

## Identity as Burden or Benefit? Youth, Historical Narrative, and the Legacy of Political Conflict

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### Key Words

Conflict • Identity • Intergroup contact • Narrative • Peace education • Political violence • Social justice • Youth

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### Abstract

Scholars across a range of disciplines have increasingly argued that the intractability of political conflicts is rooted in the proliferation of competing historical narratives. These collective narratives construct the basis of a sense of shared collective identity. Narrative and identity are thus increasingly conceptualized as fundamental to the maintenance and reproduction of political conflict. In this paper, I explore two underlying conceptions of identity that have emerged in the literature on youth and political conflict. One conception views identity as a *burden* for youth, suggesting that youth perceive the need to internalize a master narrative of collective identity that provides a sense of security and solidarity in the midst of existential uncertainty. Though psychologically beneficial, this internalization is problematic in the reproductive role it assumes in the larger conflict. An alternative conception views identity as a *benefit* in its ability to serve as a tool for social and political change, particularly for low-status groups. I review theory and research that adopt these varying conceptions and suggest that identity must be conceptualized as both burden and benefit for youth in conflict settings.

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In 2005, I conducted a life story interview with a young Palestinian Muslim named Lubna<sup>1</sup> in Nablus, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, as part of a study of Israeli and Palestinian youth motivated to pursue intergroup contact. At the start of our interview, Lubna immediately engaged with me about a book she was in the midst of reading.

... Yesterday I was reading a book that has maybe 200 pages. I finished it in two days, so it was really good. It was about two boys. One of them was real cool, he was a singer, and his brother was, his personality was so weak, so when the Intifada came, everything was different. The cool boy went to fight against the Israelis, and the brother, he lost his cat and went looking for it in a settlement, but there he was arrested by the Israelis. And soldiers caught him, and he had to stay in jail. After he went out of it, he became a different person. He was, he had a real strong personality and then he started working with the ambulance, so he saw many bodies, and he hated very much the Israelis. ... His village ... was near the great wall in Israel. So they gave him a paper that their house would be destroyed. The wall has to be! A tractor came and destroyed their house, and a little girl – she was British – she stood in front of the tractor, but it ran over her and crushed her. ... The boy tried to escape from the soldiers in the ambulance, but they shot him, and his father said, ‘My little boy is a martyr.’

... After I read this story, I was just thinking so much about our situation. I kept thinking, why this was the end? All the stories are supposed to end, ‘They lived happily ever after.’ But the only answer I thought was that this was our life, and the suffering never ends in Palestine. Welcome to home.

That the narration of Lubna’s life story begins with this spontaneous discussion of a story from Palestinian literature – a story which contains within it a set of characters, themes, and events that relate directly to the collective Palestinian experience of life under occupation [Hammack, in press] – says much about the role of collective narrative in conflict settings. As an adolescent beginning to construct a sense of coherent and purposive identity through developing a life story narrative [McAdams, 1996, 2001], Lubna inhabits a social ecology saturated with the shared narratives of an intractable political conflict. Throughout this article, I will call upon Lubna’s narrative as an exemplar of the many formal and informal interviews I have conducted with Palestinian youth since 2003. My intent in doing so is not to provide a case study of a single Palestinian youth. Rather, Lubna’s narrative is intended to illustrate the experience of a broad range of youth with whom I have come into contact over the years.

Scholars from the growing number of disciplines that study conflict have increasingly come to theorize the way in which collective narratives maintain and reproduce the conditions of conflict [e.g., Bar-Tal, 2007; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998]. Two competing conceptions of narrative and identity underlie this emerging body of theory and research. The first conception focuses on identity largely as a *burden*, particularly with regard to social processes of reproduction. In this frame, youth are conceived as relatively blind appropriators of a status quo of narrative stalemate, thus unwittingly participating in the essentialism and reification of identity that reproduces conflict [Bekerman, Zembylas, & McGlynn, 2009]. While these narratives are no doubt linked to the material conditions of political violence [Hammack, in

<sup>1</sup>Pseudonym.

press] and provide a sense of security and solidarity in the midst of existential uncertainty [Pettigrew, 2003], their internalization maintains the status quo of narrative stalemate [Hammack, 2008; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998]. The politics of identity in contexts of conflict thus seem to create a paradoxical situation: while a strong sense of social and political identity might be beneficial at the level of individual psychology – for coping and making meaning of political violence [Barber, 2009b] – the reification of identity through individual psychological development would seem to possess negative implications for conflict reduction at the collective level [e.g., Bekerman, 2009; Bekerman & Maoz, 2005; Bekerman et al., 2009].

An alternative conception views identity not only as an individual source of meaning and resilience [Barber, 2009b] but also as a collective *benefit*, particularly for youth who are members of low-status groups. In this frame, emphasis is placed on collective identity as a tool for social change and liberation from oppression [Sampson, 1993]. This view challenges the assumption that identities are themselves problematic indices of human categorization, artifacts of a modern age or of Enlightenment visions of human organization. In fact, this conception suggests that a critique of identity might benefit hegemonic intergroup relations by subverting the attempts of the subaltern and the subordinated to gain legitimacy and recognition within a larger matrix of power. In other words, viewing identity solely as a burden, rather than also as a benefit in the struggle for social justice and change, might paradoxically support a status quo of hegemony by undermining the claims of the subordinated.

The purpose of this paper is to review and interrogate these underlying conceptions of identity and narrative in theory and research on youth in conflict settings. I begin with a review of the concepts of identity and narrative, which introduces the intellectual basis for the competing conceptions outlined above. I then review theory and research that emphasize each of these conceptions. I suggest that these competing conceptions of identity represent *interpretive stances* among investigators that bring with them important implications for the analysis of youth in conflict settings. Rather than viewing identity according to one of these stances, I suggest that scholars of youth and conflict would benefit from recognizing the legitimacy of both, depending upon the relative status of social identities implicated in the conflict. I argue for an integrative approach to the study of identity and narrative among youth that facilitates such an analysis by considering multiple levels (i.e., individual psychological and social structural).

Underlying my review of competing conceptions of identity is a view of youth development in conflict settings as a dynamic site of social reproduction or resistance. In keeping with historical and cultural views of human development [e.g., Elder, 1998; Erikson, 1968], I consider youth not as a biological *stage* of development but as a social process through which the discourse and practice of a culture is either reproduced or repudiated. *Youth*, then, describes a process of both personal and societal development, and the youth of an age can and often have come to challenge the received social order [e.g., Keniston, 1971]. While contexts of development create considerable diversity in *adolescing* – becoming adult – the idea of youth as a moment of social history transcends time and place in its provision of a particular process.

This theoretical formulation of the role of youth in the maintenance and reproduction of conflict contributes to a more integrated understanding of the function of narrative in social stasis and change because it considers youth not just as passive

objects upon which master narratives are projected. Rather, I argue for a *cultural psychological* approach to theorizing and empirically studying the relationship among youth, conflict, and narrative. Central to this approach is the principle of *mutual constitution* – that culture and psyche make each other up [e.g., Shweder, 1990] and that the material world of culture, including its symbolic and discursive configuration, is both a *producer of* and *produced by* individual actors. Thus I argue for a perspective that transcends the false dichotomy of agency versus structure, or free will versus determinism.

### **The Problem of/with Identity**

Competing conceptions of the role of identity in conflict settings are rooted in the absence of a coherent metatheory of identity and, correspondingly, the insufficient frequency of cross-disciplinary conversations. The lack of sufficient conversation is rooted not only in the absence of a metatheory of identity but also in the divergent epistemological and methodological stances that frame the numerous fields that have claimed the identity concept as a central analytic tool. Given that these fields range from the social sciences (e.g., psychology, sociology, and politics) to the humanities (e.g., philosophy, literature, and cultural studies), it is not surprising that cross-disciplinary dialogue has been hindered.

As a focus of scholarly and popular imagination, the notion of personal identity emerged out of Enlightenment concerns with individual liberty and the cultivation of individuals with a particular social and economic sense of purpose [see Baumeister, 1987]. Early psychologists, though, immediately recognized the significance of *social* identity, or the sense of self derived from the groups to which one belongs [Tajfel, 1981]. William James [1890] famously argued that ‘a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him’ (p. 294). And arguably it has been indices of social identity – whether in terms of race, ethnicity, class, sex/gender, sexual identity, nationality, religion, or the like – that have been mobilized in instances of social conflict [Sampson, 1993].

