic demands were assessed based on semi-structured in-depth interviews. The attitudes of the Israeli and the Palestinian

experts were examined with regard to each of the demands that had been subject to negotiation over the years: the right of return; recognizing the pain and suffering of the refugees; recognizing Israel's part in creating the refugee problem; water rights; territory; security; end of the conflict; end of demands; mutual recognition of Palestine and Israel as the national homes of their respective peoples; recognition of the State of Israel as a state of the Jewish people. For each demand, we determine whether the interviewees treated it as symbolic or concrete, according to the analytic distinction elaborated above.

The interviews with the Israeli experts were conducted in Hebrew and took place in Israel. The Palestinian experts were interviewed in Arabic, mostly in the West Bank, by a Palestinian Israeli and the interviews were subsequently translated into Hebrew.

All in all, eleven interviews were conducted with Israeli Jewish experts and politicians. All Israeli interviewees studied in depth the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and had participated in formal and informal negotiations, as negotiators or as political consultants, among them the Oslo negotiations, the Taba Summit and the Camp David summit in 2000 and so on. Moreover, three of the Israeli interviewees participated in drafting the Geneva Accord, the only final status peace accord drafted jointly by Israelis and Palestinians .

Five interviews were conducted with Palestinian experts and politicians All Palestinian interviewees are senior public leaders, most of them in senior positions in the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) and/or the Palestinian National Authority. Most of the Palestinian interviewees had participated in formal and informal negotiations, among them the Oslo negotiations, the Wye River discussions, the Taba Summit and the Camp David summit in 2000. Some of them participated in drafting the Geneva Accord. All interviewees were assured that they will not be quoted directly, and to protect their identities, throughout the paper they will be referred to by random letters of the alphabet.

Public Opinion among Israelis and Palestinians

As stated before, in addition to the interviews, we conducted opinion polls among the Palestinian and Israeli publics. The decision to study public opinion was prompted by the important role it plays in the two-level negotiation game (Putnam, 1988; Shamir & Shikaki, 2010) and in foreign policy decisions (Holsti, 1992). Indeed, it is public opinion that underlies collective wisdom and lends legitimacy to leaders and policies alike (Shamir & Shamir, 2000). Moreover, given the reciprocal relation between state leadership and public opinion (Shamir, 2005), an analysis of each cannot be complete without the understanding of the other. Public opinion is known to be sensitive to symbolic gestures and lend support to a

negotiator who comes up with an appropriate wording to frame a demand – this may be especially the case in conflicts over symbolic values (Shamir & Shikaki, 2010). It is therefore necessary to examine the views of both publics investigated, on both symbolic and material issues, particularly in light of their sensitivity to the symbolic aspects of this specific debate.

The data are based on the Joint Israeli-Palestinian Poll (JIPP), which has simultaneously tracked Israeli and Palestinian public opinion since 2000. The polls were planned and supervised by Prof. Yaacov Shamir, of the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace and the Department of Communication and Journalism at the Hebrew University, and Prof. Khalil Shikaki, Director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR). In addition to using data from the polls conducted since the year of 2000, we developed several questions regarding demands related to redistribution and recognition and included them in the December 2008 and March 2010 polls (Israeli poll: N=600; Palestinian poll: N=1270). In all the surveys the Palestinian data are based on face-to-face interviews conducted among representative samples in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The Israeli data comprise of interviews with representative samples of adult Israelis conducted over the phone in Hebrew, Arabic or Russian. The Israeli sample is weighted based on the proportion of Arab and Jewish citizens in the general population, as well as on the results of the general elections preceding the poll.

Respondents were presented with pairs of issues, one symbolic and the other concrete, and asked which among the two they deemed the more important. In all the pairs, symbolic gains were centered around recognition, due to the importance of this issue in the day-to-day political discourse, while concrete issues focused on territorial compromises. Israeli respondents were asked to choose between Palestinian recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people versus sovereignty over Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. In addition, they were asked to choose between Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state versus sovereignty over settlement blocs in Judea and Samaria. Palestinian respondents were asked to choose between Israeli recognition of the right of return, accompanied by the return of refugees to Palestine (but not to Israel), versus a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders. In addition, they were asked to choose between Israeli recognition of the right of return, accompanied by the return of refugees to Palestine (but not to Israel) versus Palestinian sovereignty over Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem.

