Personal and National Identity: A Tale of Two Wills

Sari Nusseibeh

Foreword

Consider the following: When one of my ancestors, Burhan al-Din al-Khazraji, son of Nussaibah, once the Great Kadi of Jerusalem, was laid to rest near the Mamelukan mausoleum in Mamilla in A.D. 1446, he presumably had little or no notion of, let alone any identity-affiliation with, the Palestinian nation. His heart and mind were set on the Moslem world, and the Islamic nation. Just over five hundred years later, when my late father, Anwar Nusseibeh, also one-time governor of the District of Jerusalem, was laid to rest at one of the entrances to the Haram, he already had developed a notion of, but yet no great sympathy for, the idea of such a Palestinian nation as an entity distinct from the Arab people. Yet a Palestinian nation had in the meantime been born, which is today feeling its way in institutionalized self-determination. The following chapter is an attempt at understanding how such a nation came to exist, in one sense of "how," and what some of the implications of its existence are. This is, then, a philosophical account of a live political history.

Ibn Khaldun and 'Asabiyyah

Writing in the fourteenth century about the emergence of human civic associations, Ibn Khaldun introduced his well-known theory of civic association in terms of 'asabiyyahthe inherent natural instinct to prevent (yahulu) a misfortune or injustice (dhulm) to a blood relative. In introducing this concept, Ibn Khaldun may not have been seriously transgressing Aristotle's own emphasis on the role of affinal ties in the formation of such associations an emphasis made with Plato's "static" and theoretic model of the Republic in mind. 1 Nonetheless, Ibn Khaldun articulated his presentation of 'asabiyyah so as to alert his readers to a very special role he was ascribing to this element, a role that was

intricately tied up with his sense that he was presenting us with an entirely new science, a science of the study of the laws and mechanisms governing civic associations, their existence and evolution.

Civic associations, as expressions of human associative or cooperative behavior, have a genesis that can be traced to natural primary impulses or human instincts. These primary impulses are not unidimensional. Like Aristotle, Ibn Khaldun underlines the importance of "egoistic" motivations, such as self-defense and the need for sustenance, which make associative behavior necessary. But even more basic than this aspect of instinctual motivation, Ibn Khaldun more assertively contends that a human association can be understood or explained only by reference to 'asabiyyah. Any cooperative activity (kullu amrin yugtama' 'alayhi), including that whose purpose or function is defense (himayah) or the procurement of needs (mutalabah), has 'asabiyyah as its springboard (biha takunu). This altruistic component in the explanation of an association clearly has radical ramifications on the entire edifice of any theory on social contract. At the basic level, we are told, one human's bond with another springs primarily from the instinctive sentiment of caring that the one has for the other, rather than from the instinctive caring one naturally has for oneself. But the fulfillment of this second need cannot be accomplished except through such a basic bond, and in this sense cooperative behavior is said to be necessary.

Extending his observations to account for formal civic associations, Ibn Khaldun switched focus to the concept of "rulership" or authority (mulk). This quality of enforcing edicts and judgments, primarily aimed at protecting individuals from each other in larger associations, is distinguishable from mere "leadership" (ri'asah), which does not imply the powers of enforcement. The ruler (government) can successfully enforce its edicts only if his (its) rulership is derived from the association itself through the existence of a strong intracommunity solidarity that develops into an

institutionalized form of the association. The Khaldunian argument here is that it is 'asabiyyah that gives legitimacy to government, and therefore to measures taken by that government. When such a bond is absent, the entire polity cannot be described as a proper civic association.

While the locus of 'asabiyyah is primarily the circle of kinship, it changes as associations become larger, whether through demographic or territorial expansion or co-option, primarily shifting to the ruler in whom the well-being and safety of each member of the group is vested. What begins its genesis as the care an individual has for a blood relative reaches full political bloom in the framework of an authority whose function is to institutionalize this care. To the extent 'asabiyyah exists, there exist associations; to the degree it exists, associations are either strong or weak. True, the evolution of the life of an association is itself describable in economic and cultural terms, and it obeys a cyclical pattern of growth and demise, Ibn Khaldun contends. But if we today can describe the different economic phases of the association that Ibn Khaldun refers to in this

context as superstructural or phenomenological modalities, we can then describe 'asabiyyah perhaps as an intrinsic or infrastructural modality.

