Chapter 14

Reconciliation as Realpolitik:
Facing the Burdens of History in Political Conflict Resolution

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Introduction

In the lexicons of most foreign affairs professionals, “reconciliation” is a soft word. It has a religious flavor. In fact, one of its early definitions was the restoration of a penitent sinner to the church. “Reconciliation” is not a word ordinarily used by diplomats, journalists or professors of international relations when plans are discussed to deal with the enduring crises between Greece and Turkey, the Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, Israelis and Palestinians, even Quebeckers and Anglophones in Canada. The diplomats work first to prevent violence and then to patch together a deal that will get the adversaries—and the mediators—through the short term until, they hope, some unforeseen actor or event comes along to resolve the conflict once and for all.

And that is the problem. Traditional peacemaking approaches by and large avoid the normative issues that nourish and drive the so-called intractable ethnic and sectarian conflicts. The demands for justice by the warring sides are considered self-centered, emotional and not susceptible to the rational process of bargaining for advantage and the art of arranging trade-offs. But the toughest conflicts are those where one or, usually, both sides have suffered traumatic losses in the past and in recent times. The people in the groups or nations in conflict are predictably and un-
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The thesis of this chapter is that any conflict resolution strategy that does not address the psychological needs of the victims and victimizers can only have a superficial effect on the resolution especially of ethnic and sectarian conflict. Thus the only practical approach to the so-called intractable conflicts is one that aims for the actual reconciliation of peoples and nations. Relationships need to be changed for the better. Ways have to be found to help adversaries face the historic burdens on their relationship, to help them present their historic grievances but also, especially, acknowledge the wrongs they have inflicted on the other side. A process must be established in which the losses of victims are recognized and made part of the public record for all to see.

The parties to the conflict need to be led to accept moral responsibility for their behavior and that of their predecessors. Only then will some sense of justice begin to emerge among the people who have suffered. And when a sense of justice emerges, so too will the possibility for real peace. For there is an inescapable link between justice and peace that is documented in human psychology but to date eludes professional diplomacy and statecraft which tend to cling nostalgically to a scientifically unjustifiable concept of power politics and cynicism, the traditional realpolitik.

Today there is a new, much more realistic, realpolitik, based on new knowledge acquired through the synthesis of political analysis and the scientific study of human behavior, or psychology, in the enriched discipline of political psychology. There is impressive evidence of the dominance in universal human needs not only for food, shelter, and physical safety, but also for recognition, acceptance and respect, the iron laws of human nature. The most persistent evidence of the sources of continued antagonism and inclination toward violence comes from documentation of wounds to the self-concept or self-esteem of identity groups—ethnic, religious, linguistic, indeed, whatever trait a group considers its most noteworthy characteristic. Thus the new realpolitik recognizes that conflict resolution and peace building can succeed only if the circumstances that originally produced a people’s sense of victimhood are recognized and dealt with. There is a need for healing processes that go far beyond training in problem-solving skills.

Theorists and practitioners of international conflict management and resolution have a moral obligation to understand and respect the depth of hurt of the peoples we propose to help. We must proceed with modesty, great care, professional skill and commitment to the analysis of the historic and psychodynamic dimensions of what is essentially a task in healing in the relationships between the groups and nations whose conflict we approach. Conflict resolution theory and practice have evolved to the point where there can no longer be ambiguity about this obligation. This chapter attempts to outline the dimensions of this task.

The Dimensions of Political Reality

For some academics and professionals in the field of international affairs, the idea that they need to understand the psychodynamics of political conflicts is unwelcome or even intimidating. Indeed, psychology offers explanations as to why the study of emotions and human motivation is something many of us avoid with some energy. (Psychology even explains why we use the psychological mechanism of avoidance to insulate us from unwelcome information.) Thus it may be useful to hear from a person who is neither a psychologist, an academic theorist, nor a conflict resolution practitioner. He is, however, one of the most respected jurists in the world, whose recent responsibilities have included service on commissions of inquiry in South Africa and the international war crimes tribunals on former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Justice Richard Goldstone was already a distinguished lawyer and jurist when President De Klerk asked him in 1991 to head a new Commission of Inquiry Regarding Public Violence and Intimidation, in South Africa. Between 1991 and 1994, Justice Goldstone emerged as a powerful influence in South Africa's transition from an apartheid regime to a new experiment in democracy. In 1994, President Nelson Mandela named him to the newly established South Africa Constitutional Court but allowed the Justice to accept a two-year appointment as prosecutor at
the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague with responsibility for war crimes in Bosnia and Rwanda. This was the first such war crimes tribunal since the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals after World War II. On January 27, 1997, Justice Goldstone spoke at the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. He entitled his speech, “Healing Wounded People.” The following is a synthesis of relevant portions of the speech based on an audiotape of the event. The text that follows may be considered verbatim from Justice Goldstone’s speech:

The most important aspect of justice is healing wounded people. I make this point because justice is infrequently looked at as a form of healing—a form of therapy for victims who cannot really begin their healing process until there has been some public acknowledgment of what has befallen them. How one deals with the past, with a series of egregious human rights violations, is a problem that has come to the fore since the end of World War II. How is it that there has been more genocide since World War II than before? How do we explain that people seem not to have learned the lessons of history?