The concept of identity has become an anchoring tool for the analysis of social phenomena in a wide range of disciplines beyond psychology [e.g., Appiah, 2005; Giddens, 1991; Holland, 2008]. Although many scholars have attempted to construct a metatheoretical position on identity that can bridge individual psychological and social or cultural levels of analysis [e.g., Erikson, 1968; Hammack, 2008; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001b], the majority of theory and research on identity occurs in isolated disciplinary silos. Divergent epistemological and methodological approaches have too often obstructed useful cross-disciplinary conversations about the concept of identity [Hammack, 2008].

Following a growing interdisciplinary movement, I suggest that the formulation of identity as narrative usefully resolves many of the conceptual dilemmas that prohibit cross-disciplinary conversation. The emerging *cultural psychological* approach to narrative identity particularly resolves the tendency toward disciplinary insulation by conceiving of identity as a dynamic construct that must be considered at multiple levels of analysis [e.g., Hammack, 2008]. This approach conceives of lives as texts that embody multiple voices beyond simply the individual [Bakhtin, 1984; Wertsch, 2008].

In the remainder of this section, I review three key bodies of literature intended to foreground my analysis of the interpretive stances toward identity in research on youth and conflict. I suggest that scholars agree that issues of identity and narrative are central to the analysis of youth development in conflict settings, but whether one conceives of identity as a *burden* or a *benefit* in such settings appears to depend on the extent to which issues of power and status are integrated into conceptual or empirical analysis. In this section, I present a brief overview of (a) the idea of narrative identity, (b) the study of narrative in conflict settings, and (c) the study of youth, narrative, and conflict.

### *Identity as Story*

Following the discussion of Palestinian literature that began our interview, Lubna narrated her life story to me. Much like the story from the book she had just read, Lubna's story contained a set of characters (e.g., fatalistic parents), critical events (e.g., military invasions of Nablus during the second Intifada), and themes (e.g., existential insecurity) that provide a sense of coherence, meaning, and purpose to both the narrator and her audience. Key to my analysis of conflict and identity is the idea that our identities represent stories that are developed in *dialogue* with the storied ecology of development. In this view, identity is located at both the *personal* level of individual meaning making and the *collective* level of circulating discourses about group membership and shared experience. That is, identity can be interrogated as a process of individual story making that involves internalization of circulating discourses about collective history, memory, and identity. A narrative approach thus possesses the integrative potential to link persons and settings through the analysis of identity as a *text* that reflects vocabularies of self and other, thus always *referential* in its positioning [see Bakhtin, 1984; Gergen & Gergen, 1983]. A critical point of analysis, then, concerns the way in which youth *engage* with historical narratives in settings of political conflict as they become authors of their own personal and collective identity.

As suggested by Lubna's story, the content and form of personal narratives are not idiosyncratic or subject to personal choice but rather reflect the 'narrative structures' [Sarbin, 1986, p. 8] to which we are exposed and the 'canonical forms' [Bruner, 1987, p. 15] of autobiography available in a given cultural setting. These early theoretical ideas have undergone considerable refinement and empirical scrutiny in the past two decades. McAdams has elaborated on the forms and functions of life story construction [e.g., McAdams, 1996, 2001] and developed systematic methods for the analysis of narrative data [e.g., McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997]. Scholars have identified the central role of storytelling in processes related to memory [e.g., McLean, 2005; Nelson & Fivush, 2004], meaning making [e.g., McLean, 2005; Singer, 2004], and personality development [e.g., Pals, 2006; Thorne, 2000], with an increasing recognition of the particularity of narrative forms across settings [Hammack, 2009b, 2010, in press]. Theory and research have increasingly considered the way in which identities and stories are co-constructed [McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007; Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007] and personal narratives are inherently dialogic [Hammack, 2008].

In psychology, there has been an understandable emphasis on narrative identity at the level of individual functioning and development. Conversely, in fields such as history and politics, there has been an emphasis on narrative at the collective level, with analysis of institutionally produced texts, political rhetoric, and discourse more generally. A recent shift toward identifying the relationship between master narratives and personal narratives reveals an attempt to link the idea of narrative identity at multiple levels [Hammack, 2008]. This work conceives of master narratives as dominant scripts which can be identified in cultural products and discourse (e.g., media, literature, film, textbooks). These scripts contain collective storylines that range from a group's history to notions of what it means to inhabit a particular social category [Hammack, 2008, 2009b, in press].

Understanding identity as narrative is thus not, as it might initially seem, a static rendering. Rather, narrative identity development is best understood as a *process* that is closely mediated by social experience [McLean et al., 2007]. In other words, identity development involves a process of *narrative engagement* in which individuals confront multiple discursive options for making meaning of experience through language, and they undergo a process of appropriation that tells us much about the course of a conflict [Hammack, 2008]. In this way, identity is conceived of as an *internalization of speech* [Vygotsky, 1978], and is accessible through the act of narration [Hammack, 2008], and of using language to render individual and collective experience sensible [Bruner, 1987].

The construct of narrative identity, assessed at the individual level through the telling of a life story and at the collective level through historical and ethnographic analysis [Hammack, 2008], thus provides a window into not only processes of personal psychological adjustment and development but also larger processes of social reproduction or resistance. Such approaches to data importantly reveal both individual adaptations to conflict settings and the degree of internalization of the collective narratives that maintain conflict. Narrative identity provides a document of person-culture co-constitution [Shweder, 1990] in its ability to reflect a process of discursive engagement and internalization of various circulating master narratives [Hammack, 2008].

### *Stories in Conflict*

The story recounted by Lubna at the start of her life story interview contains within it salient characters, themes, and events related to the collective memory of the Palestinians. It presents images of a strong 'fighter' who actively resists the Israeli occupation, whose brother is personally transformed into a 'strong personality' through his experience in prison. The story refers to land seizures, house demolitions, and the sacrifice of non-Palestinian activists such as the British woman (an allusion to the American, Rachel Corrie) who serves as a human shield. These events represent critical references to themes of dispossession and existential insecurity that infuse the Palestinian master narrative of history and identity and that reflect the lived experience of military occupation [Hammack, in press]. As Lubna engages with this narrative in popular Palestinian literature, she comes to internalize the tone, form, and thematic content of the master narrative, expressing her frustration at the lack of a 'happy ending' that is supposed to characterize life stories.

While intractable conflicts are often rooted in a competition of material resources and political or territorial control [see Kriesberg, 1993], they are made salient through the construction of stories that motivate intergroup antagonism [Hammack, 2008; Liu & Hilton, 2005]. Scholars of conflict have argued that narratives contain within them core *societal beliefs* – beliefs typically characterized by claims of exclusive legitimacy, victimization, and the justness of one group's goals [Bar-Tal, 2004, 2007; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998] – that fuel the flames of conflict just as they provide a sense of solidarity and security. Thus, the competition over territorial control between Israelis and Palestinians has become crystallized and reified in a stalemate of stories that is irreconcilable [Hammack, 2008; Kelman, 1999].

Narratives provide social representations of collective history that contribute to the positive distinctiveness of a group [Liu & Hilton, 2005]. They are embodiments of collective memory [Wertsch, 2008], realized in an internalized discourse or *social speech* [Vygotsky, 1978] that provides both individual psychological and societal functions. These social representations are themselves utilized, referenced, and exploited by those in power to serve larger political interests [often specifically to the nation-state; see Liu & Hilton, 2005; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001b; Wertsch, 2008].

There are numerous examples in the history of the United States of the use and mobilization of historical narrative for particular political ends. Kammen [2008] examined the way in which major political figures attempted to craft historical narratives about the American Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and the 'culture wars' of the 1990s to serve particular interests. Schwalbe, Silcock, and Keith [2008] revealed the way in which media images preceding the 2003 American invasion of Iraq supported a 'master war narrative' (p. 448) promulgated by major political figures at the time. The concept of narrative has also been used in the Russian-Chechen conflict to link the aspirations of Chechen separatists to global *ihadists* whose motives are essentially anarchic and nihilistic [Souleimanov & Ditych, 2008] – a narrative frame that serves the interests of the Russian government to maintain authority in Chechnya.