In addition, each participant was asked to rank two symbolic and two concrete demands in terms of their importance. The demands that were presented to the Israeli sample and those that were presented to the Palestinian sample had nearly identical social and cultural significance for the sides. The following demands were presented randomly to the Israeli sample: Creating early warning facilities within the Palestinian state to prevent a surprise attack; Palestinian recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people; securing Israel's water rights; Palestinian recognition of Israeli pain and suffering throughout the conflict (2008), or alternatively, Palestinian declaration of the "end of the conflict" (2010). The demands that were randomly presented to the Palestinian sample were as follows: safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza; Israeli recognition of Palestine as the home of the Palestinian people; securing Palestinian water rights in any future agreement; Israeli recognition of the pain and suffering caused to the Palestinians throughout the conflict. In order to compare the issues in terms of their importance to the respondents, each of the issues presented to both the Israeli and the Palestinian participants was assigned an index of importance based on the following formula:

Index of Importance (only for the questions that involved ranking in terms of importance):

(1)

$(\text{Frequency as first priority}) * 4 + (\text{frequency of as second priority}) * 3 + (\text{frequency as third priority}) * 2 + (\text{frequency as last priority}) * 1.$

**Findings: Examining the Symbolic-Concrete Continuum for Each Side
Experts' Assessment of Each Negotiated Demand as Symbolic and/or Concrete
The right of return.**

Most Israeli interviewees distinguished between a declarative symbolic recognition of the right of return and its concrete implementation. The prevailing feeling among the Israeli participants was that, throughout peace negotiations, Palestinians have emphasized the symbolic demand in this regard but have been willing to compromise on its concrete implementation. Israeli interviewee **A**, for example, stated that "the declaration is more important to them... than the actual implementation. It is important to their leadership... [it is] important to their people, it's important to the refugees." The interviewees based their opinions on both formal and informal negotiations. Thus, Israeli interviewee **E** mentioned the Geneva Accord, in which, as he put it, the Palestinians "gave up the right of return in exchange for a symbolic right of return." Israeli interviewee **F** brought up the negotiations

with Yasser Arafat, contending that Arafat's historic "trade-off," as he called it, "was to exchange Palestinian sovereignty over Temple Mount for the right to return," a concession that is both material and symbolic. In the same light the Israeli interviewees saw the Arab Initiative for Peace. Thus, participant **F** believed that the Arab League's March 2009 decision clearly indicates that the Palestinian side is willing to forgo any actual return of refugees.

The Palestinian interviewees emphasized that recognition is essential but not sufficient, and that concrete implementation is needed. They noted, however, that they are well aware that the extent of the right of return must be regulated based on an agreement with Israel, or in other words, that not all refugees would return to the State of Israel. Their responses distinguished between the recognition of each refugee's right to return and a limited implementation of this right. Palestinian interviewee **N** asserted that the Palestinians "understand that, at the end of the process [peace negotiations], not all refugees can or would want to return." He went on to say that, while "for Palestinians, recognition of the right of return is very important... they know that there is a difference between having a right and realizing it." Palestinian interviewee **M** stated that "Israel must recognize this right in principle... We need to... separate between... the issue of recognizing the right and the responsibility for the great crime... and the issue of implementation."

Recognizing the pain and suffering of the refugees and recognizing Israel's part in creating the refugee problem.

Most Israeli interviewees saw recognition of the pain and suffering of the Palestinian refugees as an important part of the negotiation, which may serve as a compensation for more concrete concessions. However, no consensus emerged regarding Israel's obligation to accept responsibility for creating the refugee problem. Indeed, some of the respondents expressed the belief that the pain and suffering of the Palestinian people ought to be recognized, albeit without taking blame for it. Israeli interviewee **I** felt that hundreds of Palestinians "want the feeling that Israel says that it admits... responsibility for what happened with the refugees." However, in the Geneva Accord "we did go that far recognizing the suffering caused to the Palestinian people [without taking responsibility]." In his opinion, recognition of the Palestinian suffering is important, and if the Palestinian representatives in the Geneva negotiation had been satisfied in this regard, this would have had "a good effect on the Palestinian public opinion." Israeli interviewee **J**, who suggested that Israel should recognize the pain and suffering, saw the Palestinian demand that recognition of pain and suffering should be combined with acceptance of responsibility as

“an impossible combination” – and as he put it, “a zero-sum game.” On the other hand, Israeli interviewee **C** believed that accepting responsibility is important for the negotiation. He stated that the third and fourth generations of refugees:

“...want two things... one is related to the concrete dimension and the other to the symbolic dimension. Regarding the concrete dimension, they want a solution... in terms of compensation and rehabilitation in exchange for their terrible loss... Regarding the symbolic dimension... it's [for Israel] to stand up and apologize.”

