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Keywords: *conflict transformation, identity affirmation, intergroup conflict reduction*

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**INTERGROUP CONFLICT REDUCTION THROUGH
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OF THE ETHNIC OR ENEMY “OTHER”**

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Abstract

This paper first argues that a conflict between groups can be lessened by the explicit affirmation by one group of the other group's identity, including its past pain, defeats and collective losses, when appropriate. A model of group affirmation is then proposed, consisting of: Leadership, Recognition, Validation and the Transparency of Future Time. The groups involved can be ethnic or national in scope. This model is defined in terms of another possible ARIA model to be added to the one already proposed, though quite different in content, by Jay Rothman (1997). Limitations concerning the use of this model are discussed as well.

In this Age of Ambiguity, individuals and groups often look for a reassuring refuge in a unique and historical group identity. As William Graham Sumner (2001) observes, such group identity both includes and excludes--the ingroup/outgroup phenomenon--which insures self-contained or self-imposed psychocultural and social borders. Georg Simmel argues that such borders or boundaries seem necessary to provide a sense of inclusion within the group which, in turn, provides the individual with a sense of belonging and purpose (Simmel 1964). Following Simmel's lead, Lewis Coser argues that, in times of uncertainty or perceived threat to the ingroup, the group's boundaries become less permeable, and more rigid (Coser 1956). This dynamic may, in part, explain the growing importance, and clash, of ethnic identities in modern times, especially in areas of the world, such as Eastern Europe or the Middle East, that are experiencing profound uncertainty, violence and change.

From the perspective of realistic group conflict theory, groups compete with each other for land, scarce resources and relative, if not absolute, security. Influenced by Simmel and Coser, Levine, and Campbell (1972) state that, from the perspective of the theory, the presence of a perceived threat from the outside consolidates the group's' boundaries, solidifies group membership and heightens the costs of a member's defection. They point out that groups under threat, or with a besieged mentality, often develop a hardened self-image, or so it seems so to outside observers. The resulting image of the group under threat is often one of rigid, almost fossilized, formation with little or no diversity of discourses among elites, or the membership at large, nor any variation in the perception of the hostile or "enemy" other. In many cases of

groups under threat, this image of a fixed and fossilized interior group-life is probably true, especially in dictatorships where the opportunities for dissenting points of view are almost nil even in the best of times.

Yet, such a static conception of group identity, as presented in realistic group conflict theory, overlooks the dynamic and competitive processes of negotiating identities that can potentially operate between groups (Kelman 1997a,b). Expanding upon this idea, we focus on the selective definition of the group's identity with an emphasis on its **interior** processes of dynamic self-definition. In doing so, we assume an alternative view of group life, even under a perceived threat, that is much more dynamic, and competitive than realistic group conflict theory presents concerning the dominant discourses among elites and members, which, in turn, allows for the selective redefinition of a group through affirmation by an outgroup.

The main premise of this paper is that the tension and mistrust associated with past conflict between groups, or even between nations-states, can be lessened, and perhaps even healed, by the explicit affirmation of another group's identity, and especially the deliberate acknowledgement of each group's past pain, struggles and losses, which Vamik Volkan (1998) defines as its collective loss. This premise is, in turned, based upon two implicit and interrelated axioms, namely that: (1) Group identity is largely a social construction that involves a dynamic process of selective self definition. (2) The selective **self definition** of the group's histories and psycho-cultural boundaries includes its history of traumatic experiences or, more precisely, the "traumatized self-representation" (Volkan 1998) of the group; it is within this process of group self-definition that one can fully understand and appreciate Volkan's problematic terms: "chosen traumas" and "chosen glories."

The deposited traumatized self representation of the group can be addressed and, over a period of time, partially healed by an explicit affirmation of the in-group's identities, including its selective self-definition of the group's triumphs and tragedies. The key is to view the act of identity affirmation as an attempt to influence a group's own interior set of selective and privileged discourses among its elites and members concerning its view of itself as well as out-groups that are potentially or actually a threatening enemy-other. These selective sets of interior dialogues and privileged discourses are occurring simultaneously in each potentially conflicting group. The goal of identity affirmation is to transform the potential or actual conflict by addressing and transforming over time each of these simultaneous, interior discourses. As we shall see, it may be the most difficult task of a leader to transform, not the image of the enemy other held by the out-group, but the image of the enemy other held by one own in-group. This problem as a possibility is not really addressed in realistic group conflict theory.

In the following analysis, we will focus on group identities involved in ethnic or interstate conflict. There are important differences in these different groups, and in the appropriate levels of analysis required by each. Even so, as Timothy Nieguth (1999) argues, there are similarities in the social structures that permit the shared though restricted analysis of both in terms of group identity and its formation and preservation. As Byrne and Carter (1996) point out, group identity often consist of the composite yet shared configuration of interrelated

factors that they characterize as social cubism; they argue that these factors are found in common across a variety of different ethnonational groups. This requires a multidimensional analysis of a conflict in order to reveal the complex interrelationships involved (Byrne and Carter, 1996). As we shall see, the processes and factors inherent in identity affirmation are multidimensional as well, and are applied to the identity groups' that are either ethnic or national in scope in the following paper.