Social Contract and Altruism

I wish now to make brief references to two other areas, first to the classical social contract theories espoused by such figures as Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau; and second to the current debate on egoism and altruism in the sociobiological literature. Despite the significant differences between them, it can be argued that the classical social contract theorists, as they searched for an explanation for the hypothesized transformation into the civil state, converged on what might be called the egoistic component of human instinct. The hypothetical unencumbered, atomistic selves in the state of nature are prompted to engage in an association in order to procure a right or

a requirement for themselves: either to ensure their own security or to ensure and legitimize their own security as well as that of their possessions or to legitimize and institutionalize their natural endowment of freedom. 2 Such a perspective of human nature and motivations has inevitably led to the unleashing of a host of issues having to do with the individual and society, rights and responsibilities, "the right" and "the good." If a prior cause has to be sought for an association, and if this cause is to be found in the egoistic motivation of an individual, would this not immediately ascribe primacy to the individual, thereby stultifying the role of the communityand hence, and in a roundabout way, the individual's own good?3 Presaging with uncanny insight what he considered to be the "irrelevant" debates that would be engendered by such questions, John Dewey questioned the very foundations used by the classical social contract theorists and their followers: rather than look for prior causes in the psyche of unencumbered selves to account for the institution of Community (with a capital ''C''), we would be better advised to consider the tangible, trial-and-error consequences of this or that association on the lives of individuals if we are to be able to account for the measure of an association's success or failure, or for its continued existence or decline.

The general debate on individual and collective roles and rights continues, primarily triggered by Rawls's A Theory of Justice and Sandel's critique of it, and still to some degree fed by the literature on social contract theory. Concomitant with this debate in political theory we find related discussions in widely different fields, such as anthropology, ethnology, and biology, debating the comparative roles of egoism and altruism in understanding human associative behavior. Many sociobiologists now concur that cooperation is favored by natural selection, which immediately seems to highlight the role of altruism in human evolution. But many scientists "reduce" altruism to another brand of egoism. Thus W.D. Hamilton (1964) seeks to explain the natural selection of altruism in terms of "genetic investment," where altruistic behavior

evolves generically with self-reproduction "in mind" but within the parameters of family genetic pools.

Although Trivers (1971), in proposing his theory of reciprocal altruism, criticizes Hamilton for having taken altruism out of altruism, he nonetheless agrees with Hamilton in understanding altruism as egoism, differing only with regard to defining both the subject as well as object of altruist behavior. For Trivers, the prompting cause for the display of altruist behavior is the perceived long-term benefit for the specific organism exhibiting that behavior, and the object targeted by such behavior is not limited to the family genetic pool; indeed, it need not even be limited to the same species.

One might well ask how can an act of altruism, needed for successful association, really be an egoistic act? The answer, Ruse (1993) tells us, is that a constitutive part of altruistic preprogramming is self-deception. This is not simply a deception concerning our motivations for action but, more fundamentally, a deception concerning the presumed objectivity of our moral beliefs. I do not know what would constitute the appropriate tool to investigate the validity of this "translation thesis," according to which altruist behavior is seen as a deceptive form of egoist behavior. It certainly sounds strange to argue that in caring for another we have to deceive ourselves into believing that we care. It seems obvious that if we deceive ourselves successfully to care or that we care for someone, then we simply end up really caring for that person. In the area of feelings, deception is a self-destructing mechanism, as the later Wittgenstein might have said.