The Palestinian side also attached great importance to recognizing the pain and suffering of refugees, but pointed out that Israel must accept responsibility for the emergence of the refugee problem. Moreover, they emphasized that this recognition must be accompanied by concrete actions. Palestinian interviewee **M** stated that the solution to the refugee problem requires “first and foremost” Israeli recognition of the Nakba and of Israel's responsibility for it, and underscored the practical implications of such responsibility: “I don't care about the apology if it is not accompanied by a practical procedure...” Palestinian interviewee **A** held a similar position, stating: “Recognizing the pain and suffering is important but it's not everything. To achieve peace, we want to see... things happening in the Palestinian people's reality.”

Water rights.

All but one of the Israeli interviewees expressed a pragmatic view of this issue, seeking alternative technical solutions to dividing the Mountain Aquifer, such as desalination. Palestinian interviewees likewise focused on the concrete aspect of the situation, namely, the need for an equal share of the water. Unlike the Israelis, however, Palestinian interviewees offered fewer specific solutions to the problem. Palestinian Interviewee **N** stated that, to the best of his knowledge as a member of the committee that negotiated water rights, “there is nothing symbolic, it's a practical thing.” Palestinian Interviewee **O** was one of two respondents who spoke in terms of justice: “We want a fair and just solution to the division of resources and water.” Palestinian Interviewee **M** highlighted the Palestinians rights under international law, but also called for an equitable division of the water.

Territory (including the Jerusalem question).

It has been widely acknowledged that any debate over territory includes both symbolic and concrete aspects, and this is especially so when the point of contention is Jerusalem and its sacred sites. Nevertheless, both the Israeli and the Palestinian interviewees

revealed for the most part a pragmatic attitude in this matter, and their approach to the issue pivoted on practical solutions for the division of territories. Indeed, most saw Jerusalem as a divisible resource – in fact, in their view, it was already divided, for all intents and purposes.

Israeli interviewees E, C, and J offered solutions involving an exchange of territory. Interviewee J even quantified the problem, asserting that a “serious” disagreement was confined to 5% of the West Bank, while the debate over the rest of the territory had been resolved by prior negotiations. Israeli Interviewee A suggested that a concession in terms of territorial exchange can help achieve compromises on the right of return. Israeli interviewee B supported a pragmatic approach to territorial issues, criticizing the shift in the attitude of the Israeli public from pragmatic to symbolic, expressed in the discourse focusing on “historical rights to the land of Israel.” He rejected the “united Jerusalem” approach, stating that the issue is not pragmatic (“no one looks at the map”) and that “the unity of Jerusalem” has become “a slogan.”

The Palestinian interviewees’ discussion of territory likewise centered on practical solutions. Palestinian interviewees L, N, P and O spoke of recognizing the 1967 borders and allocating land based on territorial exchange. L stated that territory is a pragmatic rather than a symbolic issue: “From a pragmatic perspective, I know that to get Hebron I need to give up Haifa. I can’t get both Haifa and Hebron. I expect the same of the Israeli side.”

Security.

As is the case with territory, it has been widely acknowledged that security is an issue that incorporates symbolic as well as concrete aspects. Here, too, the interviews revealed a pragmatic approach on the part of the Israeli respondents, most of whom addressed the issue by offering practical solutions. Israeli interviewee I, for example, explained why any solution in this regard must involve demilitarization in exchange for “strategic depth” (strategic presence of Israeli forces outside of the Green Line). Israeli interviewee H described the security problem as a complex set of “technical issues” that are already being solved on a daily basis. As in the discussions of territory, a number of Israeli interviewees criticized what they saw as symbolic intransigence on security issues among Israeli public. Israeli interviewee G, for example, criticized the insistence of the Israeli side on reserving the right to fly over the West Bank, and contended that it was a symbolic demand with no substance to it: “What’s the area of the West Bank for an F15 or F16?... It’s a joke.”

On the Palestinian side, interviewees N, M and L offered specific suggestions in connection with security issues. Thus, interviewee N spoke about an international presence

in the Jordan Rift Valley, and the possibility of using radar and satellite dishes in the West Bank. Similarly, interviewee **M** suggested that an international force be present, “for the short or long term as determined by both sides.” Interviewee **L** chose to discuss a security model proposed as part of the Geneva Accord. Palestinian interviewees **M** and **P**, on the other hand, saw security as a tool used by Israel to seize land.