Conflict Transformation

The idea of conflict reduction through identity affirmation builds upon the theoretical work of previous scholars, especially Charles Osgood (1962), Chadwick Alger (1988), Raimo Vayrenen (1991), Janice Gross Stein (2001) and, as mentioned, Herb Kelman (1997a,b). For instance, Charles Osgood (1962) proposed the idea of the graduated reciprocation in tension reduction (GRIT) as one means of lessening hostility and mistrust between groups. The idea of GRIT is that one party announces in advance that it is taking a step or a series of steps designed to reduce tension via concrete, verifiable actions. Etzioni (1968) suggests that GRIT influenced President John F. Kennedy's American University speech, in which he announced the unilateral ending of above ground nuclear testing by the United States and he invited the Soviet Union to do the same (Kennedy 1963). President Kennedy thus initiated a process that resulted in the Partial Test Ban Treaty and the beginnings of detente.

While in some ways similar, the process of identity affirmation is different from GRIT since, in the latter, the focus is on specific initiatives or actions while in the former it is on the unique identity of the respective groups. For instance, as we'll presently see, President John F. Kennedy, in his American University Speech (1963), also affirmed the identity of the Soviet peoples, and especially emphasized their suffering as a nation during World War II.

The concept of identity affirmation grows directly out of the ongoing research on conflict transformation. For instance, Raimo Vayrenen (1991) identifies several ways in which conflict transformation takes place. His ideas complement those of Galtung (1984,1996) who emphasizes the analysis of inter-party and intra-party conflicts in their structural, cultural and behavioral contexts. According to Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse (1999), one of the key ways of reducing conflict is through personal and group transformation. Citing Galtung and Vayrenen, they point out that "conflict transformation requires real change in parties' interests, goals or self-definition. These may be forced or encouraged by the conflict itself, or may come about because of intra-party changes, shifts in the constituencies of the parties or changes in the context in which the conflict is situated" (Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, 1999, p.158). In conflict reduction through identity affirmation, the purpose is transformation of the group's interior processes of selective self-definition, which can, in turn, open up new possibilities for inter-group peace.

In her article, "Image, Identity and The Resolution of Violent Conflict," Janice Gross Stein proposes a process very similar to identity affirmation Stein states that in "both enduring interstate rivalries and bitter ethnic conflict, interests are shaped by images that in turn are

partially shaped by identity” (Stein, 2001, p.189). Like Kelman, she states that “the identities that shape images are not given but are socially reconstructed as interactions develop and contexts evolve over the trajectory of a conflict” (Stein, 2001, p.189). She especially emphasizes the importance of leadership in initiating a series of challenges and changes to the group’s self-image, and its image of the other group.

Stein points out that once “leaders or groups begin to change their image of their adversary and are interested in attempting to resolve their conflict, they must also change the image their adversary has of them if conflict reduction is to make any progress” (Stein, 2001, p 201). Following and developing her argument, we will refine the role of leadership in the process of identity affirmation by specifying the critical **and most dangerous moments** for leaders when trying to change the in-group’s perception of the out-group. As we shall see from the historical record, leaders often try to first change the “image their adversary has of them” without first successfully transforming their group’s image of their adversary. As the tragic examples of Gandhi, Sadat and Rabin illustrate, the failure of transforming one’s own group perception of the other can be catastrophic for the leadership since their assassins came from within the leader’s own group.

Conflict Reduction Through Identity Affirmation: A Proposed Model

A dynamic definition of a group’s selective self-definition provides for the distinct possibility of inter-group conflict reduction through identity affirmation that results in the incremental, or even dramatic, changes in the in-group’s internal discourses and perceptions of an out group or groups. In effect, one group is trying to negotiate or renegotiate its identity **first within itself** and secondly, with another group. Kelman points out concerning this secondary process that “how a group defines itself has significant consequences for others...its chosen identity has an impact on the interests, rights and identity of other groups. Such groups do, therefore, have a legitimate concern about and stake in the way in which a given group defines itself. For this reason, national identity, even though it is a psychological fact created by the way a group chooses to define itself, is a legitimate subject for negotiation with other groups ...that are affected by this self-definition” (Kelman, 1997b, p.337).

In conflict reduction through identity affirmation, one group is trying to do one or all of the following four changes: (1) change or, in Kelman’s words, “negotiate” the in-group’s identity among its own elites and members, (2) challenge and attempt to negotiate the out-group’s perception of one’s own group, (3) challenge and attempt to negotiate the perception of the out-group concerning its own collective identity and ethos, and (4) change or negotiate simultaneously new perceptions and understanding of *one’s own group* and its collective mythos concerning the *ethnic or enemy image* of another group—a truly transformative process, and hence a truly courageous step, as we shall see, for leaders or members to take. This is, in effect, trying to engage and partially heal one’s own group’s inner most hurts, fears and traumas and, by doing so, change its image of the out group or enemy other. As we shall see, this latter step is the most dangerous one for leaders to undertake. All of these steps

presuppose that a group's identity is subject to competing and selective internal discourses concerning its collective myths.