Obviously, the problem after World War II for many European countries was how do we deal with our own part in the human rights violations. This affects not only Germany but also the Netherlands, Belgium, and Scandinavian and East European countries where there was collaboration with the Nazis. Certain Latin American countries began to deal with their post-World War II past through establishment of various truth and reconciliation commissions. In South Africa, how would we deal with the past? Should we brush it under the carpet? Why reopen the sores? In Rwanda, how can we deal with a country that suffered one million dead in genocide? In attempting to answer these questions, the people who should be consulted more than anyone else are the victims. What do they want and need for themselves and their families?

Justice is one aspect of what must clearly be a multifaceted approach to healing a wounded people—a wounded nation. One must not expect too much from justice, but my experience has shown me that justice can play a very material role in bringing about an enduring peace. The link between peace and justice was seen by the UN Security Council in 1993 with resolution 827 that established the first international war crimes tribunal since Nuremberg and Tokyo. And it must be noted that these latter were not international, but rather multinational tribunals made up of the victorious powers in the war.

It must be noted that it was the photographs of emaciated prisoners in Bosnia that mobilized public opinion internationally and especially in the West so that the UN Security Council was moved by the member states to make the link between peace and justice by establishing the international war crimes tribunal. Without making that specific linkage the Security Council would not have set up the Hague tribunal. However, this key point was forgotten at Dayton. There was a conflict between the peace and justice linkage and the politics of negotiation. In The Hague, we decided that we had a mandate that could not be compromised by diplomats. We would press on with our task. The link between peace and justice is not a link between peace and cease-fires, but between justice and enduring peace.

One thing I have learned in my travels in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and South Africa is that where there have been egregious human rights violations which have gone unaccounted for, where there has been no justice, where the victims have not received any acknowledgment, where they have been forgotten, where there has been national amnesia, the effect is a cancer in the society and is the reason that explains the spiral of violence that the world has seen in former Yugoslavia for
centuries and in Rwanda for decades, as obvious examples.

There are five important contributions justice can make to the process of peace building. First, it can expose the guilt of individual perpetrators, thus avoiding the human tendency to assign collective guilt to an ethnic group or a religion. In the areas I have visited, individuals have not been blamed, but an entire people have been. For example, Serbs tend to blame Croatians as a people for the genocide of Serbs, Jews and Gypsies by the Ustashi regime during World War II. One of the main contributions of the Nuremberg tribunal was the identification of individual criminals.

Second, it can record the truth in the public record. This makes it extremely difficult for perpetrators or their sympathizers to deny the truth, as, for example, people who attempt to deny the reality of the Holocaust. It is a matter of fact that perpetrators work very hard to cover up evidence of their dirty work.

Third, it can provide acknowledgment of crimes against the victims. I have learned especially in South Africa, the importance to victims of public, official acknowledgment. This is not because the victims do not know that happened to them. Or do not know their perpetrators. They do. But they still want their story brought to a court or tribunal because they want public, official acknowledgment of what happened to them. Thousands of victims of apartheid have been coming to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. They have left a better people. The same is true at the Hague tribunal. Many terrified, broken people have made their way to the war crimes tribunal to give evidence in public. Even when given the option of private testimony, they insist on doing it in public. When they left The Hague, they were different people. Their healing had begun.

Fourth, truth and justice help in the dismantling of the institutions of society that have played a role in injustice and oppression.

And, fifth, criminal justice is a deterrent to further human rights violations. There are direct links between the efficiency of policing and low crime rates. What deters criminals is the fear of getting caught, not the penalties established. It is no different with wartime and political crimes. If political leaders think they will be brought before an international tribunal, they will think twice before committing a crime. I am not speaking only of criminal justice per se, but also of public exposure by truth and reconciliation commissions.

Our commission [Inquiry Regarding Public Violence and Intimidation, 1991–94] in South Africa was able to expose terrible deeds within days of their occurrence. Television news broadcast our findings usually in less than a week after the event. This had a calming effect on people who might have taken to the streets without the psychological relief provided by exposure of the truth about the crimes.