If so, there may be room here for a distinction between two kinds of altruist behavior, a "genuine" Khaldunian kind and a "purposeful" kind that one way or another can be reduced to egoism. Whatever the case, genetically we seem to have a concurrence among scientists dealing in this area on two interrelated principles: (1) there is a

distinction, at least on the ostensible cognitive and behavioral levels, between egoistic and altruistic instincts; and (2) it is primarily by an appeal to altruist behavior (without commitment to which of the two above-described kinds the reference is being made) that human associations can be explained. The first principle recognizes that there is a manifest difference, both in terms of how I feel as well as in terms of the individual I feel it toward, between the act of saving myself and that of saving someone else from drowning. A "purposeful" (rather than an "innocent'') interpretation views the impulse prompting an ostensibly altruist act (for example, to seek or ensure the procurement of others' rights and needs) as the elementary sense that such an effort is a necessary condition for the procurement of such needs and rights for oneself. Such a sense can be argued to be "elementary" or "basic" to practical thought, and a fuller exposition of its rationale and mechanism can perhaps be sought in a Rawlsean-type hypothesis where an agent's instantiation of his or her self-interest is predicated on a prior cognitive formulation of the general (blind or "veiled") kind ("for all x"), rather than a direct step revealed by an existential or a self-referential statement.

Such an altruism is "purposeful" for obvious reasons. It cannot be dismissed,

since it is appropriate in explaining areas of human behavior where personal identity is viewed through the perspective of national identity (see the discussion of interrogation below). Nevertheless, while some acts of altruism can be explained in terms of "self-instantiation," where self-identity or self-interest comes to be viewed through the medium of others, the Khaldunian-type altruism can be explained only "innocently," where the fulfillment of the need of ''others'' or of "someone other" constitutes the primary target. The distinction is, perhaps, between sense and sensibility, the latter being a genuine concern for others.

Unlike the classical social contract theorists, Ibn Khaldun's contention seems to be that we have to distinguish between two kinds of necessary conditions to understand the

genesis of human associations. One kind of necessity is "functional" or "consequential" (even "rational"), inasmuch as an association's existence and history is a function of procuring those needs, both egoistic and "altruistic," for which its members perceive it as existing. The egoism part relates to what the individual seeks for himself or herself, while the "altruist" part relates to what the individual seeks for fellow associates. In this second case, the association is to be regarded or understood as a self-serving medium, whether politically, epistemically, or psychologically. But underlying this functional layer an even more essential ingredient in the association's cohesion can be found: regardless whether an association procures the goods an individual desires, he or she is already instinctively bound up with others, through a basic sentiment of care or solidarity, 'asabiyyah. This "innocent" sentiment is both essential and manifest at a primitive as well as at the more developed levels of association.

We cannot yet claim to have a moral thesis here. Ibn Khaldun was simply intent on investigating the mechanisms that govern the ontogenesis of associations. But it is clear that an account of human nature and action that takes cognizance of primary impulses that genuinely prompt action on behalf of others as well as behalf of oneself would seem to be far more realistic and whole than one that simply stops at selfserving impulses at the primitive level. Appropriately developed and elaborated, these two distinct and distinguishable types of instincts or impulses may be used to construct a holistic theory showing the complementarity of the inclination toward the fulfillment of freedom as a capacity for self-enhancement and the inclination toward the fulfillment of this capacity to other members of the association, that is, toward equality. Such a theory would equally adequately explain the complementarity of right and duty, of the private and public selves, of individual and national identities.

On this thesis, the sense of care one has for others, of duty, responsibility, and obligation, would be as constitutive of the individual's identity as its sense of natural

endowment, rights, and personal needs. In sum, if the Khaldunian thesis on an association's ontogenesis is well founded, it would inform the liberal/communitarian debate on intracommunity relations. Its roots in the behavioral, rather than in the prescriptive, sciences lend it perhaps more ready for validation.

Page 210

Identity

There are some lingering questions from the fields of international law and relations. Even assuming that we have hit on the golden mean as far as the individual's relationship to the community is concerneda relationship of checks and balances by which the dreaded sacrificial motif expressed in excessive patriotism or self-denial is held in balance by the egoistic impulse, and in which, conversely, excessive selfaggrandizement is checked by the altruistic impulsewe will still not be any the wiser as to the specificities of that twilight zone of interaction between individual and association, or as to what constitutes community in the first place.