End of the conflict and end of demands.

“End of the conflict” is a political demand that the accord mark the formal end of the conflict. “End of demands” is a political-legal demand that both parties' demands be set down in the accord, such that, once the accord has been signed, parties can only claim its implementation.

While some of the Israeli interviewees saw both these demands as concrete and essential, others saw the end of demands as a concrete claim, while the end of the conflict as symbolic. From the responses of Israeli interviewees, it was clear that those who viewed end of the conflict as a concrete demand believed it to be important. Interviewees who saw this demand as symbolic, on the other hand, were divided as to its importance for the peace process. Thus, for Israeli interviewee **K**, both demands were essential:

If you leave things open, then we haven't ended the conflict... It's very important for Israel that the peace agreement should stipulate the end of the conflict... Regarding demands, that's a legal issue. This means all the demands... have been settled.

In contrast, in the opinion of Israeli interviewee **B**, the end of demands is a legal contract, while the end of the conflict symbolizes the shift from a pragmatic public discussion to a symbolic public discussion, the latter characteristic of Israeli public opinion in recent years. Similarly, Interviewee **C** regarded the end of the conflict as “something that we... I don't want to say we made it up, but maybe we did.” In his view, the end of the conflict demand has no concrete significance; yet, in the Geneva Accord, he had pushed for its inclusion on account of its symbolic value, which – he believed – could serve as “a tool that would help sell the agreement to the Israeli public.”

On the Palestinian side, all the interviewees attached importance to both demands in equal measure. Unlike the Israelis, the Palestinians saw both the end of the conflict and the end of demands claim as endowed with concrete significance. For example, Palestinian interviewee **N** stated that both demands were important “from the perspective that both sides can be sure that they have solved all the problems.” Similarly, Palestinian interviewee **P**

believed both these demands to be important and pointed to the section of the Arab Peace Initiative referring to them.

Mutual recognition of Palestine and Israel as the national homes of their respective peoples and recognition of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people.

Mutual recognition of Palestine and Israel as the national homes of their respective peoples and recognition of the state of Israel as the state of the Jewish people are inherently symbolic demands, which according to our definition above are not accompanied by tangible concessions. During the interviews, we examined how important the demands for recognition are to each of the sides.

While some of the Israeli interviewees supported the demand of mutual recognition, all had reservations about demanding recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people. Israeli interviewee **C**, for example, proposed an alternative wording, namely, that both sides acknowledge the right to mutual self-determination:

The way we did it in the Geneva Accord was much more clever, since in the Geneva Accord, or even in other places... we said that each of the States can determine its own identity, or we said Israel defining itself as the home of the Jewish people, say, signs an agreement with the Palestinian State defining itself as the national home of the Palestinian people. So that way you don't demand that the other side recognize your self-determination, but you demand that the other side acknowledge that you have the right to self-determination...

Israeli interviewee **B** believed that it is impossible to reach an agreement without dealing with the issue of mutual recognition, and offered what he described as a "simple solution": "For example, repeat the wording of the UN Partition Plan... and that's the end of it... It's a pragmatic solution to a supposedly symbolic question." However, he went on to say, this solution "is never going to materialize if Israel insists on the 'symbolic issue' of recognizing Israel as the state of the Jewish people, while pragmatically, we don't need Palestinians to recognize that: we decide what kind of a country it is." He sees this demand as a part of the above-mentioned process whereby Israeli discourse has shifted from pragmatic to symbolic issues. Israeli interviewees **I** and **E** were exceptions, in that they disagreed with the notion of mutual recognition as well as with the demand to recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people. They asserted that there is no need to demand mutual recognition. **E**, for example, stated that a clause addressing mutual recognition should not be

included in any peace agreement, since such recognition has already been given in the past and, additionally, no such clause appears in any other peace agreement in the Middle East.

In contrast to the Israelis, Palestinian interviewees were not in agreement regarding the significance of mutual recognition of national homes, and some opposed this notion. However, all the Palestinian interviewees concurred with their Israeli counterparts in that each state may define itself however it sees fit, and claimed that political recognition would only complicate the issue. For example, Palestinian interviewee **M** opposed mutual recognition stating, “because what’s important to the agreement are two things: mutual political recognition of sovereignty of each state, and then ending the conflict, such that there will be no demands in the future...” He stated that Israel can define itself in any way it chooses but the Palestinians should recognize it as it is recognized by international law. On the other hand, Palestinian interviewee **L** declared mutual recognition to be “definitely” important. As for recognizing Israel as the state of the Jewish people, he leaves it to the State of Israel to decide: “I believe it is up to the Israelis to declare the nature of their state...”