The role of narrative has been particularly well documented in research on education in conflict zones. Christou [2007] argued that history education in Cyprus is constructed to foster patriotism and to subvert personal narratives that do not support a monolithic historical narrative. Dalsheim's [2007] study of historical narrative in Jewish Israeli high schools reveals the challenges of contesting the master narrative of the state in the education system. Post-conflict societies, such as Rwanda or Northern Ireland, are also characterized by struggles about the presentation of historical narrative in educational settings [e.g., Freedman, Weinstein, Murphy, & Longman, 2008]. Simply put, stories are inherently political and provide a motivational force for collective (in)action or (im)mobilization [e.g., Schwalbe et al., 2008].

Narrative may be problematic in maintaining or exacerbating intractable conflict [e.g., Bar-Tal, 2007], but it can also – precisely because of its conceptual salience in such settings – assume a role in conflict reduction. Kelman [1999] argued that the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires the development of a transcendent narrative in which each group recognizes its positive interdependence on the other. Adwan and Bar-On [2004] have developed a joint narrative of 1948 as a way of teaching Israeli and Palestinian youth about the interpretive nature of history. The use of storytelling as a technique in peace education and conflict resolution has become increasingly common [see Maoz, in press]. Zembylas and Ferreira [2009] ar-

gued that the use of storytelling in educational settings can challenge the received ethos [Bar-Tal, 2007] of conflict and identity. Auerbach [2009] has developed a reconciliation framework that centers on processes of narrative acknowledgment and integration. In theory, just as narrative can divide, it can help to unite groups in conflict by making collective claims explicit – particularly through the sharing of personal narratives.

In sum, the proliferation of polarized collective narratives in contexts of intractable conflict has been well documented by social scientists, and interventions that seek to capitalize on the significance of narrative have begun to emerge. What is less often theorized and empirically examined is the *relationship* between master narratives and personal narratives in conflict [for exceptions, see Christou, 2007; Hammack, 2009b, 2010, in press]. Master narratives are often characterized as relatively static and enduring rather than in states of constant tension and insecurity. A key reason social scientists have struggled to fully theorize and empirically examine conflict and narrative – beyond a rudimentary conception – is that they have too often overlooked individual subjectivity in processes of social and cultural development. That is, by consistently privileging structure over agency, many scholars of conflict have tended to assume the reproduction of master narratives absent empirical specificity about processes of *narrative engagement* – the ways in which individuals negotiate the polarizing discourse of conflict [Hammack, 2008].

### *Youth, Conflict and Narrative*

The study of youth and political conflict has been prodigious, from early work that focused on the role of youth in instigating conflict within societies [e.g., Keniston, 1971] to more recent studies that have focused on the consequences of conflict for youth psychological well-being and identity development [for reviews, see Barber, 2009a; Barber & Schluterman, 2009]. A theme of more recent work has been to locate youth as part of a larger social and economic structure [e.g., Abeyratne, 2004; Daiute, 2006] and thus to view them not as the essential *drivers* of social change, as earlier work did [e.g., Keniston, 1971], but rather as active participants in social processes associated with conflict. For example, Abeyratne [2004] argued that youth movements in Sri Lanka that have contributed significantly to conflict are more connected to economic issues than to fundamental ethnic divisions. Nolte [2004] illustrated how the politics of youth in Nigeria has fulfilled local and regional competitions for power within the pre- and postcolonial periods, while also being closely connected to social and economic issues. Work on youth bulges (i.e., significant generational increases in the number of youth in a society) has revealed the way in which demographics and economic possibilities converge to contribute to conflict [e.g., Urdal, 2006].

An emerging line of research either implicitly or explicitly assumes a narrative approach to the study of youth in conflict settings. Ullah [1990] examined social identification as a rhetorical process among second-generation Irish youth living in England during the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. He illustrated the way in which youth work through their identity development in talk – how arguments within themselves and with other youth assume a major role in their own process of social identification. Ullah demonstrated how this unique group of youth



engaged with several discourses of social identity – the meaning of being Irish versus English, for example – as they developed their own set of identifications within the larger political and ideological context of the Troubles.

More recently, Daiute and Turniski [2005] examined the ways in which youth in post-war Croatia make sense of social and ethnic identity through narrative. They collected stories from youth who identified as either Serb or Croat in the context of a social history project at a non-governmental organization in Croatia. They were particularly interested in the transgenerational management of identity conflict and thus elicited narratives from the youth of how adults discussed or managed social conflict. Their findings illustrate the variability youth possess in engaging with the discourse of conflict. They utilized sociohistorical theories in developmental psychology [e.g., Vygotsky, 1978] to examine the way in which youth use narrative as a tool to both convey messages to a particular audience and to guide future action. The narratives of youth revealed the way in which official discourses of history and collective memory intersected with interpersonal experiences in the post-conflict period to create variability among youth.

Daiute and Turniski's [2005] study offers a particularly good example of a cultural psychological approach to narrative identity development, in which the mutual constitution of persons and societies is apparent. While Serb and Croat youth in post-war Croatia are confronted with a prior generation's master narrative about ethnicity and nationality, they simultaneously try to construct a new discursive configuration of intergroup relations through their interpersonal connections. This study nicely illustrates the way in which youth represents a moment of *narrative engagement* – a time in which cognitive, social, and emotional development converges to position individuals in a place of heightened consciousness about language, discourse, and identity. In the context of conflict, we might expect this process to be amplified, rendered more salient for youth because of the significance of (competing) master narratives for the security and sustenance of the group [Hammack, 2008].

In my own work with Israeli and Palestinian youth motivated to pursue intergroup contact, I have employed a narrative approach to examine both the basic relation between master historical narratives and personal narratives, as well as the development of the personal narrative following intergroup contact [e.g., Hammack, 2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, in press]. This work has illustrated the way in which youth actively engage with master narratives of history and identity, selectively appropriating elements at different moments of narration. While the personal narratives of youth often reflect the form and thematic content of master narratives, particularly for Jewish Israelis [Hammack, 2009b] and Palestinians from the occupied territories [Hammack, in press], youth also contest elements of the master narrative and repudiate some of its content. The narratives of young Palestinian citizens of Israel reveal a diverse process of narrative engagement and civic-cultural identity reconciliation that suggests significant complexity [Hammack, 2010].

Youth thus represents a key point of entry into understanding the dynamics of conflict – and, perhaps even more important, the course that conflict is likely to take. In the post-conflict context of Northern Ireland, for example, McEvoy-Levy [2001] argued that peace builders must query 'the discourse of youth' (p. 95) to probe the conflict transformation process. I have suggested that the concept of narrative offers a valuable heuristic for theory and empirical research on youth, conflict, and iden-

tity. A narrative approach responds to the call for interrogating not just the psychological consequences of war but the *meaning* youth attribute to war, conflict, and violence [Barber, 2009b]. Because it represents a space of heightened identity politics, the context of conflict offers a living laboratory for examining these fundamental social processes [Bar-Tal, 2004].

Such an approach to the role of youth in conflict elaborates processes of personal narrative identity development and links them to broader processes of social reproduction, thus theorizing youth as both producers and products of collective memory. I suggest that, through this process of narrative engagement, youth inherit the legacy of identity politics that characterizes the status quo of conflict. Whether this inheritance is interpreted as a *burden* or a *benefit* is intimately linked to the positions of groups in the larger matrix of power and hegemony in a particular conflict.

### **The Burden of Identity**

The conception of identity as burden is rooted in recognition of its role in motivating individuals and groups to participate in the social and psychological mechanisms that reproduce conflict [Bar-Tal, 2007]. These mechanisms include both the active participation in political violence that maintains and exacerbates conflict, as well as the psychological processes of delegitimization, negative stereotyping, and exaggerated intergroup differentiation that accompany categorization in conflict settings [Bar-Tal, 2007; Oren & Bar-Tal, 2007]. In this frame, identity becomes a psychological tool through which conflict is reproduced in its ability to thwart individual reason and morality.