In what sense does an association actually exist ? Do associations exist analogously to the way individual human beings exist? And if they did exist in one manner or the other, would it follow, in accordance with the Quinean dictum of "no entity without identity," that such collective entities would indeed be in possession of their own identitieseven roles and rights? What would such identities consist in, and how would their roles and rights bear on the individual? Even if the posit of such distinct and independent entities is an exercise in political fantasy, we still have to cope in our political reality with nations, ethnic groups, races, and religious communities. As we grope with such concepts as national identity, or national consciousness, or the national will, or national rights, we find ourselves groping with real-world problems.

4

Twenty years ago Pomerance (1976) tried to articulate the question of what the self is in the debate on the national right of self-determination, a debate inspired by

Woodrow Wilson in the aftermath of World War I. The literature in the international law journals since then has been replete with related discussions on territorial integrity, sovereignty and interventionism, on secessionism, and in general on the conflicting rights of different collective selves. More recently, the banner of ethnic and minority rights within the context of cultural and economic participation and development, rather than in the context of fully fledged political expressions of sovereignty, has been raised in political journals, especially against the background of the "failed nations" syndrome. Briefly and simply, there is no consensus on what our priorities should be, on what our moral imperative should be, even on what it is we are dealing with. And beyond the fogginess that surrounds what constitutes a national entity and what degree of political self-determination or legitimacy such an entity should come into possession of, or what the implications on human or other collective rights and sovereignty titles may result from such possession, there is the further question of the application of a moral theory to intercommunity affairs.

I cannot address all those questions, but in view of the remarks already made on the ontogenesis of human associations the question of identity is relevant. There is a fundamental distinction between a self-oriented, or "vertical," dimension of identity and other-oriented, or "horizontal," dimension or, alternatively,

between a separate self and an associative self. Similarly, one might be able to speak about "parity" in the attempt to analyze the identities of individuals and groups, and about a "continuum" as one looks closer at the presumed divide between individual and community.

In traditional treatments of identity, there is a generic gap between philosophical discourse on personal identity and political discourse on national identity. This reflects the sense that the individual human being is a primary substance, whereas the human association should more properly be regarded as a relational and complex network of

arrangements predicable of individuals. And even were a sociologist or political scientist dare to "quantify" such a predicate, or to treat a human association as a secondary or a tertiary substance, for example, then the burden of determining what "identity" would mean will naturally fall on the culprits and on their specialized fields of discourse.

The philosophical tradition has treated identity as being uniformly applicable to all objects without regard to the distinction between animate and inanimate objects. 5 In spite of accounting for what might generally be called "mind-predicates" of human individuals, the discourse on personal identity has nonetheless regarded the identity of the passage through history of a person almost analogously to identity of an ashtray or a car over time. Elaborated further, ethnogenesis, as a science of the development of group identities, does not seem to have had an analogue of philosophical autogenesis on the level of individuals, with the exception, perhaps, of the existentialist tradition (the case is different in the field of psychology). By this I mean that each human being is naturally assumed as somehow being possessed of an identity, and we do not encounter a problem in the ascription of such identities to individuals in the way we do when we speak of Tatars, Kurds, the Chinese of Hong Kong or Taiwan, or the Palestinians, to name some examples. In what way is this lack of discrimination a problem, and in what way would investigating such a problem bear on our initial concern with the borderline between individual and association, or with the identities of individuals and associations?

The Emergence and Identity of Collectives

When Ernst Mayr called for a distinction between the biological and inanimate worlds, his point was not simply one of discourse or lexicon (category, species definition), but with the objects of discourse (taxon, species delimitation). The philosophers' use of terms such as class or set, whether the objects or members are biological or inanimate, reveals an underlying confusion between objects in the world whose

processes are governed entirely by physical and chemical laws (teleomatic), and objects whose processes cannot entirely be so explained yet which are governed or controlled by genetic programs (teleonomic). Mayr's main contention was that while inanimate objects are subject to deterministic physical laws, the behavioral processes of animate objects are always subject to

Page 212

"chance elements" that preclude the ability, except statistically, to predetermine a particular evolutionary path or outcome. Although Mayr does not at this point quite make the case so explicitly, his further distinction between an open and a closed part of the genetic program in biological systems and his contention that the probabilities of evolutionary change are in part functionally determined by the open part of the program, that is, through the interaction of biological systems with the external world, gives reason to infer that the conscious choices help determine that system's evolutionary path, and therefore its identity.