So the question presents itself: **How** should such affirmations be carried out and completed? Obviously, there is no factual formula that can be universally applied to each and all situations, especially where inter-group or international conflicts are persistent and severe. In short, no set formula is exclusive--each unique situation calls for an identity affirmation process that is tailored to local circumstances and historical circumstances. It may not work in some situations at all.

Given these limitations, it may be useful nevertheless to outline a tentative model for conflict reduction through identity affirmation to be tried and tested in actual and ongoing disputes. In outlining such a model, I shall also call for a greater use of what can be described as multiplex modeling and methodologies in specific case studies in order to gain an understanding of what works, what fails, and why the difference, in the historical record of conflict reduction through identity affirmation (Boudreau, forthcoming).

The Elements of Identity Affirmation: A Proposed Model

There are four elements in the proposed model of conflict reduction through identity affirmation: **leadership, recognition, validation, and the transparency of future time.**

These can be reconceptualized using Jay Rothman's idea (1997) of the ARIA which, first and foremost, keeps the focus on the importance of *identity* in conflict. It also forces us, as Rothman states, to focus and be more precise. Hence, the ARIA form is tried here, with the precautionary caveat that, just as composers write different arias—using the same form as a tool to give structure and sound to their different musical inspirations, so too it will be necessary to compose a different aria than Rothman's here.

Given this, the model can be described as an Affirmation ARIA, consisting of the following formula: (A) Affirmation in inter-group conflict requires (R) Recognition and reciprocity; (I) Initiatives by in-group leadership or citizens, or both; and (A) Acceptance of the hitherto out-group which consists of (1) validation of the out-group's past pain and traumas, when appropriate and (2) concrete efforts to insure the transparency of future time between groups.

We will define and discuss each of these terms in the logical sequence in which they should occur. In essence, this model attempts to do on a group or international level what Martin Buber (1974) describes as an essential, if not the essential, transformation of relationships on the individual level—changing an “I-it” relationship into an “I-Thou” relationship. This requires challenging the in-group history of hostility towards an out-group through its own processes of selective self-definition. This is admittedly a daunting task, even in the best of times, but as we shall see, there are historical examples in which people have reached out over the great divide of inter-group conflict and sought conflict reduction, even resolution, through identity affirmation.

The Model

AFFIRMATION of an out-group identity is the summation or result of the following three interrelated though separate elements: Recognition, Initiatives by in-group leaders and Acceptance.

1. Recognition

A critical factor of identity affirmation is recognition. This is, in essence, an initiative by in-group leadership that has legal implications and consequences. Recognition by an in-group of an out-group has, at least, three elements which are: (1) affirming the right of a group to existence, (2) reciprocity, and (3) equality. Recognition by an in-group of a former out-group means, at its extreme, that the we-group recognizes the right of the “others” *simply to exist*. For instance, for many years, the state of Israel’s right to exist was not recognized by any of its Arab neighbors. Then in 1977, President Anwar Sadat made his historic trip to Jerusalem thereby recognizing, in one bold step, the existence of Israel. It took almost a year and half for the governments of Egypt and Israel, after much negotiations and a Camp David Summit involving Presidents Carter, Sadat and Prime Minister Begin to ratify this bold initiative in the form of the Camp David Peace Accords; yet, as Janice Gross Stein notes (2001), the irreversible first step was taken when President Sadat first stepped off the plane onto Israeli soil. In that first symbolic as well as substantive step, he broke with his Arab allies and recognized the state of Israel’s right to coexist in peace with its largest neighbor. In doing so, he initiated a peace process that continued through the 1990s. In a paradox of peace and affirmation, President Sadat simply recognized what the Israeli people already possessed— namely, their right to exist, and to coexist with their neighbors without the constant threat of war.

In short, recognition of the “other” in its most basic form affirms the inherent right of the “other” to exist as part of the human family. As such, it is the basic foundation to identity affirmation. Cast in these terms, recognition fundamentally means that the “we-group” no longer seeks to destroy or annihilate the “out-group.” Recognition also implies, and requires, acceptance of the moral obligation by the in-group that reciprocity, and not oppression, will govern the relationship between the groups in the future. Reciprocity, in turn, means that the in-group will demand no rights for itself that it denies to the out-group. Furthermore, it requires that the in-group will make no demands upon the out-group that it refuses to accept for itself. In essence, reciprocity affirms that the in-group recognizes its moral and legal obligations to treat the out-groups as equals. This requires, first and foremost, changing the in-group’s internal discourses, narratives, tropes and stereotypes of the out-group. One way to do this is to change the narratives and stories told about the enemy “other” within the group; by doing so, the “we-group” accepts the responsibility not to demonize, satirize or scapegoat the out group (Senehi 2002). The “we-group” also accepts the obligation not to deny members of the out-group the same access to a cultural identity, resources, education and employment that it demands for itself. To do otherwise is discrimination based upon group membership, and thus is the very antithesis of conflict reduction between groups through identity affirmation.

Recognition is also a legal term under international law and acknowledges that a **de jure**

equality exists between two nation-states (Slomanson, 2003). This recognizes the importance of equality in relations between states or, for that matter, ethnic, religious and racial groups. The concept of equality is inherent in the recognition and identity affirmation of an out-group by an in-group as well. In essence, it acknowledges the sovereignty of one group, and its rights to self-determination, free from external or internal influences instigated by the other group. Equality means, at its most primitive level, that one group or individual does not have the right to prey upon the labor, life or happiness of another group or individual.