This view of identity is closely linked to the foundational paradigm of social psychology that viewed the group as largely *contaminating* individual rationality and decision making. Early notions of a 'collective mind' [Le Bon, 1895/1969, p. 20] and 'herd instinct' [Freud, 1921/1959, p. 50] gave way to studies that have consistently revealed the diminished capacity for rational decision making [e.g., Janis, 1982], empathy [e.g., Milgram, 1974], altruism [e.g., Latané & Darley, 1968], and even perceptual accuracy [e.g., Asch, 1955] in group settings. In this view, the group represents a dark force with negative consequences for social relations. Social categorization via inculcating notions of a shared identity possesses potentially destructive consequences, realized in support for racism [Allport, 1954], ethnocentrism [Tajfel, 1982], and, at the extreme, genocide [Moshman, 2007].

This conception of identity is thus inherently suspicious of social categorization more broadly and is, in fact, not solely rooted in social psychology. Scholars across a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences have argued that *essentialized* notions of social categories have often been used to legitimize the subordination of groups by entities such as the state and its legal and political systems [Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a]. For example, scientific racism in the US serves to legitimize a status quo of racial subordination and White hegemony by positing a fundamental difference in attributes such as intelligence between Blacks and Whites – a difference that suggests power asymmetry might represent the natural order [for a review, see Cravens, 1996].

From this vantage point, categorization is seen as a top-down process that constructs subjectivity – understood in Foucault's [1982] sense in terms of both 'subject

to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge' (p. 781). But this process is not neutral vis-à-vis institutions or groups in power. Rather, categories become the basis of a social order framed as 'natural' [Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a, p. 390]. A popular example can be found in Foucault's [1978] analysis of the way in which the *homosexual* was created in the nineteenth century medical discourse of Europe. His historical study reveals the way in which a new social category of identity – the homosexual – was invented through discourse to stigmatize and pathologize, thereby constructing a new axis of social and political categorization and subordination.

In spite of the awareness raised by poststructuralist accounts of the way in which identity itself is a discourse that indexes power and hegemony [e.g., Foucault, 1978], the concept of identity remains enshrined as an essential aspect of the social world and of individual subjectivity, perhaps precisely because of the tensions and ambiguities raised by poststructural and postmodern accounts [see Giddens, 1991]. In addition, groups struggling for recognition and social justice are subject to the received system of social categorization and often use strategies of status enhancement that work within that system [Tajfel & Turner, 1986]. The notion of identity as a burden for youth in conflict settings stems from this view of the dangers of an essentialist position about identity. If group identities are naturalized, individuals view conflict as inevitable and fail to see identity as an instrument for the separation and subordination of groups [Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a].

Evidence for this interpretive approach to identity in conflict settings comes primarily from (a) research on youth and political violence, and (b) research on education in conflict. In the remainder of this section, I will review theoretical and empirical work in these areas and illustrate the connection of this work to the idea of identity as a burden for youth and for the promise of conflict resolution.

### *Violence in the Name of Identity*

The majority of empirical work on youth and political violence has focused on the negative consequences of conflict for mental health and psychological well-being. Exposure to political violence among youth is associated with post-traumatic stress and other forms of impaired adjustment [for a review, see Barber & Schluterman, 2009]. In order to cope with the psychologically unforgiving context of political violence, youth turn to identity and ideological commitment to make meaning of conflict and violence [Barber, 2009b; Punamäki, 1996]. This process reveals the psychological resilience of youth in conflict settings [Barber, 2009a], even while it problematically ensures the reproduction of conflict and the cycle of intergroup violence.

Evidence suggests that youth in conflict settings are protected from the potentially deleterious psychological consequences of conflict when they identify strongly with their in-group. Muldoon and Wilson [2001] discovered that youth in Northern Ireland with high levels of ideological commitment also reported the highest levels of self-esteem. Barber's [1999, 2001, 2009b] work with Palestinian youth suggests that the way in which youth *interpret* the meaning of political violence is related to their psychological adjustment. In his comparative work with Bosnian and Palestinian youth, Barber [2008, 2009b] suggested that Palestinian youth demonstrated greater psychological resilience because of the meaning they associated with their national

cause. He argued that conflicts that possess *identity-relevant meaning* are likely to have different consequences for youth than those which are difficult for youth to comprehend, such as the conflicts of the former Yugoslavia [Barber, 2009b; Jones, 2002]. I will return to this line of work in my discussion of conceptions of identity as a benefit, but for now it is important to note that, just as identity-based conflict places youth at risk for social and psychological problems, it also provides a source of resilience in the possibility to make meaning of violence.

To the extent that youth are motivated to participate in the political violence that maintains and exacerbates conflict on the basis of identity, they reproduce the material and psychological conditions of conflict. Several studies have revealed the social psychological processes that high levels of identification appear to produce, including negative stereotyping, negative intergroup attitudes, and support for out-group violence. Bar-Tal [1996] conducted a series of studies with Jewish Israeli youth examining concept formation of the social category *Arab*. He discovered that Jewish Israelis internalize a concept of Arabs laden with negative stereotypes at very young ages, even prior to the ability to describe the content of the category. Bar-Tal concluded that conflict settings such as Israel rely upon both cognitive and affective processes beginning at very young ages in order to maintain and reproduce a status quo of conflict.

Studies have also found that youth in conflict settings internalize negative intergroup attitudes that maintain the status quo of conflict. In a study of over 1,500 youth and their parents in ethnically divided postwar Croatia, Ajdukovic and Biruski [2008] discovered that youth demonstrated more negative attitudes toward out-group members than their parents, who had grown up in a less divided, preconflict period. Their results revealed, however, that members of the majority (i.e., Croat) group reported higher levels of out-group discrimination than members of the minority (i.e., Serb) group. This study revealed that the identification process is not neutral and rather confers varying positions in the larger matrix of power and intergroup relations in a society.

Teichman, Bar-Tal, and Abdolrazeq [2007] examined similar phenomena in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They examined attitudes toward Jews among three samples of Arabs of varying status – Arab citizens of Israel, middle-class Palestinians from the city of Hebron in the occupied West Bank, and Palestinians from a refugee camp also in the occupied West Bank. They discovered a significant relationship between levels of collective self-esteem and negative attitudes toward the out-group (i.e., Jewish Israelis), suggesting that a strong sense of identification in conflict settings is accompanied by derogation of an out-group.

Beyond its consequences for cognition about the out-group, identification also appears to be associated with support for acts of political violence among youth in conflict settings. Khashan [2003] examined support for suicide bombing among a random sample of 342 Palestinian youth in a refugee camp in Lebanon at the height of the second Intifada (a time in which suicide bombing was frequent). He found overwhelming support for the use of suicide bombing as a legitimate tactic to fight the Israeli occupation among the youth. His analyses suggest that support for suicide bombing was largely a function of affiliation with political Islam and self-esteem among youth, arguing that support for suicide bombing ‘suggests a deep sense of national humiliation, which bombers seek to redeem by politicizing religion’ [Khashan, 2003, p. 1062]. He suggested that the growth of political Islam, coupled with the pov-

erty in refugee camps and the psychological response to national humiliation reveal a pattern of support for suicide bombing among Palestinian youth. Key to this pattern is what Khashan called the 'social functionality' (p. 1049) of internalizing such views.

Muldoon, McLaughlin, Rougier, and Trew [2008] studied adolescent explanations for paramilitary involvement among a sample of Catholic and Protestant youth from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. They elicited narratives among youth about support for paramilitary involvement and analyzed their data using a grounded theory approach. They discovered that social identification represented one common explanatory factor in support for political violence.

Taken together, the literature on youth, identity, and political violence suggests that, even though identity-relevant meaning can shield youth from negative psychological effects [Barber, 2009b], the identification process would appear to play a reproductive role in conflict settings. As youth internalize the politics of identity polarization that characterize a conflict, they find a sense of security. But they also reproduce the psychological conditions of conflict, including cognitive, affective, and behavioral components [Bar-Tal, 2007]. In other words, political conflict has a normative, direct influence on basic psychological processes implicated in maintaining and reproducing conflict, such as the legitimization of political violence against an out-group [Oren & Bar-Tal, 2007]. Identity appears to represent both a *mediating* and *moderating* force in this relationship [Barber, 2009a], reproducing the basis of conflict as it simultaneously facilitates individual coping with the conditions of conflict.