After the political transition in South Africa, President Mandela ruled out a Nuremberg-type tribunal because it would have caused uproar in the white community. But there were too many victims who needed public acknowledgment of their losses. He decided on the compromise between amnesia and criminal trials. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, his choice, has received over four thousand applications from South African police, security forces and other perpetrators of "political" crimes for indemnity from prosecution. Can one imagine what it would have been like to put four thousand plus people on trial?

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission [whose two year life is coming to and end] will have an important impact on South African society. It has served as a bridge between the past of human rights violations and a
future of a democratic country in which a human rights culture could be built. It is saddening to note that the international war crimes tribunal at The Hague has not been able to have the same effect in former Yugoslavia. Without the political will of the international community to pursue indicted war crimes suspects, the body’s healing effect in that region has been severely limited.

Justice Goldstone’s Holocaust Museum speech is remarkable in its clear and unambiguous support of the psycho-political approaches this writer and his colleagues have developed in more than twenty years of work with victims and victimizers in conflict resolution processes. And because the Justice claims no status as a researcher or theoretician—he just calls it as he sees it in his real world, tribunal work—his beliefs and conclusions influence others. His speech is a rousing overture to the body of this chapter.

Acknowledgment and Justice in Conflict Resolution Strategies

Training seminars and problem-solving workshops are a basic tool in conflict resolution theory and practice, but the approach to reconciliation and peace building taken here goes well beyond the question of how to design an effective workshop. In fact, it challenges the assumptions of many practitioners of conflict resolution who get involved in political disputes that conflict resolution training is the essence of the process. The emphasis here fully reflects Justice Goldstone’s themes of the burdens of history on contemporary political relationships and the specific, non-negotiable psychological tasks history imposes on those who would design a conflict resolution strategy. Thus political diagnosis must be the first step in a strategy, followed only then by the choice of the most appropriate problem-specific conflict resolution techniques and processes.

There are a variety of approaches available for improving political and social relationships between groups that have endured protracted conflict and violence. Some focus on the task of helping leaders define steps forward in a discreet, creative way. Still others focus on the challenge of helping to shift public belief systems in a way that supports leadership initiatives toward compromise for peace building. Others emphasize practical relief and development. In this approach conflict resolution workshops and training can have important, but only partial, roles in the grand strategy. The conceptual conviction here is that political conflict resolution is made up of a set of strategic challenges, and the inevitably complex nature of conflicted inter-group and international relationships requires a politically sophisticated approach. For example, the task of organizing a third party facilitated council of historians from each side in a conflict to “walk through history” is fundamental to eliciting an inventory of unacknowledged and unatoned wounds from the past. Then one must consider and build into strategic planning the healing potential of enlightened political leaders as well as the critical importance of non-political leadership from various sectors of involved communities, groups and nations.

Integrated conflict resolution strategies will almost always include the stimulation and encouragement, including perhaps partial funding, of inter-ethnic networks organized to pursue super-ordinate goals, for example, clean water or the mobilization of community services. The potential roles of interfaith clergy and networks of women drawn from groups in conflict in promoting the habit of collaboration and non-violent resolution of conflict must also be considered. Here traditional negotiation and mediation training for interethnic teams that have specific tasks to perform can be put to very good use. For example, Mercy Corps International, an American relief and development agency, successfully trained Muslim, Serbian and Croatian employees in post-Dayton Bosnia who worked together rebuilding houses and laying water pipes.

The concept of integrated strategies in a comprehensive approach to ethnic conflict resolution is attracting important attention in world capitals, the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), among other international organizations. And in 2005, in what could be seen as a revolutionary initiative by the United States government, the Agency for International Development committed itself to a five-year, $400 million program to deal with Instability, Crisis, and Recovery (ICRP) that will recruit and direct outside specialists in conflict mitigation and management using integrated strategies in fragile states in need of help.
This chapter is an exposition on the broader theory and practice of complex conflict resolution acquired by the writer in over twenty-five years of evolving practice. It is based on an appreciation of the burdens of history, specifically of continuous insult from and the infliction of traumatic losses on one people by another. The losing side's resultant psychology of victimhood sets up the enormously difficult barriers that impede traditional conflict resolution and peacemaking approaches. It requires a healing process that is not provided for most of the current schools of conflict management and resolution.

Victimhood in History

There are three major characteristics of victimization. First, the individual, group or nation has experienced a major traumatic loss of freedom, physical or mental capacity, life, property, territory, security and/or faith in the future. Second, the violence or aggression that caused the loss cannot be justified by any sense of law or morality. And third, there is an enduring, if not always conscious, fear among the victims that the victimizers, or their descendants, by refusing to acknowledge their injustice and to express contrition, are only waiting for a chance to return and attack again.