The Importance of Concrete and Symbolic Demands in Public Opinion

Israeli public opinion.

In the opinion of the Israeli public as of December 2008 and March 2010, the most important demand was the recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people – in marked contrast to the Israeli interviewees, who tended to minimize the importance of this demand. In the December 2008 survey, this symbolic demand was ranked first, and two concrete demands – securing water rights and setting up early warning facilities – as second and third. Palestinian recognition of Israeli suffering was ranked as the least important. In March 2010, the demand for the end of the conflict was ranked second, but it was not clear whether it was regarded as concrete or symbolic. The demands ranked third and fourth were securing water rights and setting up early warning facilities, in that order.

In addition to ranking their preferences in the negotiations, the respondents were asked to choose between Palestinian recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people and territorial compromises. The results showed a clear preference for the former over the latter. In December 2008, 50% of respondents preferred Palestinian recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people to sovereignty over Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem (35%; 6% did not prefer either option, and 10% did not respond or did not know). In the March 2010 poll, 55% preferred Palestinian recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people, while 25% preferred Israeli sovereignty over Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem;

11% did not prefer either option, and 10% did not respond or did not know. Of the respondents who preferred Palestinian recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people (N=273), 50% said that they find this much more important than securing sovereignty over East Jerusalem; 34% said they find it somewhat more important, and 12% said they find it slightly important (5% did not respond or did not know).

In the December 2008 poll, 46% preferred Palestinian recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people, while 41% preferred sovereignty over settlement blocs in Judea and Samaria; 5% did not prefer either option, and 9% did not respond or did not know. In March 2010, 38% preferred Palestinian recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people, while 31% preferred Israeli sovereignty over settlement blocs in Judea and Samaria; 11% did not prefer either option, and 20% did not respond or did not know. Of the respondents who indicated a preference for Palestinian recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people (N=273), 50% said that they see this as much more important than Israeli sovereignty over the settlements in Judea and Samaria; 35% said it was somewhat more important, and 12% said it was slightly more important (3% did not respond or did not know).

Thus it appears that, contrary to the belief commonly held among scholars that the Israeli approach is predominantly concrete, the reality is more complex: Israelis tend to uphold concrete as well as symbolic demands.

Palestinian public opinion.

Like the Israelis, the Palestinian respondents ranked Israeli recognition of Palestine as the state of the Palestinian people as their first priority. The second preference was the concrete issue of safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza, and the third was the symbolic demand for Israeli recognition of the pain and suffering caused to the Palestinians throughout the conflict. Last came securing Palestinian water rights in any future agreement. These findings hold true for both 2008 and 2010.

In a poll conducted in 2003, most Palestinian refugees insisted that any agreement with Israel must ensure their right to return to their homes and property within Israel. The majority of the respondents, however, expressed a wish to live within the Palestinian state (31% in Gaza and the West Bank and 23% in Israeli territories that they envisioned as being made part the Palestinian state) or in a different host country (17%), rather than in Israel (10%). This indicates that, at that time, the right of return was seen primarily as a symbolic right, which most respondents did not intend to realize.

The December 2008 poll indicates that, at that time, 50% of Palestinian respondents preferred a state based on the 1967 borders over Israeli recognition of the right of return accompanied by a return of refugees to Palestine but not to Israel. Only 24% preferred Israeli recognition of the right of return, even at the cost of a smaller state. Nineteen percent did not prefer either option, and 4% did not respond or did not know.

In March 2010, 56% of the Palestinian respondents preferred a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders over Israeli recognition of the right of return. Twenty-five percent preferred Israeli recognition and 18% did not respond or did not know. Of the respondents who preferred a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders (N=716), 52% said that this is much more important to them than Israeli recognition; 39% said it was somewhat more important, and 8% said it was slightly more important (0.7% did not respond or did not know).