### *Educating for Identity*

Education has long been theorized as a key institutional site of social reproduction [e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977] and state control of collective memory [Wertsch, 2008]. The second clear area of research on youth in conflict settings in which a critique of identity has emerged focuses on education in general, and peace education in particular. Analyses of educational materials such as textbooks have revealed the way in which institutional authorities seek to use historical narrative to inculcate a master narrative of identity that maintains the status quo of conflict and hegemony. These materials, and the education system more broadly, reveal intergenerational tensions on issues of culture and identity, as adults seek to transmit a document of collective memory that may or may not resonate with youth.

Bar-Gal [1994] examined the role of geography education in Israel in transmitting a delegitimizing narrative of the Palestinians. He found that representation of the Palestinians varied according to the political needs of the state at distinct historical moments. In the prestate period, Arabs were described in a classic ethnocentric discourse, in which they were depicted as exotic and primitive. Following the 1948 war that resulted in the declaration of Israeli statehood, Arabs were officially depicted as 'minorities' within a narrative of what Bar-Gal [1994] called 'Zionist possibilism' (p. 228) – an Israeli ethnocentric tendency to see themselves as 'civilizing' (p. 228) the Arab minority.

Bar-Tal [1998] conducted a content analysis of 124 Israeli textbooks on Hebrew language and literature, history, geography, and civic education, using textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education for the academic year 1994–1995. He was par-

ticularly interested in the proliferation of key societal beliefs that form the core of a Jewish Israeli master narrative of conflict – beliefs about security, victimization, and delegitimization of the out-group, among others. He found that textbooks particularly emphasized the theme of security, which preceded discussions of positive self-image and collective victimization. Explicit delegitimization was significantly less common than in prior periods of the state's history [Bar-Gal, 1994], though Arabs continued to be represented with negative stereotypes.

A growing line of scholarship goes beyond identification of master narratives within educational materials to the study of how individuals *engage* with those materials. Porat [2004] studied Jewish Israeli students' engagement with a textbook account of a 1920 violent incident between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. Students provided a narrative account prior to reading the textbook account and then 1 year later. He found that students' social memory of the event was strongly influenced by the group within which they lived in Israel (i.e., secular vs. religious-nationalist), thus suggesting that, while textbook accounts are important, their interpretation is closely colored by more proximal narratives in youths' ecology of development. In other words, narrative engagement with educational materials does not occur in a cultural vacuum but rather requires sustained communities of shared meaning and interpretation to maintain salience.

Just as the education system can reproduce the basis of conflict by transmitting a particular historical narrative that maintains the status quo, so it can also theoretically be deployed to work for social change. Education for peace and coexistence attempts to contribute to this end by providing counter-narratives and sites for contact between members of conflicting groups [for a review, see Maoz, in press]. These opportunities exist both in isolated encounters or a series of encounters, or they exist in the form of integrated schools.

Most intergroup encounters in conflict settings are framed within the assumptions of the contact hypothesis [Allport, 1954], in which the goal is individual prejudice reduction through interpersonal acquaintanceship [Pettigrew, 1998]. Though there is evidence that intergroup contact generally does reduce prejudice [Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006], there are problems with many of these encounters in settings of intractable conflict [Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005]. These problems range from their reliance on an American cultural model of intergroup relations and social change [Hammack, 2009a] to the reified notions of culture and identity they often seek to inculcate [Bekerman & Maoz, 2005]. Scholars have argued that these kinds of interventions paradoxically support the status quo in conflict settings by providing sites that crystallize and reproduce identity polarization, rather than raise critical awareness among youth of the politics of identity in conflict [Bekerman, 2007, 2009; Hammack, 2006, 2009a; Helman, 2002]. Given that conflicts are characterized by a tendency to *essentialize* identity [Bekerman et al., 2009], efforts that do not work toward a critique of identity reproduce the status quo of identity politics.

In studies of dialogue between Jewish and Arab university students in Israel, Bekerman [2002b] has found that participants reproduce the discourse of *nation* and *culture* uncritically in their discussions. He suggested that this discursive pattern is highly problematic for conflict reduction and reveals the extent to which both Israelis and Palestinians remain consumed with modern ideas of monolithic nationalism that have undergone considerable challenge in an era of globalization and blurred borders [Bekerman & Maoz, 2005].

The same pattern of discursive reproduction has been found in other studies of Israeli-Palestinian contact. Maoz [2000] has found that Israeli and Palestinian participants enter into contact with divergent agendas which are linked to the status asymmetry between groups. Helman [2002] studied a yearlong intergroup dialogue between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel in 1995–1996, discovering that both groups reproduced ‘monological’ (p. 327) conceptions of culture and identity in their dialogues. These and other studies of the process of intergroup dialogue among groups in conflict have begun to provide valuable descriptions of such efforts [e.g., Maoz, Bar-On, Bekerman, & Jaber-Massarwa, 2004] and to reveal the social and psychological mechanisms through which such efforts appear to reproduce the dynamics of conflict. Studies have also begun to further interrogate the philosophical, ideological, and cultural assumptions of particular peace education programs [e.g., Hammack, 2009a; Maoz, in press].

In sum, the identity dynamics of conflict are often reproduced within intergroup settings, and participants in such efforts reenact the narrative basis of conflict through their own discourse [Bekerman, 2002b]. Though well-intentioned, such efforts rely largely on a model of social change rooted in individual prejudice reduction and less often address the structural change needed to transform intergroup relations and reduce conflict [Hammack, 2009a]. Studies have begun to document similar phenomena in formal educational settings such as integrated schools in conflict settings.

Bekerman has extensively studied efforts to educate for coexistence in Israel in two integrated Jewish-Arab schools. While recognizing the benevolent intentions of such efforts [Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2004], he has illustrated how these schools reproduce static and monolithic notions of identity through religious, national, and cultural commemorative ceremonies [Bekerman, 2002a] and the teaching of historical narrative [Bekerman & Zembylas, 2010]. Similar to peace education programs following a model of intergroup contact [Hammack, 2009a], these integrated schools follow a US-based model of multicultural education that problematically presents reified notions of culture rather than fostering critical reflection among teachers, parents, and students about identity [Bekerman, 2004]. In the context of an ongoing existential conflict based precisely on identity (non)recognition, parents and adult educators express significant concerns about such educational efforts creating too much confusion about identity [Bekerman, 2005]. That is, they fear the disloyalty that a deconstruction of identity might entail and thus favor a multicultural approach that reifies culture and identity. This approach stands in contrast to children and youth, who are often willing to challenge or transcend issues of ethnicity, religion, and nationality [Bekerman, 2005, 2009]. Thus identity-based peace education, whether in intergroup contact efforts or more systematic schooling, would appear to reproduce the narrative basis of conflict which serves the status quo interpretation of adults in conflict settings [Bekerman, 2005, 2009].

Research on identity and education in conflict settings reveals the intergenerational tensions that exist around the transmission of historical narrative. The work of several scholars reveals the importance of taking a multigenerational approach to the study of narrative, conflict, and identity [e.g., Ajdukovic & Biruski, 2008; Bekerman, 2005; Daiute & Turniski, 2005]. Research on history education more broadly has recently addressed the issue of intergenerational transmission. Wineburg, Mosborg, Porat, and Duncan [2007] conducted a longitudinal study of historical con-

sciousness about the Vietnam War among adolescents in the US from 1997 to 2000. They used photos in the context of parent-adolescent interviews to elicit narratives of historical consciousness, finding that youth engaged with collective memories of the War through a variety of media, including popular films, in addition to formal curricula and stories from their parents. This research importantly reveals the way in which education is a much larger process beyond schooling that involves youth engagement with a host of texts related to history, memory, and identity.

In sum, theory and research on education and identity in conflict settings reveals the way in which youth confront the narrative stalemate of conflict at every turn, including the most benevolent efforts to educate for peace and coexistence. Such work reveals the way in which conflict settings are saturated with stories that are difficult to question or challenge, particularly when they are supported by the structural and material realities of conflict, as is the case in Lubna's narrative. As in research informed by social psychology, the underlying frame of identity in this work is one that identifies the burden, rather than the benefit, of identity. This framework is influenced by both critical intellectual perspectives on the identity concept [e.g., Bekerman & Maoz, 2005] and empirical evidence that reveals the role of identity polarization in conflict reproduction [e.g., Muldoon et al., 2008]. The reification of concepts of *identity* and *culture* in contexts such as peace and multicultural education is problematic precisely because it fails to acknowledge the way in which these concepts themselves are discursive techniques for subordination within the configuration of the nation-state [Bekerman, 2007; Bekerman & Maoz, 2005].