History, of course, is the story of victims and victimizers. Indeed, the advent of ethnic and sectarian conflict resolution theory and practice, unofficial or “track two” diplomacy (Davidson and Montville 1980–81, Montville 1986), and the concepts of preventive engagement (Dellums 1993), or constructive engagement (Perry 1994), and preventive diplomacy (Boutros Ghali 1993), represent conceptual initiatives designed to head off the tragedies which engender victimization and the perpetuation of political violence.

The critical first step in an international conflict resolution process that aims at genuine reconciliation is acknowledgment by the aggressor group or nation or its successors if current leaders have no direct responsibility for the unjust actions. Acknowledgment is the act of explicitly describing and accepting moral responsibility for the violent acts or events, which caused the traumatic losses to the victims. Explicit description of the acts for which guilt is acknowledged is necessary so that the victims can be assured that none of the violations are overlooked in the subsequent contrition and forgiveness transaction which is the ultimate aim of the healing process and which is the psychological foundation of genuine reconciliation (Montville 1993).

Richard Hovannisian, a historian at UCLA, interviewed five hundred survivors of the wartime massacres and forced march of Armenians in Anatolia in 1915 and 1916 by the last of the Ottoman regimes. He compiled a tragic record of victimization of a people and said, simply,

We want Turkey to admit its guilt. We want acknowledgment. Our homeland, our property was all taken.... The major grievance is the indifference of the world community. That this slaughter remained unpunished, and so did not serve as a preventative (Rosenfeld 1985).1

Acknowledgment may require detailed preparation. One of the most dramatic and morally responsible acts of acknowledgment occurred in 1991, when the Chancellor of Austria, Franz Vranitsky, citing exhaustive research by an Austrian historian, accepted responsibility for Austria’s complicity in the Holocaust. The historian had used state archives and other sources to unequivocally document the complicity of Austrian officials and non-governmental organizations, businesses and individuals in the Nazi campaign of persecution of the Jews in the late 1930’s and of participation in the execution of the genocide during the war.

Up to the time of Vranitzky’s revelation, in a speech televised live to the nation on July 6, Austrians had denied any complicity in the Holocaust, and, indeed, claimed that Austria had been Hitler’s first victim. To his enduring credit, Vranitsky said in his speech,

Austrian politicians have always put off making this confession. I would like to do this explicitly, also in the name of the Austrian government, as a measure of the relationship we must have to our history, as a standard for the political culture of our country (quoted in Montville 1993).
Taking a Walk through History

It should be apparent from the discussion above that literally and in the therapeutic sense, taking a history of a political conflict is a fundamental step in designing a reconciliation strategy. The medical metaphor is apt when the idea of healing is introduced into the discussion of the methods of international conflict resolution. In the psychodynamic approach, the third party team designing and executing an integrated strategy should ideally have at least one member with clinical experience in individual and small group psychotherapy. This could be critical in a problem-solving workshop setting where an interethnic leadership group is being developed, for example. The job of the clinically trained person is to tactfully help participants express inter alia basic anxieties about national identity, rage over past assaults and losses, fears about present and future safety and security, and perceptions of the adversary side.

People coming from violent conflict experiences often go to great lengths to avoid honest expression of basic emotional preoccupations. They use well-known psychological defenses. Yet it is only expressions of feelings that can reveal the agenda for healing in a conflict resolution process. And without searching discussion of healing needs, workshops can go on for days, weeks or even years without providing insight about how to end violence and genuinely resolve the conflict. The specific techniques and dynamics of the psychologically sensitive problem-solving workshop are described extensively in Volkan, Montville and Julius, *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships* (Lexington 1990 and 1991), and they need not be repeated in this chapter. However, it would be useful to outline some general guidelines.

**Recruiting Participants**

The first step in planning a workshop for a leadership group or a council of historians is the careful selection of the representatives of the groups or nations in conflict for participation in the process. They should have keen intellect, knowledge of history, emotional maturity, moral courage, leadership qualities and the ability to influence high-level, official political thinking and decision-making.

Senior political leaders in intense conflict situations are rarely the best candidates for psychodynamic work and membership in a “leadership” group, because they are generally emotionally deeply invested in their public image if not survival and therefore not susceptible to change simply through new insight; and they are also limited in their room to maneuver by the negative emotions of their constituencies. Their ability to “learn,” acknowledge and articulate new and potentially healing insights gained in workshops is limited by the need for the insights to be acquired also by their mass of followers.