We also asked the respondents to choose between Israeli recognition of the right of return, with a limited number of Palestinians returning to greater Jerusalem, versus Palestinian sovereignty over Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. In December 2008, 38% chose Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem and 33% chose Israeli recognition; 23% did not prefer either option, and 7% did not respond or did not know. In March 2010, 43% chose Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem and 35% chose Israeli recognition; 22% did not respond or did not know. Of the respondents who preferred Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem (N=543), 50% said that this was much more important to them than Israeli recognition; 34% said that it was somewhat more important; and 11% said that it was slightly more important (1% did not respond or did not know).

The Sides' Perception of Each Other's Preferences in Terms of the Symbolic-Concrete Continuum

The Israeli interviewees' perceptions of Palestinian attitudes diverged: some saw them as primarily pragmatic, while others as symbolic. Israeli interviewee **A**, for example, described the Palestinians as completely pragmatic:

The Palestinians, I think they care less about dramatic declarations, they want pragmatic results. What they really want is... give me my freedom... give me the territory, I want the symbolism less now... Israel unfortunately sets a great store by such favors and such patronization, like I give you a flag, give you a national anthem, give you a song and screw you over – excuse me – in simple Hebrew, when it comes to territory, refugees, Jerusalem and the like...

Israeli interviewee **J** felt that, initially, the Palestinians had emphasized more symbolic matters, but this had changed over the years:

When we started the negotiations with the Palestinians, I was there pretty much from the very beginning, honor was the most important component for them and substance was almost meaningless. They also didn't quite understand, they didn't prepare enough, they didn't know the facts well... no one cared about the substance... That's not [the case] any more. They have really changed, they're organized, know their facts etc. Actually today the one who cares more about appearances is the Israeli side.

In contrast, Israeli interviewees **D**, **I**, **B**, and **H** expressed the belief that symbolism is more important to the Palestinians than concrete demands. Interviewee **D** described Israel's attitude towards territory, water and refugee rights as a fundamentally technical platform, as opposed to the Palestinians' justice based approach. In his opinion, the conflict between these two attitudes presented an obstacle in previous negotiations, preventing the sides from even beginning to discuss solutions. Interviewee **B** also believed that the Palestinians' attitudes are mainly symbolic, but he felt that a change had recently occurred in the Israeli approach: today the Israeli side also concentrates on symbolism, rather than on practicality:

When I started dealing with this issue... 15 years ago... in the beginning, I thought a major part of the issue was the cultural differences between the two sides, mainly that we were the pragmatic ones... while they came with an attitude that cared more about symbols... I'm not so sure this is true [today]. That is, when I look at the importance that is assigned by our side to issues like the unity of Jerusalem... when I know that anyone who knows anything about the subject and has examined it knows that the whole thing is pretty much a bluff.

Israeli interviewees **C**, **E**, and **G** emphasized the importance of an approach that combines the symbolic and the pragmatic, realizing that symbols are of great importance to the Palestinians but also that symbolism cannot stand on its own. Interviewee **G** actually criticized Israel for being too concrete in its approach, which he dubbed "the thrift-shop mentality."

While most of Israeli interviewees had formed an opinion regarding the location of Palestinian preferences on the concrete-symbolic continuum, the responses of the Palestinians were much more vague in this respect. For example, Palestinian Interviewee **N** said that the

Israelis simply “want to get it all.” In the same vein but in less categorical terms, Interviewee **L** stated:

I can't tell. What we see now are two issues: the issue of security and the recognition of the state of the Jewish people... The security issue is something we consider as physical. The recognition in the state of the Jewish people... is a bit confusing. It just gets in the way...

The position of Palestinian interviewee **M** was somewhat more complex: he believed that the Israelis use symbols to justify their political demands.

Discussion

According to a commonly held view, which is also manifested in the academic literature, one of the main obstacles to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict stems from a disparity between a concrete Israeli orientation and a symbolic Palestinian approach. The findings here reveal a far more complex reality, with both sides making symbolic and concrete claims simultaneously. It appears, therefore, that the widespread assumption regarding the different nature of the demands made by each of the sides is unfounded. Furthermore, this study shows that this mistaken premise may, in itself, constitute an obstacle to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. More generally, in light of the finding obtained in this research, the hypothesis that there is a clear-cut distinction between symbolic and concrete cultures seems untenable. Crucially, this idea is clearly counterproductive, as the data suggest that balancing between symbolic and concrete demands in a negotiation can serve as a tool for achieving conflict resolution.