### **The Benefit of Identity**

Identity can be viewed as a burden for youth in conflict settings to the extent that they come to uncritically appropriate, reproduce, and reify the narrative basis of conflict. The view of identity as a burden that characterizes the narrative identity development of youth is derived from this critical account of the hegemonic nature of identity as a *received* social taxonomy. That youth in conflict come to feel compelled to internalize a reified and polarized narrative of collective identity would seem to curtail the agency they might otherwise possess to make meaning of the social world.

It is important to note that it is not youth themselves but rather the scholars who study them who come to this interpretation. Thus Palestinian youth like Lubna narrate tragic personal narratives, but they identify great meaning with the cause of the collective [Barber, 2009b; Hammack, in press]. For youth like Lubna, the personal narrative is not a project of individual imagination. Rather, it is a text that is intrinsically linked to the social structure in which individual development occurs. As such, the personal narrative is subject to the social and political positions that individuals inhabit – positions of power, privilege, and domination; positions of marginalization and subordination. Contexts of development such as the one Lubna inhabits position subjectivity as a slave to the structure of a society, for the nonsense of conflict can only gain meaning by situating oneself in a community whose collective trauma is anchored in a common narrative [see Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008].

An alternative interpretive stance about identity emphasizes the transformative possibility of identity as a tool for liberation, rather than simply a means of social reproduction. Underlying this view is a challenge to the idea of conflict as inher-



ently negative and a concern that critiques of identity might support a hegemonic status quo by undermining the claims of minority or subordinated groups – claims that are rooted in demands for identity recognition. In other words, interpretive stances toward identity themselves index relative status and power and are intimately linked to the meaning of conflict itself.

In this section, I further review evidence of the beneficial nature of identity to individual psychological adjustment and development among youth in conflict settings and to collective struggles for liberation from oppression among low-status groups.

### *Conflict, Meaning and Identity*

‘The tanks are coming,’ Lubna said as she began to narrate her memory of the 2002 Israeli invasion of Nablus in the midst of the second Palestinian Intifada.

They’re going to kill ... the people from Nablus. ... It was so scary. ... And then there were many guns shooting. ... And there were explosions – the electricity gone. A long night. After the long night, I didn’t want to walk out. ... Because everybody knew [what would happen] if you open the window and [the soldiers] saw you ... So we had to stay in [the house]. It was very scary. The first day we had food. The first day it was fresh. The second day it became a bit [less] ...

This excerpt from my initial life story interview with Lubna reveals the psychological legacy of war and political violence for youth. This scene describes a major life event in Lubna’s personal narrative in its initial stages of construction at the age of 15, and it importantly illustrates the way in which the agency of youth to make decisions about their own life stories is constrained by the social structure of ongoing intractable conflict.

These kinds of experiences so common in conflict settings no doubt represent traumas that can result in psychological difficulties [Barber & Schluterman, 2009]. Yet, as already suggested, identity can become a *personal* benefit in terms of individual psychological adjustment and coping for youth [e.g., Barber, 2008; Muldoon & Wilson, 2001], providing a valuable source of resilience as they come to attribute *collective* meaning to trauma and injustice [Barber, 2009b]. Thus as Lubna identifies the trauma of the 2002 invasion with the larger political movement for Palestinian independence, she comes to *moderate* the negative psychological consequences of the invasion, finding a sense of collective meaning and purpose to the political violence that characterizes her story.

I blame the occupation for this. ... Why do children – the Palestinian children – always have the wish to live and the right to eat, to travel, to live freely in their cities and their country – and every other people in the world just wish to go to the playground? ... Why do we always ask for the rights which we should have, but the other children of the world just ask for more rights? For a school to study in, to be safe there, [that’s all we ask].

In her life story, Lubna clearly links the structural and direct violence to which she is exposed with the collective struggle of Palestinians to challenge the Israeli occupation. By linking her experience and her individual life story to this larger collective narrative, Lubna acts to moderate the risk of political violence exposure, as she comes to embody a collective identity.

The idea that social identification fulfills valuable individual psychological functions for self-esteem can be linked to Tajfel's [1981] views on social identity. Tajfel and Turner [1986] proposed this view of social identity to interpret the pervasive finding that mere categorization into arbitrary social identities was enough to activate in-group bias on several indicators. The notion that such processes might be conceived as psychologically beneficial is substantiated in more recent studies of youth in conflict settings.

Studies have suggested that social identification appears to moderate the effects of trauma and political violence on youth functioning and development. In several studies with Israeli and Palestinian children, Punamäki has examined coping and resilience. She and her colleagues have discovered that patterns of coping are closely linked to political developments and hardships [e.g., Punamäki & Puhakka, 1997]. In a study of 385 Jewish Israeli children and young adolescents, Punamäki [1996] found that ideological commitment (operationalized in terms of support and glorification of political violence, patriotism, and attitudes of defiance toward Arabs) both moderated and mediated the impact of political hardships on psychological symptoms. Among youth with low levels of ideological commitment, exposure to political hardships was associated with psychological distress, but not among youth with high levels of ideological commitment. Political hardships were also associated with higher ideological commitment, which in turn was related to lower levels of psychological symptoms, revealing the mediating role of ideology in the relationship between political violence exposure and psychological well-being.

Barber [2009b] has suggested that *identity-relevant meaning* provides a protective mechanism for youth in conflict settings by facilitating social and community integration to rally support for a collective cause. He conducted fieldwork with Palestinian youth and their families in Gaza during and after the first Intifada (1987–1993) and has illustrated, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the way in which the ability of youth to make meaning of the conflict appears to buffer them from trauma [Barber, 1999, 2001]. His comparative work with Palestinian and Bosnian youth is especially illuminating in this regard. Barber [2008] offered contrasting portraits of the meaning youth made of political violence in Bosnia in the 1992–1995 war versus Gaza in the 1987–1993 Intifada. Using several types of data, he illustrated the way in which the variability in interpretation of political violence among Bosnian versus Palestinian youth resulted in radically divergent psychological outcomes. While Palestinian youth demonstrated considerable resilience owing to the collective meaning they associated with the cause of the Intifada, Bosnian youth interpreted the violence as senseless and confusing, devoid of collective meaning. Barber's [2008] findings are consistent with Jones [2002], who conducted a multimethod study of adolescents following the war in Bosnia. She found negative psychological outcomes among youth who actively searched for meaning related to the war, discovering that an avoidant coping approach seemed to serve youth better in this conflict setting.

In conditions of threat and mortality salience, identity might assume a role in psychological adjustment by, as Tajfel and Turner [1986] theorized, enhancing self-esteem. Carlton-Ford, Ender, and Tabatabai [2008] examined the relationship among perceived threat, self-esteem, and psychological well-being in a random sample of 1,000 Iraqi adolescents surveyed in 2004, 1 year after the US invasion. They discovered a positive significant association between perceived national threat and self-esteem, which they interpreted according to social identity theory. Majority status

groups demonstrated this pattern, while minority status groups showed the opposite relationship: perceived threat was associated with lower self-esteem. This study illustrates the way in which the threat of war and political violence is interpreted based on relative status and power within a larger matrix of social identity.

This line of research on meaning and individual psychological response among youth in conflict settings suggests that, when a conflict is defined in terms of identity-relevant meaning [Barber, 2009b], identity can represent a psychological tool that contributes to psychological adaptation and well-being. But it also highlights that how youth interpret the structural basis and events of the conflict is dependent upon the *relationship* among various social identities implicated in the conflict and what the collective response to that position is. In the Palestinian case during the first Intifada, a grassroots social movement with international support and recognition created a context of collective solidarity which youth, in spite of their lower status in the conflict, could call upon for interpretive meaning [Barber, 2008, 2009b]. The senselessness of the war in Bosnia and the absence of a sense of shared meaning inhibited the ability of youth to benefit from identity [Barber, 2008; Jones, 2002]. The Iraqi case is more complex but suggests a sense of fatalism among low-status groups at the time of the study, given that identity seemed to only benefit the majority group's response to perceived threat [Carlton-Ford et al., 2008].