Senior political leaders are also unlikely to risk their positions by getting out in front of their followers with moral or peacemaking initiatives toward the enemy. This is a political reality that careful conflict resolution strategies must take into account. Intellectual or spiritual leaders from other sectors of a community or nation may have to undertake the moral responsibility, paving the way for politicians to “catch up” with and hopefully transform this fundamental leadership by others into official policy. These non-political leaders could be academics, clergy, business people, trade union officials, poets or playwrights. What makes them leaders are their courage, wisdom and capacity to show the way.

**The Psychodynamic Workshop**

The early presentation of fears, grievances and political demands by the more victimized group is predictable and normal in a problem-solving workshop. After initially creating a sense of safe space for the participants, psychologically sensitive third parties will attempt to make room for them to walk through history with each other, if and as the group dynamic indicates it is appropriate. “Walk” is the operative term. We prefer not to “run,” with a torrent of accusations and condemnations, but rather encourage the thoughtful expression by representatives of each side of the unhealed wounds in their historical relationship.

This is almost always a profound learning experience for each side, since victimizers traditionally employ the psychological mechanisms of avoidance and denial of unpleasant truths about their behavior and that of
their forebears. And victims are ordinarily so intensely absorbed by their own losses that they rarely understand the complexities and moral ambiguities their oppressors might have experienced in the past. It is especially important to take into account the fact that the victimizers may also have been victims at some point. This is why revision of history books—getting the story straight—is common in successful political reconciliation processes (Willis 1965, Montville 1986, 1990, and Luttwak 1994).

Taking a reasonably accurate history of a conflicted relationship in effect sets out the agenda for healing in a psychologically informed conflict resolution strategy. Participants in a leadership group or workshop or council of historians will lay out what Volkan (1992) calls their “chosen traumas”, those losses in history which have greatest symbolic meaning for their profound sense of victimhood and which continue to nourish their feeling of unacknowledged injustice. We have dealt theoretically with the critical importance of acknowledgment in ethnic and sectarian conflict resolution. It might be useful at this point to look briefly at two case studies for the impact of historic loss on contemporary violent conflict.

**Understanding the Mind of Serbia**

Most observers of the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic credit a speech he gave in Kosovo in April 1987, as the beginning of his climb to dominant power. In the speech, he implored the Serbian minority to stay in the province even though it was economically distressed. Kosovo’s population was 90% ethnic Albanian, but the province was also the birthplace and symbolic center of Serbia’s national identity. The Serbian Orthodox monasteries of Kosovo are a legacy of a tribal chieftain Stefan Nemanja, who established the first independent Serbian state in the twelfth century CE.

On June 28, 1989, Milosevic returned to Kosovo to celebrate the 600th anniversary of Serbia’s national day that, ironically, marks the defeat of Serb forces by the Ottoman army at the Battle of Kosovo. Hundreds of thousands of Serbs from Yugoslavia and around the world gath-ered at the site for the event that commemorated the loss as an enduring sacrifice of the Serbian nation for the benefit of Christian Europe. “Six centuries ago,” Milosevic said, “Serbia defended itself on Kosovo, but it also defended Europe. She found herself on the ramparts for the defense of European culture, religion and European society as a whole.”

The Serbian epic poem declares “Whoever is a Serb and of Serbian blood and comes not to fight at Kosovo...Let nothing grow from his hand...until his name is extinguished forever.” Thus Kosovo represents for modern Serbs not only the signature event in the establishment of national identity, but also a gift for which Europe shows no gratitude. Furthermore, Serb leaders rationalized their contemporary genocidal violence in Bosnia as the continuation of their struggle against Islamic “fundamentalism,” again in the face of an ungrateful Christian Europe.

Psychologically, there is a direct link between the pro-Nazi, Roman Catholic Croatian Ustashi genocide that killed hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Serbs during World War II, and the loss at Kosovo, five centuries earlier. Indeed, there is also a direct link between the Catholic Fourth Crusade’s destruction of Orthodox Constantinople in April, 1204 CE, in Serbian memory.

Each case, the Serbs perceived Latin Europe as indifferent to their sacrifices. And each case nourished the profound sense of victimhood that tells Serbs that the world cares nothing about their well being, sacrifices and losses. The majority of Serbs who kept Milosevic in power until his overthrow in 2000 appeared until then to live in an awesome loneliness in which they concluded that they may use any means to defend their identity from extinction. The new democratically elected Serbian government has made important and psychologically healthy strides towards connection with Europe and the West.

**The Uncivil War in Northern Ireland**

Unlike Milosevic, The Irish Republican Army (IRA) has not come close to majority support either in the Republic or among the Catholics in Northern Ireland, but it has endured as a lingering symbol of Irish Catholic victimhood in the historic relationship with England, even after the 1999 Good Friday peace agreement signed by Northern Ireland political
party leaders through the mediation of former Senator George Mitchell.