Dr. Martin Luther King recognized this reality in his famous “Letter From the Birmingham Jail,” written under the most difficult circumstances in the spring of 1963. At the time, Dr. King was leading a nonviolent civil rights effort to desegregate eating facilities in Birmingham, Alabama. In his letter, which he wrote on scraps of paper that were then passed to associates outside the prison, Dr. King wrestles with the difficult question: What constitutes a just law? His answer is based upon both moral and legal grounds; he states that:

To use the words of Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher, segregation substitutes an ‘I-it’ relationship for the ‘I-thou’ relationship, and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. So segregation is not only politically, economically and sociologically unsound, but it is morally wrong and sinful...**Let us turn to a more concrete example of a just and unjust law. An unjust law is a code that a majority inflicts on a minority that is not binding on itself. This is difference made legal. On the other hand a just law is a code that the majority compels a minority to follow that it is willing to follow itself. This is sameness made legal.**...Let me give another explanation. An unjust law is a code inflicted upon the minority which the minority had no part in enacting or creating because they did not have the unhampered right to vote. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up the segregation laws was democratically elected?...there are some counties[in Alabama] without a single negro registered to vote despite the fact that the negro constitutes the majority of the population. Can any law set up in such a state be considered democratically structured? [Emphasis added]

In essence, Dr. King (1963) was arguing for the **recognition** by American society of Blacks’ right to be treated equally under the law as American citizens. By first making a natural law argument, Dr. King first goes beyond the American context and argues that such equal treatment is a basic right entitled to all humans. He then makes a very compelling constitutional argument as well. As Dr. King knew well, the first step in securing equal treatment, and in gaining the equal protection of the law—whether domestically or internationally—is **recognition** of the other as a human being. As such, this is a critical preliminary element in identity affirmation.

2. Initiatives By In group Leadership: Track I and Track II Diplomacy

As Janice Gross Stein notes (2001), dynamic leadership is required to initiate the

process of conflict reduction with an out-group. When we think of public leadership, we often think of our political leaders and diplomats. Public leaders in their official capacity are obviously prime candidates for initiating the process of conflict reduction through identity affirmation. This is often referred to as Track I, which usually consists of official diplomacy by governmental officials. A political leader often have the visibility and salience to participate in, and sometimes even challenge, the internal narratives, tropes and discourses that selectively define his or her own "in-group;" he or she is often in a position to influence, sometimes profoundly, the internal discourse and narratives concerning the in-group's collective mythos.

Yet, this is not to imply, as mentioned earlier, that a specific group's elites are somehow in total agreement about which discourse, history or trope to privilege; elites may be in bitter competition and conflict concerning which historical and psycho-cultural factors should be ascendant and privileged within a group. For instance, in many Middle Eastern states today, there is a fierce internal debate between those elites that favor a secular state, and those that an Islamic nation and government. This debate mirrors the larger conflict that often exists between traditional societies and modern nation-states (Smith 1995, 1991).

There are many complex reasons for this current historical phenomena; yet, to explore the dynamics of this debate goes far beyond the current scope of this paper. The point is that political leaders can often participate in the simultaneous process of trying to change or renegotiate their own group's collective mythos and, secondly, also attempting to participate in the reinterpretation and new narrative of the in group's image of an ethnic or even "enemy" group. This is another way that a leader can attempt to participate in redefining a group's prevailing and privileged self-image, and selective interpretations of itself and others.

The **in-group** of the leader initiating the process of identity affirmation may have deeply embedded stereotypes and prejudices concerning injuries or injustices of its own, real or imagined, suffered at the hands of the out group, or "enemy-other." So, by initiating recognition and identity affirmation of another group, the leader may be arousing deadly ghosts and powerful forces contained within his or her own community's collective mythos. Hence, an astute leader will prepare his or her in-group for the **transformation of the in-group's collective mythos**; simultaneously as he or she seeks to transform the stereotypes, prejudices and even hatreds aimed at the leader's own people contained in the collective mythos of the out-group.

Changing group perceptions and deeply held self-images can be extremely problematic even *in the absence* of a well defined or perceived threat from an ethnic or "enemy" other (Jervis, 1976). This, at least partially explains why often the most difficult task of political leadership is to challenge the collective mythos, narratives and tropes **of one's own in-group concerning an enemy or apparently "hostile" out-group**. This is one reason why leadership in beginning a process of identity affirmation of another group requires real courage. The resistance of the one's own group to any change or challenge to

its prevailing and powerful collective myths makes the task of identity affirmation concerning an enemy, or openly hostile group, the most difficult and dangerous step in the process. One has only to remember that Gandhi was assassinated by a fellow Hindu soon after he announced plans to make a peace mission to Pakistan—thus implicitly, at least, affirming the identity of the Moslem state. Nor, unfortunately, was he alone in this regard.

In the fall of 1977, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt made the short yet historic trip from Cairo to Jerusalem, and thus became the first leader in the Arabic world to recognize the state of Israel. In essence, he stated that "We have all suffered enough; It is time to give peace a chance." He then whispered to the press, stating "I have a secret ally in Israel--the Israeli mother."