The Israeli Side

Israeli interviewees were largely in agreement about the degree of importance of mutual recognition of Israel and Palestine as the national homes of their respective peoples, and some also supported the political demand that Palestine recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people. The literature on political recognition deals for the most part with the struggle of different groups within a joint social sphere, rather than with conflicts between states or nations. The interviews conducted for the purpose of this study show that, much as with individuals and groups, recognition is also sought and demanded by states. Thus, our research contributes to the scholarly effort in this regard by extending the academic study of demands for recognition from the national-social to the international context.

On issues of water rights, security and territory, Israeli interviewees appeared to favor the pragmatic approach. Furthermore, the responses show that all the interviewees who saw

the demand for the end of the conflict as concrete believed it to be important, while those who saw it as symbolic were divided as to its importance in the peace process.

In the surveys, Israeli respondents unambiguously placed recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people as their top priority, preferring it over territorial demands. The second and third preferences, however, were concrete.

The Palestinian Side

The interviews demonstrate that, although the Palestinians interviewees assigned great importance to symbolic demands, they did not discount concrete interests either. The recognition of the right of return and of the pain and suffering of refugees was mentioned over and over again, as well as the demand to accept responsibility. The literature is divided on the question of whether or not a political apology must involve accepting responsibility (Auerbach, 2004; Barkan, 2000; Cunningham, 1999; Rotberg, 2006; Rouhana, 2004; Weyeneth, 2001). In our case, the Palestinians focused on the Israelis' acknowledgment of responsibility as a symbolic gesture, which would necessarily entail an apology.

According to the academic literature, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an example of a case in which the demand for justice has become a key issue. Thus, the goal of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has frequently been defined as achieving a "just and stable peace" (Rouhana, 2004, p. 37), thereby rendering justice as a primary condition to forging peace. The present study has not supported the above theoretical premise. The concepts of rights and justice rarely figured in the Palestinian conceptualizations of demands – in fact, these terms were mentioned only three times, in two interviews. Instead of calling for justice, the Palestinian interviewees tended to frame specific, concrete demands designed to solve the problems of security, water, territory and more – although their solutions were less defined or detailed as compared to those advanced by the Israeli side. And while putting emphasis on Israeli recognition of the right of return and on the refugees' pain and suffering, as well as on accepting responsibility for the refugee problem, the Palestinian interviewees clearly stipulated that these symbolic gestures must be translated into practical measures. Thus, on the Palestinian side, the discussion of the refugee problem was by no means amorphous or wrapped in vague terminology such as justice or equity, but appeared to be firmly anchored in pragmatism and realism.

As for Palestinian public opinion, the rankings given to symbolic and concrete demands show preference for both. The first priority for most Palestinian respondents was a symbolic demand: Israeli recognition of Palestine. Their next highest preference, however,

was concrete: safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza. Recognition of pain and suffering was clearly more important than water rights, a finding which points to the importance of the former issue for the Palestinian public. The emphasis Palestinian public opinion places on concrete aspects was also evident from their preference for a state based on the 1967 borders or for sovereignty over Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem over recognition of the right of return.

It is noteworthy that, while both sides weighed symbolic and concrete demands as equally important, neither side was aware of that tendency on the part of the other. Israeli interviewees were divided on their perception of the Palestinians' place on the symbolic-concrete continuum, but some of them clearly still saw the Palestinians' attitude as anchored primarily in symbolic values. As mentioned previously, the prevailing assumption among scholars is that differences in symbolic versus concrete preferences serve as an obstacle to conflict resolution. Ironically, the results of this study indicate that it is the assumption itself that might constitute an obstacle in a quest for peace.

From a different perspective, the Israeli interviewees' awareness of the symbolic needs of the Palestinians may be helpful in responding to the Palestinians' demands. The Israeli interviewees acknowledged the importance attached by Palestinians to Israel recognizing the right of return and the pain and suffering of the refugees, as well as to Israel accepting responsibility for the refugee problem. As a result of this awareness, the Israeli interviewees were willing to acquiesce to the former two demands in order to advance the negotiations. The Palestinian interviewees, on the other hand, had no clear perception of the Israelis' place on the symbolic-concrete continuum. In so far as symbolic demands carry great weight in the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, this lack of awareness on the part of the Palestinians may prove an obstacle to constructive negotiation.