When one understands the psychology of victimhood and its capacity to flourish generation after generation unless dealt with, it becomes easier to comprehend the meaning of the IRA’s attempt to blow up Margaret Thatcher and her cabinet in Brighton in 1984, car bombs in the British Parliament’s parking garage, the rockets fired at No. 10 Downing Street and every other incidence of IRA terrorism. And terrorism it is, denounced vigorously by the Irish government and the great majority of Irish Catholics in the Republic and in Northern Ireland.

But there has been a remarkable persistence and determination in the hatred of the tiny minority of IRA militants against Britain, cease-fires notwithstanding. A symbolic walk through the history of the Anglo-Irish relationship helps to explain why. Such a walk could be a valuable stimulus to English memory and a contribution to current peacemaking efforts for Northern Ireland.

By all available evidence, official Britain has persisted in avoiding or denying its historic moral responsibility to the Irish people for a centuries-old record of extraordinary violence and repression. This contemporary resistance to acknowledgment of and contrition for past aggression kept alive an Irish instinct toward defense of the collective self expressed, among other ways, in IRA violence.

Any number of historical works could be used to “take the history” of English oppression of the Irish people, but The Story of the Irish Race, by Seamas McManus (1993), first published in 1921 and still in print is representative. In a chapter called “Suppressing the Race,” the author begins by saying, “Through these many dread centuries England’s energies were concentrated upon an effort, seemingly, to annihilate the Irish race (1993, 399).” McManus quotes a letter from the eminent English conservative statesman and political philosopher, Edmund Burke:

All [of Cromwell’s penal laws... were manifestly the effects of national hatred and scorn towards a conquered people whom the victors delighted to trample upon and were not at all afraid to provoke... every measure was pleasing and popular just in proportion as it tended to harass and ruin a set of people who were looked upon as enemies to God and man; indeed, as a race of savages who were a disgrace to human nature itself (McManus 1993, 399).

Oliver Cromwell landed at Dublin in 1647, with 17,000 men in a vengeful Puritan passion, “Bible-reading, psalm-singing soldiers of God—fearfully daring, fiercely fanatical, papist hating... and looking on the inhabitants as idol-worshiping Canaanites who were cursed of God, and to be extirpated by the sword (McManus 1993, 423).” Cromwell’s Christian soldiers slaughtered thousands of men, women and children at Drogheda, “in the streets, in the lanes, in the yards, in the gardens, in the cellars, on their own hearthstone” (McManus 1993, 424). At Wexford Cromwell made no distinction between defenseless civilians and armed soldiers. Britain through the 17th century had conducted a policy of active genocide against the Irish race. In the 19th century there was a policy that could be called passive genocide.

By the 19th century, the potato was the primary food of the Irish peasant majority. Cereals, meat, and dairy products were produced, but they were sold largely to England. When the potato blight hit in 1845, followed by complete crop failures in 1846 and 1848, the export pattern of other foods to England was maintained. Peasants died of starvation. Sir Charles Trevelyan, permanent head of the English Treasury said that to feed or clothe the dying would be to interfere with the free market.

The Irish population was estimated at 8.5 million in 1848. By 1851, emigration and starvation had reduced it to 6 million. (Today the population stands at about 4.5 million.) The famine had a powerful psychosocial impact. There was a sense of cumulative degradation in both those who remained and those who immigrated to North America.

Yet there has been a significant development in the centuries old Anglo-Irish antagonism. In November, 1997, British Prime Minister Tony Blair formally expressed regret at London’s role in the Irish famine. Further, Blair came out in support of a memorial to Irish famine victims in Liverpool where many of them were buried. He also promised to explore sources of government funding for the memorial. The Irish News said on November 20, the prime minister’s powerful and sympathetic letter [of support] will be seen as an act of reconciliation and acknowledgment of the hurt that was caused in those terrible years. There is no
question that the arrival of Mr. Blair at No. 10 Downing Street has had a major impact on the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Poland, Russia and the Katyn Forest Massacres

Yet another very important example of detailed work to fill in the blank pages of history is the case of Russia's acknowledgment of its moral responsibility for the murder of 26,000 Polish officers and other imprisoned citizens in March, 1940. The event is known as the Katyn massacres for the name of the forest in Belarus where most of the Poles were held. The Polish-Russian collaboration on archival research, Gorbachev's partial and then Yeltsin's complete and unqualified acknowledgment of Soviet government responsibility for the order to execute the Poles stands an impressive model of a psychologically sensitive conflict resolution process.