(Sadat, 2003) His initiative began the public peace process between Israel and its neighbors. Yet, his initiative was not so popular at home; extremists were not prepared for the transformation of Egypt's collective myths towards Israel that Sadat's initiative of recognition and peaceful relations entailed. He was assassinated by his own countrymen in the fall of 1981.

More recently, in 1995, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel was assassinated by a fellow Jew after he publicly recognized the rights of the Palestinians to a homeland or "entity" within the West Bank. His death was a tragic loss and the Middle East peace process now seems moribund as a result.

So, challenging the prevailing stereotypes and the enemy image of the "other" **within** the in-group requires firmness and resolve. The key is for someone within the in-group or we-group to **initiate** a deliberate policy and process of conflict reduction through identity affirmation. Accepting the challenge to begin such a process is a critical indicator of true social and political leadership, especially if by doing so, the possibility of armed conflict and war can be lessened or eliminated. However, as the tragic examples of Gandhi, Sadat and Rabin indicate, the process of initiating identity affirmation can be very dangerous as well, until one's own in-group is prepared to accept the previously perceived enemy out-group as an equal partner in the pursuit of peace.

Track II or Multitrack Leadership: Non-Political Initiatives

Because the risks to political leaders who seek to challenge the collective myths of their own group is often great, the initiative to affirm the identity of an out-group can fall to leaders and participants of non-political organizations. Ambassador John McDonald, Joseph Montville and others have defined and developed the concept of Track II, or citizen, diplomacy (Volkan, Julius and Montville 1991, Diamond and McDonald 1996; Saunders, 1999)

Track II diplomacy consists of religious, economic or other nonpolitical leaders, or simply private citizens, who engage in citizen diplomacy and constructive engagement with citizens of the out-group or even with the "enemy." By doing so, such citizen diplomats

implicitly or explicitly affirm the identity of the excluded group while simultaneously beginning the long process of transforming the image of the “other” within the in-group. This may make it safer eventually for political leaders to take such initiatives to affirm the out-group as well.

Examples of successful Track II diplomacy are numerous—and growing. For instance, during the Cold War, President John F. Kennedy sometimes asked Norman Cousins, editor of the **Saturday Review** to undertake “unofficial” missions to Moscow to discuss policy and political possibilities with the Soviet leadership. These efforts helped lead to the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963. More recently, in the 1980s, numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) made repeated trips to the Soviet Union to meet with citizen groups, as well as the official leadership, in an effort to overcome the enemy image of the Soviet people held by many Americans. In the late 1970s, Professor Richard “Red” Schwartz (1989) of Syracuse University started the first American Jewish-Palestinian group dedicated to dialogue and mutual understanding. Today, there dozens of such groups, and Professor Schwartz is tireless in his efforts to bring about an “affirmation” of each group by the other through private, citizen-to-citizen channels.

As Track II diplomacy illustrates, leadership in affirming the identity of an out-group need not come simply from **de jure** political or diplomatic leaders. The crucial contribution of leadership, whether it be by private citizens or by highly visible and powerful public leaders **is to begin** a process of conflict reduction through identity affirmation.

The ideal outcome is that the initiative of the leader to affirm the “other” will be accepted by his or her society as a whole, and be eventually embedded in the very social fabric of the in-group. We will come back to this problem -- the problem of embedding a new relationship between groups, creating in essence a new collective mythos or, at least, transforming critical parts of the old one—in the section on “the transparency of future time.”

3. *Acceptance*

Acceptance as a moral and political force has two interrelated components: (a) Validation and (b) promoting the “Transparency of Future Time” between groups.

Validation of Pain: Taking Responsibility

Understanding the collective mythos of another group is most important when trying to reduce conflict through identity affirmation. This is because *a critical aspect of Identity Affirmation* is recognition and validation of the out-group’s past experiences of traumas, pain and defeats, especially if inflicted by the in-group that now seeks to affirm its former opponents. As stated earlier, fear of the “others,” and recollections of past pain and defeats at the hands of another, are often a vitally important part of a group's identity, included within its collective mythos (Volkan 1998). Jay Rothman is right when he states that fear of another out-group—based upon that group’s past persecution, hatred and hostility of the in-group—is a

contributing factor to continuing inter-group conflict (Rothman 1997).

In particular, the leadership of the group making the affirmation should, when appropriate, openly **acknowledge and mourn** for the affirmed group's past traumas and prolonged past traumatic experiences, which Volkan calls the "traumatized self-representation" of the group (Volkan 1998). This is what West German Chancellor Billy Brandt apparently tried to do during his official visit to Poland in 1971. During that visit, he spontaneously knelt in front of the monument built to the memory of the millions of Poles who fell victim to the Nazi's policies of extermination. Admittedly, this was probably not enough, in itself, to challenge the Poles'—or the rest of the watching world—internal group narratives concerning the aggressive policies and practices of Germany or of Germans in the past; but **it was a demonstrable beginning**, and it announced, with a simple yet solemn gesture, a radical departure from the not too distant past, acknowledging the tremendous suffering of the Polish nation who lost over six million people during the war.