Mayr's other relevant insight in this context concerns the presumed generic distinction between the individual and a more complex system. The discussion about what to regard as "a target" of natural selectionwhether the gene, the individual human being, the speciesis really what to consider as a primary substance. The generic distinction between individual and collectivity or species is not so well founded after all: the collectivity is in a sense an individual, just as the individual is in a sense a collectivity. Mayr uses the terms "simple" and "multiple" individuals to maintain the necessary distinction, and consents to the evolving use in biology of the term "population'' to contrast the group with a simple individual.

At this stage, I would like to make two interrelated points: first, whether for the kind of reasons cited by a biologist like Mayr or by a political scientist like John Dewey, there seems to be eminent sense in emphasizing both the analogy, or parity, as well as the logical if not generic continuity, between the individual and the group. The

distinction between parity and continuity in this context will bear on our later discussion of the two distinguishable dimensions of the self. But the point of the main emphasis at this stage is not so much to reify groups or to endow them with ontic "respectability" as it is to "deflate" the excessive faith in the existence of such respectability for individuals. The a priori, unencumbered, or residual self of the individual on this view should not be regarded as having an optically respectable status any more than the group; and the group, conversely, should no longer to be singled out for being "landed" with identity crises any more than the individual. Whether an individual or group exists, there is no solid ground for believing that the individual human being is somehow naturally or automatically endowed with a "fully fledged" identity, while the group is not. How, then, do we determine the existence and possession of an identity?

We can see how Mayr's remarks can easily be extended by the same logic to other parts of the philosophical lexicon, including "identity." The static and uniform manner in which this term is understood and applied in the case of lifeless objects must simply be understood and applied in a fundamentally different manner as we turn to interactive biological systems, especially when we come to consider those organisms that, whether simply or in a complex and derivative way, are capable of the rational exercise of their wills in cognition or action. For such systems, identity formation is a function of volition (the exercise

of the open part of the genetic program). In the field of political history this statement is not so contentious. The relevant literature on national identities commonly refers to the "constructivist" thesis. According to this thesis, those distinctive features that nationally single out a particular group are claimed to be rooted in the conscious and volitional efforts of articulation undertaken by the leadership or intellectual elites. Thus, not only territoriality (the body in the case of individuals) or the inherited

features and dispositions (the genetic programming), but also the subjective and specifically chosen manner of interaction with the outside environment is what eventually determines the crystallization of a separate identity. In the Israeli-Palestinian context, a good example of how such group identities are grafted in response to circumstances in the "objective" environment, and how indeed Zionism and Palestinianism have come to be mutually generative "creations'' of each other, how each is "enfolded" in the other, can be found in the interesting work of Juval Portugali (1993). 6

The evolution of an individual's identity, and differences in characterthose described by "strength of character" or "distinctiveness" or "independence" and other similar epithetscan also be accounted for in terms of volition. Going further, the self, whether of the individual or the group, exists and has identity insofar as an active engagement of the will has been triggered. Thus, the "having" of an identity on this view would not be an either-or proposition but a matter of degree, and an end-product rather than a preexisting endowment. Further, acquiring an identity is a creative and cumulative process, rather than a quantitatively or qualitatively predetermined and fixed inheritance.

This process is one in which the self, triggered by circumstances in the surrounding environment, seeks its own space for development and enhancement through the endeavor to assert itself, self-mastery, and independence of will. I have my own identity insofar as I am my own master or sovereign. I am more puppet than person if my cognitive and action processes are entirely or mostly controlled by an external programmer. The quest of the self for identity is therefore a quest for freedom, for "a space of one's own," namely, for an ability to determine an evolutionary path of progress or enhancement. This quest of the self generates that distinct identity appropriate for the endeavor.