Poland and Russia have had a historical relationship burdened with violence, conquest and accumulated grievance, the balance of which has been clearly on the Polish side. When Mikhail Gorbachev proposed to rehabilitate the Polish relationship with the Soviet Union during his revolutionary campaign of glasnost and perestroika, he found a willing response in the Polish Communist Party and also the intelligentsia. But a representation of the latter—writers, artists, journalists, philosophers and social scientists—published open letters to Gorbachev insisting that before his initiative toward Poland could be accepted, the Soviet Union must acknowledge responsibility for the murder of the Polish officers whose bodies had been found in the Katyn Forest. The murders were seen as a cold-blooded act by Stalin to destroy the young leadership generation of an independent country, a selective, class genocide.

The Soviets had always admitted that the Poles at Katyn were part of a contingent of 15,000 reserve officers seized by the Red Army in 1939, when the Soviet Union absorbed eastern Poland under the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. But Moscow insisted from the beginning that the massacre had been carried out by Hitler's troops in 1941, after the German Army overran the Soviet camp where the officers were interned. Successive Communist governments in Warsaw had backed the Soviet story, but accumulating evidence pointed to the NKVD as the murder instrument, acting on Stalin's orders.

In 1987, General Wojciech Jaruzelski announced that a joint Soviet-Polish commission was being established to examine the "blank spots" in the record of bilateral relations. Also to be studied were the 1939 Soviet-German treaty dividing Poland and the 1944 Warsaw uprising, in which many Polish and Western observers believe that Soviets paused to let the Nazis finish off the pro-Western Polish leadership before occupying the city.

Gorbachev eventually accepted Soviet responsibility for Katyn in April 1990, after the Communist government in Warsaw had collapsed. But the admission was only partial, limiting the blame to the NKVD. It was not until October 14, 1992, that President Boris Yeltsin sent a special envoy to President Walesa with two sets of photocopied secret Soviet documents which proved that Stalin and several Politburo members signed Resolution number 144, dated March 5, 1940, instructing the NKVD to execute 14,700 Polish officers and other prisoners of war. The order included 11,000 other Polish civilians and state officials who were imprisoned by the Red Army in 1939. There were numerous other documents in Yeltsin's package including handwritten reports and memoranda from the Khrushchev period. Later, Moscow released other documents on Soviet-Polish relations including secret protocols from the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement.

There is no suggestion that this unprecedented act of revelation of the most damning of state secrets was entirely an act of moral compulsion. Yeltsin's gift of documents also embarrassed Gorbachev by revealing critical material that Yeltsin said he withheld from the Poles. And the act also served to further discredit the Communist Party in Russian and international opinion, a continuing goal of Yeltsin in his political struggles. Nonetheless, the release by Yeltsin, the successor to the victimizers, and, almost as important, the delivery by special envoy of the Katyn documents to Lech Walesa, the formal representative of the victimized Polish nation, in a ceremony of acknowledgment and contrition was existentially an act of vision and extraordinary political courage. Certainly the reactions of Walesa attest to this judgment.
American journalist Louisa Vinton (1993) reported that publication of the Politburo resolution had an enormous impact in Poland. President Walesa was visibly moved by the revelations and, wiping tears away, handed the microphone over to the poet Czeslaw Milosz during the announcement of the transfer of the documents (Vinton 1993, 21).

One Polish journalist wrote that the release had “epochal significance.” The weekly “Polityka” said that “contemporary Polish-Russian relations in the moral sphere now have the chance to throw off the burden of the past.” Walesa said that Yeltsin had made a “heroic decision” which none of his predecessors had the courage to make. Vinton showed admirable insight into the critical need for acknowledgment, writing that:

Many outside observers were puzzled by the strength of the Polish reaction, as the facts of the case had long been known, especially in Poland. The relevant point for the Poles, however, was moral and political, rather than historical. A truth known to them but denied public confirmation for fifty years had at last been acknowledged. [italics added.] The revelations reinforced the sense that Poland’s relations with Russia could only become normal once all the facts about the past had been revealed (Vinton 1993, 24, emphasis added).

**Justice in Times of Transition**

It is encouraging to note that an American non-governmental organization that is neither self-consciously associated with conflict resolution nor psychodynamically-oriented has had a psychologically important conflict resolution impact in several countries in transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. The Project on Justice in Times of Transition, originally founded in New York, is now an inter-faculty program at Harvard University. Conceived by Timothy Phillips, a Boston-based business and public policy activist, the Justice Project brings together political leaders, policy makers, jurists, human rights activists and writers to confer on basic issues of civil liberties, human rights and national reconciliation in former Communist countries of Eastern Europe, the former Soviet republics, the Baltic states as well as South Africa and in Latin America.