Validation is the process of acknowledging the past trauma, pain, suffering of the out-group. In essence, validation is taking responsibility and apologizing for, when applicable, the past pain, trauma, discrimination and stereotypical distortions by the in-group. This is substantiation—first by the leaders and then by the members of the in-group as a whole-- that the collective loss suffered by the out-group was a real and often deeply embittering experience. By doing so, the leadership of the in-group is taking responsibility, when appropriate, for its share for the problems in the past relationship between the groups, especially for any pain that may have resulted from the in-group's actions.

As such, validation is the "emotional project" of identity affirmation. Validation seeks to acknowledge the group's past traumas—and the concomitant emotional losses that such past pain cost the group in terms of realizing its full potential. In particular, it seeks to reduce the fear of the hitherto persecuted group by taking deliberate and often unprecedented steps to reassure and add respect and reciprocity to a new relationship between groups. By doing so, it may help to reduce the "traumatized self-representation" of the once excluded group (Volkan, 1998).

The converse of validation, especially the act of taking responsibility for past pain inflicted by the in-group upon the out-group, is to act as though the collective loss of the group did not occur, and was not real. For instance, certain groups, especially in Germany, deny that the Holocaust during World War II occurred. This is a frightening claim that stands at the opposite extreme— in essence, the total negation— of identity affirmation and especially the recognition of all groups in the human family's right to exist in peace, in pursuit of their "unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Another real danger is that there are times when validation of a group's past pain can be extremely inappropriate. President Reagan's trip to Bitburg, Germany to place a wreath at the gravesite of Nazi war dead was, to many Americans, shocking and inappropriate. For instance, in a widely publicized event, Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, in a face-to-face encounter with President Reagan, pleaded for him not to make the trip. Yet, President Reagan went anyway, "affirming" what wiser men would simply let lie. At least American veterans of

General Patton's Third Army (who, during World War II, fought at Bitburg) could sardonically joke that the real purpose of the trip was to praise the marksmanship of the U.S. Army infantry.

But this is a sad commentary on the negative effects and narratives that emerge within the in-group when an affirmation and validation of an out-group's past pain is inappropriate. As such, President Reagan's trip to Bitburg illustrates how delicate, and even dangerous, inappropriate validation can be to inter-group relations. So validation of past pain must be used as carefully as a surgeon's scalpel—less old wounds be reopened, and conflict potentially intensified rather than reduced.

In contrast, President John F. Kennedy openly and publicly acknowledged the suffering and losses of the Soviet peoples in his June, 1963 American University speech, stating: “And no nation in the history of battle ever suffered more than the Soviet Union suffered in the course of the Second World War. At least twenty million lost their lives. Countless millions of homes and farms were burned or sacked. A third of the nation's territory, including two-thirds of its industrial base, was turned into a wasteland—a loss equivalent to the devastation of this country east of Chicago” (Kennedy 1963).

The historical context of Kennedy's speech should be noted. With the end of World War II and the outbreak of the Cold War, the reality of the Soviet Union losses during World War II was largely lost in the West. Hence the political, not to mention the emotional, impact of Kennedy's speech in recognizing and validating the still fresh wounds of the Soviet people were great. For instance, President Kennedy's science advisor, Jerome Wiesner stated that intelligence reports indicated that Chairman Khushchev said it was the best speech ever made by an American president.

In essence, appropriate validation is taking responsibility, when applicable, for the past pain, trauma, discrimination and stereotypical distortions or omissions by the in-group of the out-group. Furthermore, it is recognizing that the most powerful way to do this is through an emotional and often symbolic response, or series of responses, that goes to the core of the excluded group's collective mythos.

As President Kennedy's speech illustrates, the simple yet substantive gesture will sometimes do. For instance, if a future foreign leader wants to make peace with, or improve relations concerning, the United States, he or she could first go to place flowers at the eternal peace flame burning on the battlefield of Gettysburg, now a national park and historic site. Such a simple gesture might well arouse the deepest hopes and emotions, in both the north and south of the United States, “to achieve and *cherish* a just and lasting peace, as President Lincoln said in his Second Inaugural speech, “among ourselves and with all nations.” [Emphasis added]

Transparency of Future Time: Forging A New

The border between the United States and Canada is an example of making future time as transparent as possible. That is because neither country has any military forces located near the border with the express mission to defend the border from the other. Both governments

have expressed support of this policy of, in essence, defenseless frontiers. As a result, it is the longest undefended border in the world. By not stationing troops in a position that could harm the other, both governments are, to the best of their abilities, demonstrating that there is no intent, nor capability to invade and harm the other. The verifiable lack of capability is one way to make transparent the relationship of the two governments, at least in regards to this issue in the future. The U.S. and Canada may have deep differences over economic policies, Cuba and pollution, especially in the Great Lakes area, but these differences have not influenced their common commitment to reassure the other that, “in the future, we have no plans or immediate capabilities to hurt i.e. invade you.” The lack of a current capability to inflict harm in the foreseeable future is a key step in making transparent future time.