This identity-formation process is not unidimensional or vertical only. To focus

simply on self-oriented components of an identity-formation process is to ignore the theoretic mechanism by which we explain the community-oriented component of that same process. Perhaps the thesis on the generic continuity of the biological spectrum coupled with the psychological element of 'asabiyyah can help us further understand how a self's merger into a more complex system does not negate that self's identity but, on the contrary, actively articulates it. Both features provide us with a model to the ease with which individual impulses become transmitted in such a way that (1) the individual self becomes enhanced, and (2) a collective self can evolve.

Let us remind ourselves here of the egoistic as well as altruistic explanations

Page 214

for human action, as well as of the two interpretations of the altruistic impulse, the purposive and the innocent. The self's exercise of will in its search for its own space is the egoistic or "vertical" component, while the altruistic impulse is a "horizontal" component. This latter purposive impulse explains the associative constituent of the self's identity. Indeed, Ibn Khaldun would argue that it is the underlying basis even for an egoistic self and, therefore, for the self's two aspects and complete identity. Sensibility to another's pain ('asabiyyah) is more constitutive of an identity than the sensation of pain in oneself, and just as self-enhancement or vertical identity is a matter of degree, so is sensibility and horizontal identity. As individuals vary with respect to their possession of either of these two qualities, so they vary with respect to their possession of this complex identity.

These remarks relate primarily to what was described as the complex identity of a "unit" self. But there is something further to be said about the horizontal dimension of identity: what is at issue here is the nature of that twilight zone of the continuum, where the individual self merges with, or into, the collective self. The initial "horizontal" step, constitutive of the individual's complex identity, targets another "member" or unit of the same kind. But one can see how this 'asabiyyah can "spread"

among and between more individuals, slowly taking on an institutionalized form and becoming eventually vested in the ruler/government of that association. It is reasonable to assume at this juncture that, in its interaction with the outside environment, the unit self's quest for its own space at a certain point may require it to intensify its associative impulse; or that, its preexisting associative impulse, sensing a collective danger, or challenge, becomes automatically intensified, giving rise to the evolution to the collective self. The association's existence, therefore, as well as its identity as a collective self, is a volitional expression (not a negation) of the horizontal dimension of the identity of the individual self.

What is it that determines the institutionalization of 'asabiyyah and the evolution of a particular collective self as a political agent (a nation as opposed to a family or a tribe)? Tentatively, the emergence and crystallization of the collective self as a political agent is a function of the volitional activation of the individual self's identity, in such a way that this self's identity becomes enhanced. This is so whether the enhancement is horizontal, with the associative self being constitutive of the individual self's identity, or vertical, where the associative component is regarded as an instrumental to, rather than constitutive of, that identity. Human motivations being so complex, it is probably wise not to discount either of these two explanations, and to assume that human (associative) actions can be explained in one way at one time, in another way another time, and yet in a mixture of the two ways on other occasions.

There is one final element to be added to the above account: we saw why a collective self evolves, but we may still wonder about how this happens. How, in particular, does the associative impulse of the unit self help create (through

"intensification") the collective self? The answer, probably, lies in the principle of generic continuity between the unit and the larger group. This continuity facilitates the transmission and regeneration of such impulses among and between these unit selves,

finally reaching that critical point where, synergetically, the group begins to move with one will, much in the same way that, especially for such basic purposes as migration, unit birds merge together to form one flock for the duration of the journey, flying through the skies as though it were a single collective organism or system.

Even so, the above description may be of an "ideal" or "laboratory situation," rather than of a practical kind. In "real life" situations, the tensions and turbulences in that zone of the continuum (perhaps as a result of such conflicting motivations even in the same individual) may well be expressed in a far more complicated picture. In the present, post-Oslo, post-Intifada, postconflict Palestinian situation, for example, there are clear indications of an "recoil syndrome," where the egotistic (vertical) imperative has returned "with full vengeance,'' almost with a recriminatory, even accusatory, attitude toward the "associative" self in the same individual. My reference here is not to those who have entered public service or who have been "rewarded" for the "sacrifices" they have made and who can still therefore feel "wholesome," but to many of those who did not, and who feel a disappointment with what they have come to regard as their "wasted years in the national struggle."