The original focus of the Justice Project was the protection of civil liberties and respect for the rule of law during the transition from totalitarianism to democracy in the former Communist countries of Europe. The Project soon came to focus on the fundamental task of “coming to terms with the past” which included confronting the legacy of human rights abuses. The use and function of truth commissions was explored with Eastern Europeans being briefed *inter alia* by former Argentinean President Raul Alfonsin and former Chilean Truth Commission member Jose Zalaquett on the experience of their two countries. Launched at a major conference in Salzburg in 1992, the Project helped organize an unprecedented three day meeting in January, 1993, in San Salvador called “Reconciliation in Times of Transition” which involved President Christiani and FMLN military chieftain Villa Lobos, Defense Minister Ponce and senior representatives of the military, business, government, labor, NGO and former guerilla sectors of Salvadoran society. The very presence of former bitter enemies in one conference hall caused veteran observers of Salvadoran politics and warfare to shake their heads in wonder.

While the importance of acknowledging historic wrongs was emphasized by some of the plenary speakers, including this writer, and all Salvadoran presenters spoke of the need for healing the wounds of the past, there were no acknowledgments of responsibility for specific acts of aggression. Unlike the Katyn Forest case, the deaths in El Salvador were perhaps too recent, and the perpetrators too concerned about criminal liability to be frank about their roles. However, acknowledgment had been carried out by two truth commissions, one international and one domestic, whose findings had been generally known to the public and were to result shortly after the conference in public condemnation of senior military officers and certain guerilla leaders. The former were slotted for early retirement and the latter were declared ineligible for political office.
The Project on Justice in Times of Transition became a moveable consultation in steady demand. Czech President Havel and Hungarian President Goncz were strong supporters of the Justice Project as a mechanism for reconciliation. The Project was invited to South Africa by Nelson Mandela to assist in a post-election healing process, paving the way for creation of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In 1997, it convened a meeting in London of significant leaders of the Muslim, Serbian and Croatian communities in Bosnia that the participants believe was an important contribution to the building of alliances in support of the civilian goals of the Dayton peace accords.

The Justice Project also mounted an extraordinary public meeting in the previously much-bombed Europa Hotel in Belfast in June, 1995. The gathering brought Catholic and Protestant politicians and militants together with British and Irish cabinet ministers. Poets and writers evoked the tragic past of Ireland with a poignancy that riveted the audience. It was an experience of profound mourning. Several of the Northern Ireland participants in the Belfast meeting took part in the negotiations leading to the Good Friday peace accord in 1998.

Contrition and Forgiveness

Clearly one of the most daunting tasks in the psychodynamic approach to international conflict resolution is to persuade victimizers or their descendants to offer meaningful, unambiguous and unqualified apology to the victimized group or nation. There have been inspiring cases such as President Yeltsin’s initiative with the Katyn documents, Chancellor Vranitsky’s speech to the Austrian people, and President Walesa’s formal apology to the Jewish people for Polish anti-Semitism and complicity in the Holocaust offered in the Israeli Knesset and other examples at lower or non-official levels (Montville 1989, 1993).

Beyond the fact that meaningful apology requires moral courage, there is the fear that the victimized individual, group or nation might use the apology as a weapon to exact crippling reparations or to visit political revenge upon the leaders or body offering the apology. Many observers of the Turkish-Armenian case believe one of the obstacles to unambigu-
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"The New Yorker," and participant in the Project on Justice in Times of Transition, quoted Arendt and in an eloquence of his own wrote:

True forgiveness is achieved in community: it is something people do for each other and with each other—and, at a certain point, for free. It is history working itself out as grace, and it can be accomplished only in truth. That truth, however, is not merely knowledge: it is acknowledgment, it is a coming-to-terms-with, and it is a labor (Weschler April 5, 1993, 4,6).

Cynthia Ozick, the late Hannah Arendt and Lawrence Weschler each, in their distinct way, have played a leadership role—literally showing the way—in trying to instruct the broad public in the essence of peacemaking. Each has recognized the difficulty for senior political leaders of consistently or even intermittently exerting moral leadership in the raucous and sometimes violent arena of politics. And so there seems to be a constant need for moral—lifesaving—leadership from other sectors of society.

As the pioneers of the new field of international conflict management and resolution walk toward the outstretched arms of groups and nations seeking help to escape their past and present tragedies, it seems clear that a moral task devolves on them in the process. And that task is to respect the suffering of their clients by learning what must be learned about their history and their losses and helping them to walk through the processes necessary to come to terms with their past. If conflict resolution practitioners go about their work with a compassion informed by profound knowledge and skill, they can help people and nations to heal and get on with their future. And they will be able to take justifiable satisfaction with their accomplishments.

Note

1. The Turkish government acknowledged the occurrence of "a great tragedy" in 1915 but denied there was a deliberate Ottoman policy of genocide against the Armenians.

References


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