Transparency of future time means that the in-group will attempt to build a new and safer relationship with the hitherto excluded group by taking concrete steps and immediate behavioral actions—as distinct from mere verbal promises-- to make their future relationship as predictable and transparent as possible. In his book, *Evolution of Cooperation*, Robert Axelrod (1984) discusses extending “the shadow of the future” over current interpersonal interactions as one way to insure continuous cooperation. The idea is that the prospect and promise of having a continuous and mutually beneficial relationship in the future is one way to engender or enhance cooperation in the present. Extending the “shadow of the future” over current interactions and transactions is the first key characteristic of the transparency of future time.

The second is verifiability. With the promise of a new and ongoing relationship, the in-group and hitherto out-group should have verifiable means and mechanisms to insure that the other side does not have the capability to hurt the other. Thus, for instance, in the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact eventually had vast early warning and satellite systems to verify in “real time” the changing military capabilities of the other.

This task may become more difficult as the group size becomes relatively smaller. For smaller nations or groups entangled in a regional or even local conflict, such elaborate systems are usually not possible, and may not be necessary. Other means may be used, depending on the scale of the conflict, to enhance confidence in the future. One such mechanism is the **exchange of observers**, which is our third factor in the transparency of future time. Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), used by the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War in Europe sought to make the future more transparent but through complex mechanisms involving the exchange of information, including the exchange of military observers (mentioned above). In the Cold War CBMs, military observers were often exchanged whenever either side planned military exercises that required the local, and even theater wide, build-up of forces. The exchange of military observers was most often temporary, with the important exceptions of military attaches to either NATO or Warsaw Pact countries and a small group of permanent military observers arranged between the U.S. and Soviet Union.

Another variation of the exchange is to have **international** observers positioned within

both groups to insure transparency and to verify the lack of capability to inflict harm upon the other. Some authors, including this one, have advocated the use of such *international* observers even in actual wartime as a way to minimize damage and casualties, as well as build the credibility of the third party that might be useful in the eventual settlement of the conflict. This practice was actually used during the Iran-Iraq War by then Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar with remarkable results in that he, with the very able assistance of Assistant Secretary-General Giandomenico Picco (1999), eventually earned enough trust from both sides to be acceptable mediators who helped to end that tragic war (Boudreau 1991).

Educational exchanges are another way of making transparent future time since they can potentially cast the shadow of future cooperation over the relationship of educational institutions and groups that can ripple out into society. The founder of the first modern exchange program in the United States was the eccentric yet affable genius Donald Watt of Putney, Vermont. Watt (1967) believed in the simple yet unheard of idea (in the 1920s) of learning about other countries by living in them with a native family. His simple idea gave birth to the Experiment in International Living in Brattleboro, Vermont in the 1930s. Now, at latest count, there are over 600 educational exchange programs in the United States, consisting of individual home stays for an individual student in another land to complete college semester abroad programs. Hence, it seems that Watt (1967) had a good, yet elegantly simple, idea—namely, that people learn best about other cultures by living in them and bringing back an enriched understanding of other groups and nations.

A final and very powerful way of making the future transparent is to promote economic cooperation between the former antagonistic groups or nation-states. This is the great hope and idea behind the present formation of the European Union (EU). Inspired by Jean Monnet, the first actual steps, implemented in the 1950s, involved the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community formed by the 1951 Treaty of Paris which integrated the steel industries of Germany and France, thus making it theoretically and practically impossible for each nation to go to war with the other (Slomanson 2003).

So, to summarize, transparency of future time means that the in-group will attempt to build a new and safer relationship with the hitherto excluded group by taking concrete steps to make their joint future relationship as predictable and transparent as possible. For a lasting peace, or even for a reduction of a conflict to occur, any affirmation of a group identity should include, not only the recognition and validation of each others' past or present triumphs and tragedies, when appropriate, but also include the promise and realistic expectation of a normalized-- i.e. non harmful—relationship in the future.

The promise to embed the new relationship within economic structures that can bring prosperity to all is a very powerful way of changing competing discourses and narratives within all the involved groups—especially if they see that cooperation with a former enemy will be secure and profitable in the future. This is what the European Community and now European Union and, in particular, France and Germany have tried to do over the past decades. This is what the transparency of future time seeks to do –to build a future together that is as predictable, safe and productive as possible. In this way, the identity

of all groups, of all nations, is not only affirmed—it is assured and secured in the prospects of a more peaceful posterity.

Problems and Prospects

There are, of course, numerous problems with the idea of inter-group conflict reduction through identity affirmation; I will mention only a few possible ones here. First, as Meridith Gould (1999) states in a critique of this paper: “reducing conflicts among groups that have different traditions, norms, values, languages and customs is a very difficult task. The first step... is to get the groups to recognize and believe that a ‘relationship’ is needed and desired.”

If such a relationship **is** desired, Gould (1999) points out that there is an important distinction between whether these groups had a relationship in the past or whether they are developing a new one. There may be very different results concerning the impact of identity affirmation if the relationship between the groups is pre-existent, and previously traumatic, or totally new. The model (proposed above) of identity affirmation, as of yet, does not account for these potential differences.

Secondly, as Ms. Gould points out, the model as currently defined is too generic; it does not adequately discriminate between the very different types of groups that exist; nor does it adequately define the **kinds** of relationships that these groups hope to foster (Gould 1999). Future research is needed to specify what types of groups are most responsive, (or not responsive at all) and what types of potentially different relationships result from attempted identity affirmation by a group. For instance, would Identity Affirmation be more or less effective if a very large group, say a” nation(s)-state,” uses identity affirmation that is directed towards a smaller group, or vice versa? Or, does it work best between groups that are relatively “equal” in size and power?