Whatever the complications and complexities are, we may still refer back to the general explanatory principle being proposed, namely, that a self's complex identity is grafted onto and crystallized through a vertical as well as a horizontal impulse in response to challenges in the environment. This impulse, or will, generates the specific identity appropriate for the endeavor of seeking freedom, enhancement and growth. At certain moments, such growth and enhancement may be viewed as requiring an intensification of the associative will in such a manner that a collective self evolves. Personal will thus comes to be constitutive of national identity, but the latter, being an expression of the associative will, also becomes constitutive of personal identity. 7

I wish now to return once more, again briefly, and against the background of the

related comments I made, to Ibn Khaldun, and to some of the issues raised concerning

intercommunity as well as intracommunity affairs. If the quest for freedom, selfenhancement,

and development is constitutive of the self's identity, then even more so

is the sense of care or protectiveness toward others. This sentiment of 'asabiyyah may

be restricted initially to members of the same family or the same genetic pool. But, as

we saw, the quest for self-enhancement, as it begins to operate in larger associative

contexts and in more developed economic structures, requires an extension of that

sentiment and embodiment in institutionalized form. The constituents of the self's

identity on the subjective level include a quest for the equal distribution of this

freedom among all members of the association. Where we find that either of these two

kinds of quests are

Page 216

being stunted or stifled, we also find instability or a dynamic for change at work,

seeking to rectify the balance. The emphasis in the dynamics at work may be different,

insofar as the one or the other of the two quests at one or another point in time are

being stifled. It is thus we can understand the ethnic "explosions" in the Balkans, or

the Baltic States, and within Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union: the

long history of the oppression or simply suppression of ethnic selves perforce brings

about a reaction, much in the same way that psychologists tell us that analogous

reactions are triggered in parallel circumstances in the individual ego.

Such explosions do not occur where ethnic or minority or even national selfexpression

and self-enhancement are encouraged and provided forwhere the

individual's dual quest for self-fulfillment and 'asabiyyah is not felt to be inhibited by

an opposing force or agency. Indeed, where this quest is felt to be successful and

respected, we witness a harmonious mosaic of mutually enriching communities,

whether in the same republic or among republics. Collective selves can also dissolve

in favor of other associative selves, as in the emergences of unions and federations

and new economic structures. In such situations, enrichment may become possible through reinforcement of the multiple-level interaction of retained identities. The overall identity becomes a complex one consisting of different layers, much in the same way, on the individual level, that I regard myself as Sari, a Jerusalemite, a Palestinian, an Arab, a Moslem.

Identity under Interrogation

Let me draw on some of the experiences of Palestinian prisoners who underwent interrogation to illustrate how the ostensible conflict between egoism and altruism, or between the private and public selves, is put into sharp relief. One of the methods of interrogation is precisely to try separate the egoistic and associative selves, making the subjects feel that their identity is constituted only by the former. The subject is thus forced to face the issue of identity head on, in ways that many of us in our ordinary lives may be totally unaware of. In presenting such an extreme case to convey the organic interrelatedness of individual and collective identities, as well as the role of the will in the process of self-affirmation, I think it is possible to see the complementarity of private and public selves. That the following description is in a "literary," rather than an analytical, style is a function of its subject matter.

The "struggle of the will" is an amazing art. Armed with a physical mastery of the situation, the interrogator tries to achieve mental and psychological control. On the surface, the interrogator is free and sovereign, while the prisoner is slave and captive. But both know it is not over physical mastery that there is a struggle. The quest is for control of the will of the prisoner. Often, the interrogator wins the battle: sufficient guile and pressure can lead to quick results. Often, so perfected is the art of guile on the part of the interrogator, so undeveloped the

Page 217

art of self-mastery, the sense of self-identity on the part of the prisoner, that the prisoner is not even aware in the end that he has been violated. He moves out of the

interrogation labyrinth into jail, and from there finally back into real life, still as though half a person, almost as though dreamwalking. You recognize such dreamwalkers, such automated creatures, as you wander the streets. Sometimes, only much later, does such a person finally wake up. Only then he realizes the value of his own will, his own identity, and only then it dawns on himor maybe it dawns on him only in phased doses?that he is a victim of rape. Back there in that labyrinth, his mind, his integrity, his inner soul had been violated by the interrogator's "probe." So violated was he, that he wasn't even aware of it.