The idea of identity as a benefit to youth in conflict settings can be linked to this important ability of identification to moderate the effects of trauma and violence [Barber, 2009b] and to potentially bolster self-esteem in intergroup settings [Tajfel & Turner, 1986]. But this interpretive stance toward identity in fact goes further in positing the significance of identity to collective processes of social and political change in the interest of justice and equality. In this frame, then, identity represents a tool for liberation for low-status groups, and the process of identification is vital to maintaining collective struggles for recognition and equal rights.

### *Oppression, Liberation and Identity*

As suggested, conceiving of identity as primarily a burden in contexts of conflict is problematic to the extent that it fails to view (a) conflict as a positive force for social change and liberation from oppression for low-status groups, and (b) identity as a central social and psychological tool to achieve that change. The second area of scholarship that highlights the benefit, rather than the burden, of identity is thus connected to the study of oppression, liberation, and identity. In this section, I further explore the interpretive stance toward conflict as a positive force for social change and review relevant theory and empirical research in this area.

Because conflict is characterized by violence in both material and psychological terms, there is a tendency to view conflict as inherently negative. Early theorists acknowledged the important social and psychological *functions* that conflict seemed to possess (e.g., for the enhancement of group solidarity [Freud, 1921/1959]). More recently, scholars have acknowledged the way in which conflict can be a positive force for social change by directly challenging a status quo of social injustice [Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994]. Struggles against colonialism, for example, represent attempts to counter the negative psychological consequences of subordination [e.g., Fanon, 1961/2004]. Battles waged in response to oppression, subordination, and he-

gemony thus offer a potentially positive contribution to social justice for marginalized groups. The view of conflict as inherently negative would thus seem to privilege the quiet which only benefits the group with greater power.

This view of conflict as positive and identity as a tool for social change can be linked to the *identity politics* movement which has characterized political activism across the globe since the twentieth century and become a major focus of study in fields such as sociology [e.g., Bernstein, 2005]. This movement argues for the use of social categories as the basis for mobilization to obtain recognition and equal rights with dominant groups, typically along the lines of sex/gender, race/ethnicity, or sexual identity. It has become linked with global movements for multiculturalism, women's rights, gay and lesbian rights, and the rights of indigenous groups [see Sampson, 1993].

The identity politics movement is primarily concerned with the problem of recognition and the distribution of power within social and political configurations. Scholars have suggested that both the interstate warfare that characterized the twentieth century and the intrastate conflict that is common today involve recognition of claims for political, territorial, and economic control [Taylor, 1994]. As Taylor [1994] argued in his classic essay on the politics of recognition, 'dominant groups tend to entrench their hegemony by inculcating an image of inferiority in the subjugated. The struggle for freedom and equality must therefore pass through a revision of these images' (p. 66). Thus to view the reification of identity as inherently problematic in contexts of conflict, as is an understandable impulse for any critical social scientist, is to deny the significance of *difference* and *recognition* for which an essentialized concept of identity can, in fact, be usefully mobilized to counter hegemony.

There are numerous examples in recent history of the use of identity as a force for liberation from subordination. Fanon [1961/2004] famously argued for the colonized to assume a strong sense of national identity and accompanying violent tactics in order to reverse the power relations between colonizer and colonized. National liberation struggles have and continue to embrace this strategic use of identity to mobilize and motivate individuals for collective action against an oppressive configuration of intergroup relations.

Perhaps the most prolific literature on the benefits of identity to attain social and political equality focuses on the struggles for rights and recognition for racial and ethnic minorities and indigenous groups. Hanson's [1997] historical analysis reveals the way in which native American Indians have used the concept of ethnicity to struggle for national recognition in the US. In a survey of 124 students at Haskell Indian Nations University, Adams, Fryberg, Garcia, and Delgado-Torres [2006] discovered that the degree of identification with indigenous identity was positively associated with a sense of community efficacy and perceptions of racism. They suggested that these data reveal the extent to which identity serves as a resource for indigenous youth dealing with the legacy of colonialism, genocide, and continued racism in the US.

Theorists of African American racial identity development have long emphasized the way in which this process is characterized by sensitization to subordination and the collective struggle for social and political change [e.g., Cross, 1991]. Shelby [2002] suggested two underlying views on Black political solidarity: one rooted in the idea of common oppression and one rooted in the idea of a collective identity with cultural, ethnic, and national distinction. Identity, then, has been an important tool in the struggle for social and political equality for African Americans.

The idea of a collective identity has been fundamental to the gay and lesbian liberation movement for social and political recognition and equality that emerged in the mid-twentieth century. Konnoth [2009] has recently argued that this movement has used the idea of a *gay identity* as the basis for legal action, often following the model of the Civil Rights Movement for African Americans in the US. Slagle [1995] suggested that the identity politics that framed the original movement, problematically essentializing sexual identity, has transformed into an emphasis on the 'politics of difference' (p. 98) in the queer movement that emerged in the 1990s. While several scholars have suggested that the essentialization of identity was historically strategic to raise visibility of sexual diversity [e.g., Garza, 1995; Slagle, 1995], the reliance on monolithic notions of a gay or lesbian identity failed to challenge the sexual taxonomy imposed from above [e.g., Foucault, 1978]. Gamson [1995] raised the question of whether identity movements must self-destruct because of this essentializing tendency. He highlighted the way in which identity categories serve as both the basis of oppression and political power, thus revealing the inherent dilemmas of identity-based social movements.

There is an extensive amount of literature beyond the US context that emphasizes the role of identity in struggles for social and political equality. A growing body of research in South Asia reveals the way in which identity is deployed as a tool for collective action in the interests of social change. Ram [2004] illustrated the way in which the Ad Dharm movement in Punjab in the 1920s was characterized by the heightened identity consciousness of the untouchables in response to the domination of other groups. This movement forms the basis of the contemporary Dalit identity in Punjab [Ram, 2004]. Arora [2007] has explored the strategic use of the identity concept among tribes in India, revealing the way in which groups vie for political recognition and authority on the basis of identity. Hangen [2005] documented the way in which a political party in Nepal effectively called upon the idea of connection to a Mongol racial identity for mobilization against domination. Chowdhury [2006] revealed the way in which sex workers in Bangladesh used the discourse of a shared social identity as *workers* to struggle for rights and recognition and to challenge their own stigmatization.

Influenced by the framework of liberation theology and psychology [Martín-Baró, 1994], movements for indigenous recognition and rights in Latin America call upon notions of a shared identity to work for social change [e.g., Comas-Díaz, Lykes, & Alarcón, 1998]. Given that political and economic forces often operate differentially according to identity [Boelens & Gelles, 2005], it stands to reason that claims for social justice become rooted in the assertion of identity. Hristov [2009] noted, however, that the Latin American context requires careful *intersectional* analysis of identities, in which class and race/ethnicity are intertwined in the system of oppression [see Cole, 2009].

In sum, the identity concept has historically been deployed by low-status groups to mobilize against oppression and injustice. Several scholars have suggested that this use of identity represents strategic essentialism in its recognition of the way in which social categories can confer political power just as easily as they can serve as the basis for oppression [Gamson, 1995; Garza, 1995; Hangen, 2005]. This line of theory and research has not been systematically extended to the study of youth in conflict settings, though it possesses important implications for how we think about the identity development process of such youth.

## The Politics of Identity: Burden and Benefit

In the summer of 2007, I returned to Nablus to conduct a new life story interview with Lubna, now 17 years old. In the period between our interviews, she had participated in 2 intergroup contact programs with Israeli and American youth in the US. What was most remarkable about the development of her life story over the course of these 2 years was how little had changed. In fact, Lubna's exposure to a social structure apart from military occupation (in the US) had *increased* the salience of structural violence integrated into her narrative, with even more accounts of checkpoints, imprisonment of friends, and the separation barrier than had been included in her prior narrative. Reflecting on her experience of contact, she said:

I didn't want to hurt anyone in my words and all that. Although ... we were getting hurt by what they said, like I was focusing, which is right sometimes, on the human side of the conflict. Like, we have to be friends, we have to love each other, we have to be two nations in one and all that. But you can't only focus on that human side in this life. You can't like, you don't wanna hurt them and say, you know, 'You're acting with no conscience, your soldiers.' ... [But in Gaza] they killed 35 people in their homes. So many of them were children. Like, at 3 a.m., and they didn't kill [the Hamas guy they were after]. He was not in the house.