Furthermore, at **what level** of group analysis is identity affirmation most effective, if at all, in changing the internal stereotypes, privileged discourses and tropes of all the groups involved? In short, is there an optimal level of analysis in terms of the size, composition, education or political orientation of the group attempting an identity affirmation, as well as a group whose identity is being affirmed? Perhaps the latter group might even **resent** that such an attempt of identity affirmation is being made, thus making the inter-group conflict possibly worse!

The problem of empirical testing, refinement and verification of this proposed model must also be addressed. In a forthcoming paper, I suggest that the field of conflict analysis and resolution must use a multiplex methodology as one approach in order to ascertain and make “knowledge claims” concerning human conflicts, and their aftermaths. A multiplex methodology has at least two critical characteristics that it shares with actual human conflicts. First, these conflicts typically have multiple parties, including allies, and thus require multiple levels of analysis, evaluation and intervention (Byrne and Keashly 2000). A multiplex methodology is systematic inquiry into the multiple, simultaneous and often contradictory knowledge claims made by all significant parties to a violent human conflict; in fact, one of the great prizes of a protracted social conflict (Azar 1990) is the power to characterize a violent

conflict situation. These competing knowledge claims do not lend themselves, at first, to a Hegelian or Gandhian synthesis (Bondurant 1971). Thus they have to be simultaneously examined as they exist in a conflict situation, which is a second characteristic of the multiplex approach. Changing these competing knowledge claims into a shared discourse (Senehi 1996, 2000, 2003) is one of the goals of identity affirmation. The methodological challenge remains of accurately *evaluating* such attempts at identity affirmation and thus accurately measuring whether change occurs in internal discourses among all significant groups in a violent human conflict (Boudreau, forthcoming).

Finally, does identity affirmation create any value-added (Sebenius 1984) possibilities in the relationship, and potential future negotiations, between the involved groups? If so, is the value-added immediate, short-lived or long term? In other words, are the potential posited changes in the groups' internal discourses about themselves and each other lasting, or do they fade over time? ("Posited" in the sense that the model does anticipate that such changes will occur in the dynamic and selective self-definition of each group.) If the impact of such affirmations is short-termed, then will additional acts of affirmation and reciprocation, such as the ones recommended by Charles Osgood (1962), will be needed in the future in order to make these posited changes a permanent part of a group's collective mythos?

There are obviously no immediate answers to these questions; only further empirical and theoretical work can critically review, reject or elaborate and refine the model proposed here of Identity Affirmation.

It needs to be emphasized that conflict reduction through identity affirmation is no panacea for peace; it is doubtful, for instance, that such an initiative will work during a period of violent escalation between groups or nations. As Fisher and Keashly point out (1991), the timing and coordination of efforts to transform a conflict is crucial. So, in view of this, the staging and timing of Identity Affirmation must carefully considered by in-group leaders or members before being attempted. Or, as the example of Bitburg illustrates, it may be simply inappropriate to do at all.

As such, conflict reduction through identity affirmation should be viewed simply as one more tool, one more potential approach, in a spectrum of conflict reduction or resolution techniques, to be used when decision makers think it appropriate. Secondly, the very real risks of failure in an affirmation initiative may enhance stereotypes of each other, and thus increase inter-group or international polarization. Thirdly, despite the very best efforts at identity affirmation by a group or government may simply fail to incrementally change the thinking or soften the hardened hearts of the "enemy." Intractable antagonisms, conflict or even war may be the inevitable outcome of such a protracted impasse. Even so, this article is suggesting that, if the timing and staging is right, an attempt could be made by an in-group to reduce its conflict with an out-group through identity affirmation, at some point in their troubled relationship, before the final gauntlet is flung.

Conclusion: Weaving a New Beginning

This paper argues that a conflict between groups can be potentially lessened by the explicit affirmation by one group of the other group's identity, including its past pain, defeats and losses. If pursued in good faith, such affirmations may help reduce inter-group or international conflict. The process of identity affirmation is based upon the premise that the psycho-cultural self-images and historical discourses that help define in-group identity are open to internal challenge and change prompted, if necessary, by an out-group's "affirmative" efforts and can thus be transformed, even if marginally, as a precursor to establishing better inter-group relations.

This paper first examined and defined group identity in terms of the group's own dynamic process of selective self-definition. The potential use of identity affirmation to change self-selective internal discourses into a shared common discourse between groups has also been explored. The process of identity affirmation by one group may help create "value added" possibilities, especially for future negotiations between the groups, but more research is needed in this area in the future.

Also, the possibility of using a model of identity affirmation, with appropriate modification from the one presented here, on the **interpersonal level** to reduce fear and conflict should be considered and explored in the future, especially by specialists in the field, like social psychologists, and mental health professionals. Finally, this study proposes a model through identity affirmation that may work to reduce fear and conflict between very large groups, including nation-states. Yet, more research needs to be completed, and actual case studies contemplated in order to develop, refine and test the model.

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