As concerns symbolic versus concrete distinction, the present study has shown that the common assumption regarding a gap between the Israeli and the Palestinian preferences is unfounded. On the other hand, a disparity emerged between groups within the Israeli society concerning the value of symbolic aspirations. In the polls, Israeli respondents ranked the demand for Palestinian recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people as their top priority. In contrast, most of the Israeli interviewees believed that this demand for recognition is unnecessary, and may even be perceived by the other side as a provocation. Public opinion is an important player in conflict resolution and, moreover, there is a reciprocal, inter-dependency relationship between public opinion and leaders. Thus, the disparity found

between the opinions of the public and the persons interviewed should not be disregarded, since it constitutes an obstacle that may impede the negotiation and conflict resolution.

Political processes of negotiation, conflict management and conflict resolution require common ground and shared understanding. One of the central challenges in resolving international conflicts is the possible failure of talks or accords due to inter-group differences which hinder communication and prevent sides from agreeing upon shared rules of play (Wittes, 2005). By the same token, the success of any political dialogue depends on understanding the goals and the discourse of the 'self' as well as learning about the 'other' (Gurevich, 2002; Sagi, 1999). Our research demonstrates that, in a conflict, examining the needs and aspirations of sides through the lens of symbolic and concrete distinction is essential for promoting mutual understanding and toppling stereotypes.

Thus, awareness of the symbolic and the concrete dimensions in one's own as well as the other side's aspirations is essential for dealing with conflicts. The Joint Israeli-Palestinian Polls (JIPP) conducted between 2003 and 2006 indicate that an overall package can receive greater support than its component parts. People's rationale is largely based on trade-offs, so one component may be seen as a compensation for another (Shamir & Shikaki, 2010). This research has shown that the relationship between symbolic and concrete demands can serve as a tool for achieving a compensatory balance. Israeli interviewees proposed varied ideas for symbolic acts as a compensation for concrete concessions. The findings suggest, therefore, that understanding which core issues are seen mostly as concrete (for example land, in our case) and which as symbolic (for example, recognition) improves the chances that the sides will agree upon the overall package in a negotiation. Put differently, in international conflict management and conflict negotiation, it is essential to understand and analyze the sides' attitudes towards symbolic demands, as this may facilitate conflict resolution as well as reconciliation.

As we maintained earlier, a demand can be seen as both symbolic and concrete. The right of return issue, for example, has two dimensions: a concrete demand for physical return and a symbolic demand for recognition of the right to return. We have found that a trade-off between the two dimensions can be used to achieve conflict resolution. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, both sides agree that the right of return cannot possibly be realized by having all refugees return to Israeli territory within the Green Line. This is evident from the results of the December 2011 JIPP poll: 45% among Palestinians support a solution based on permanent residency of the refugees in Palestinian and the Israeli areas transferred to

Palestinian (residency in host countries, third countries, or Israel would be subject to the decision of these states). While the refugee problem is generally seen as an intractable issue, in our study the interviewees on both sides asserted that recognizing the right of return can be exchanged for Palestinians waiving the actual return and thereby conceding that this right would ultimately remain unrealized. This result suggests that openness to symbolic demands and the trade-off between the symbolic and the concrete dimensions *within the same demand* may serve as a means to promote conflict resolution. Further studies may examine how this strategy can be applied to other international conflicts, based on an understanding of the importance of symbolic demands for recognition in conflicts.

The above discussion does not imply that symbolic-concrete compensation is possible for all demands in a conflict. The Palestinian interviewees were reluctant to agree to mutual recognition of Israel and Palestine as the national homes of their respective people, despite the importance attached to these demands by the Israeli side. Furthermore, they spoke against recognizing Israel as the state of the Jewish people, in spite of this issue's importance for the Israeli public opinion. And while the Palestinian side set a great store by the Israeli acceptance of responsibility for the refugee problem, the Israeli interviewees were divided on whether this demand should be met. It seems, therefore, that the study of conflict resolution can benefit from a better understanding of the ways in which recognition can serve as an obstacle to resolving conflicts, on the one hand, and as a tool to aid it, on the other.

An assumption underlying the few studies dealing with the symbolic-concrete distinction regarding conflict resolution is that cultures can be classified into two clear-cut categories: symbolic versus concrete (Abu-Nimar, 1996; Cohen, 1997; Inbar & Yuchtman-Yaar, 1985). Yet, as we have seen in the Israeli case, within the same culture, public opinion and leadership can attach different importance to symbolic demands. Thus, further research on symbolic aspects in conflict resolution would do well to cast such inter-culture assumptions aside. The perception of a culture in academia must take into account its complex nature, and seemingly irrational phenomena should be examined based on the analysis of the symbolic discourse in various public arenas where conflicts are presented and framed.

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