Lubna narrated the psychological challenge of intergroup dialogue for youth in conflict, particularly dialogue that presses youth to develop a common identity and to transcend the national identities that divide them [Hammack, 2006, 2009a]. On the one hand, this kind of dialogue appeals to her desire for intergroup harmony. On the other, she acknowledges that the structural violence of asymmetric conflict interferes with the ability to construct a common identity.

The development of Lubna's personal narrative over time reveals the limits to agency that political violence creates, as well as the role that youth serve in the reproduction of conflict through the process of life story construction. The construction of life stories replete with the structural violence of conflict maintains the status quo, and intergroup contact intended to thwart this process does not necessarily alter the course of the personal narrative.

I think if you want your way to peace, you have to get into war. If you keep on looking at the situation, if you were an Israeli and you are looking at the situation from far above, you're only thinking of making our life insecure. So you think it's easy if they stop their bombing? ... You have to go into war. You have to fight with them and all that ... We have to reach to a point everyone knows about our suffering ...

Two years older and 2 coexistence programs behind her, Lubna saw war as the only mechanism for the communication of Palestinian (and Israeli) identity security. Through her own process of personal narrative development, Lubna revealed herself as an active participant in the discursive reproduction of conflict – a process through which individuals make the structural realities of life and the master narratives of the group manifest in the document of a single life.

This interpretation of Lubna's story conceives of identity as a burden in the sense that the context of conflict creates a pernicious state in which youth are compelled to reproduce the material and psychological conditions of antagonism in their life stories. Through a process of identity development, youth appropriate a master nar-

rative of collective memory, often characterized by trauma [Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008], and a particular identity *discourse* that maintains the conflict [Bekerman, 2002b, 2009; Bekerman & Maoz, 2005]. Lubna's story is illustrative of a common pattern in the personal narratives I have collected with youth who participate in such peace-building efforts. Her life story is enslaved to a process of social reproduction that, out of a need for individual and collective security, contributes to the maintenance of an unjust status quo [Hammack, 2009a].

Yet there is another interpretation of Lubna's life story that does not problematize her appropriation of a collective narrative or her unwillingness to transcend a strong sense of in-group identity. This alternative interpretation recognizes the liberatory role of identity in response to social injustice and thus views Lubna's story as a useful tool in the Palestinian struggle for independence from the Israeli occupation. This stance embraces the strategic essentialism inherent in the numerous movements for social and political equality that have characterized the twentieth and twenty-first centuries [e.g., Garza, 1995]. Such a stance suggests that to deconstruct the basis of either Israeli or Palestinian concepts of national identity as a project of modern social organization (as the *burden* interpretation does) may be intellectually correct, but it would seem to benefit Israelis more than Palestinians, since Israelis have achieved formal independence and have even gone through a period of national critique (i.e., the post-Zionist movement). In other words, contesting the reification of identity in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would seem to negate the claims for recognition among Palestinians like Lubna, who remain stateless inhabitants of occupied territory or refugees.

In the US context, to argue that categories like race or sexual identity are *merely* discursive, as a poststructuralist account suggests, is to dismiss the subjectivity that discourses of identity construct. In other words, advocating such positions might subvert the recognition process Taylor [1994] identified as key to contemporary political life. To call for the *transcendence* of particular social categories, then, would seem to imply that equality or social justice has been achieved, which is likely a dubious claim.

My intention in this article has been to interrogate interpretive stances toward identity in conflict settings through the lens of theory and research on the youth who inhabit these social ecologies of development, with the aim to inspire greater reflexivity among scholars working on these issues from a number of disciplinary perspectives. As is undoubtedly evident, my own position has been characterized by considerable ambivalence on how to interpret identity. On the one hand, as a critical social scientist, I am skeptical about identity and recognize its discursive basis. Intellectually, I seek a moderate stance between essentialism and constructionism in matters of identity, perhaps because I recognize that the claims of identity remain politically significant and hence am uncomfortable with a strong constructionist argument that might subvert political processes for recognition. Yet I have also seen the way in which the master narratives that Israeli and Palestinian youth encounter and reproduce through their discourse and practice are extremely problematic for the resolution of conflict, because the identity reification process seems to enshrine trauma (both historical and present-day) in terms that are irreconcilable and often mutually exclusive [Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008].

Blending strategies of both social creativity (e.g., reclaiming and redefining identity terms) and direct social competition [Tajfel & Turner, 1986], assertions of

identity can be powerful tools for liberation from oppression. Thus perhaps the point is not to deconstruct or denigrate identity as a relic of the modern era but to recognize its *reconstruction* as an instrument for social change among the subordinated and subaltern. I believe that, as a concept, identity can occupy both discursive spaces – it can serve as both the burden of a modern-era quest for essentialized notions of the nation-state [Bekerman & Maoz, 2005], as well as a discursive tool employed by oppressed groups to advocate for social change [Sampson, 1993]. In this way, identity is a linguistic marker of both the internalization of a social structure and the agency that individuals and groups might realize to reconstruct that structure. It is itself a discursive marker of structural and cultural violence [Galtung, 1990] *as well as a means to combat that violence* through collective mobilization and advocacy.

In this article, I have constructed a reflexive argument about identity, youth, and conflict that seeks to respond to calls for greater theoretical and empirical specificity of the relationship between political conflict and youth. My aim has been to provoke further dialogue, as well as systematic empirical study, on the contested terrain of identity and its consequences for youth in conflict. I called upon the personal narrative of Lubna, an exemplar of the many young Palestinians inhabiting a complex world of violence and occupation whom I have interviewed since 2003, at 2 time points to illustrate the way in which youth actively engage with the discourses available to them in their social ecology of development to construct a coherent personal narrative. While I have subsequently problematized her appropriation of a master narrative that would seem to only reproduce the discursive conditions of conflict, I have also suggested that this process of identity formulation works in the service of social change and, hence, we must be cautious in our intellectual critiques of identity.

I think it safe to inhabit a stance that accommodates both conceptions of identity – to recognize its discursive role as an agent of constructing or supporting particular forms of human social organization (e.g., the nation-state) but also its *reclamation* as a discursive tool for political equality and social justice. The task, then, seems to me to be further thick description of these processes – description that takes context very seriously and does not strive to universalize mental experience – with an eye toward the co-constitutive nature of individuals and societies [Shweder, 1990]. Through the kind of theoretical and empirical work that embraces this approach, we might come to better theorize a social science committed to assuming a role in political processes for social justice and change.

Beyond further theoretical development or empirical description, we must consider what kinds of *practice* these dueling views of identity might prescribe. A truly transformative kind of practice in peace education, conflict resolution, and intergroup contact would seem to benefit from critical education *about* identity politics in a given society. That is, efforts that aim for social change cannot skirt the history of grievance and social injustice in which conflicts are rooted. Yet they also do not benefit simply by reifying identity as a static trait which has no flexibility, fluidity, or hybridity. Thus I think those of us who take Taylor's [1994] claims about recognition seriously, but who are also suspicious of the concept of identity as a hegemonic tool, must find a way to strike a balance in our practice for peace and social change – a balance that both recognizes and critically interrogates identity as a method of subjection or the subversion of agency.



Lubna's life story reminds us that the personal narrative is a lived document of direct, cultural, and structural violence [Galtung, 1990] and that we cannot expect the experience of intergroup contact to erase the material reality of conflict. Yet if we can take advantage of the inherent willingness and ability of youth to see one another *beyond* identity [Bekerman, 2005], it is certainly possible to imagine educational and social psychological practice that can work toward the parallel aims of identity de-essentialization *and* social justice for those groups for whom essentialism and subordination have been intimately linked as projects of a particular hegemonic configuration of intergroup relations. My point in this essay is not to go further with speculations or prescriptions on what precisely these practices might be, for I think that scholars in peace and social justice education are well on their way to those kinds of precise formulations [e.g., Bekerman, 2007]. Rather, my intent has been to provoke further dialogue among researchers, theoreticians, and practitioners whose work lies at the interdisciplinary intersection of identity, politics, and human development – dialogue that might further transform our science and practice by critically interrogating our assumptions and their implications. For the sake of youth like Lubna, whose personal narrative is a product of a continuing conflict so consumed with essentialized notions of *nation*, *culture*, and *identity*, the acknowledgment of these paradoxes of and possibilities for identity in our theory, research, and practice might better serve the social change needed in settings of conflict and social injustice.

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