But sometimes, the interrogator comes across solid rock. Try as he might, he finds himself unable to make a breakthrough. The infliction of physical pain is subject to diminishing returns, and the person now being dealt with has succeeded in withstanding the pressure's highest allowable limits. Physical and moral degradation also seems fruitless, as the opponent seems in possession of an unreachable inner value of himself. Try to degrade him as much as the interrogators can, the prisoner seems always to tower above them, even in absolute nudity. Try to "shrink" him to an isolated prisoner as much as they can, he nonetheless seems unshakably a part of a free whole. Even the infliction of physical pain does not seem to work, as the intellect being confronted seems to be totally governed by its own master, or else it completely shuts down. Indeed, it seems like a dark labyrinth possessed by only one inner master, in which an unwanted intruder quickly feels trapped, unable to make an intelligent move. Pressure cumulatively mounts on the interrogator. Something mysterious begins to happen: the interrogator begins to feel he is losing control, that his subject is gaining more control of the situation than he can. Like a physical force directed by an aggressor that on meeting its target is skillfully tackled and realigned, thus making its perpetrator bear its brunt, so the weight of the pressure being exercised by the interrogator seems to rebound, its tentacles slowly beginning to confine his own movements. In his mind's eye, he suddenly realizes that it is a counterpart who is free.

Often, calculating several steps in advance of such a situation, the interrogator chooses to make an early escape. But the prisoner knows he has won the battle. Perhaps the interrogator does not know this, but being like "solid rock" is what the prisoner often feels at the end of the battle, but not at the beginning. As he sees the interrogator's will shrinking and collapsing unto itself, the prisoner's newly acquired sense of self-confidence and self-respect makes him feel that he can move mountains by the sheer power of his own will. But he didn't feel like that only a few days before, when he was first plunged from normal life into the dark and dirty ratholes of the interrogation cells. He was uncertain of himself. Uncertain of his power to withstand. Doubt even crossed his mind as to the value of all this—his own worth, the worth of his cause, the worth of his convictions and beliefs, the worth of his peers and compatriots. At moments, he even felt he

Page 218

was on the brink of falling apart. At times, sitting alone in the darkness of his cell in between sessions, weighing the meaning of the bloodshot rage and anger he saw blazing in the interrogator's eyes just as he was being dragged off back to his cell, he would cringe and cower before the fantasized images of pain and torture to which he felt certain he would be submitted once they came to pick him up again. He had felt himself swaying inside, rocking adrift an endless wave, being pulled and tugged in this direction and that. At times, he just wanted to let go. What was it that he felt like letting go? It was like letting go of himself, letting go of the responsibility and duty over his own actions, of his convictions and beliefs, of his own self-image, of his own identity. It was as if he wanted to disengage, not just from his body, but even from his own person, as though through sleep, and to crawl up some sandy shore, alive and free. But then, slowly, and from the midst of total darkness and isolation a calm and gentle breeze would reach him, awakening his senses. The thought would hit him: But who would I be, the survivor of this imagined disengagement? Nobody. A

total vacuum. Even if I felt then I had a will to move, to think, could I trust that will to be mine? If I let go of it now, surely I will never be able to reclaim it. I would not be the person I am now, who holds those convictions, who fought for them, who is now in jail because of them. Even were I to try to "call back" those convictions, these thoughts and emotions, I would surely then be deceiving myself to think they were mine. They would simply run through my brain as though retrieved by a computer from its databank; they would belong to me as much as a "program" might belong to a computer. To feel them truly as my own, I cannot disown them now, or disengage. To be sure of my will, I must remain in its control. To have my identity, to be myself, I must affirm my mastery over myself, over my thoughts and action. I must remain in charge.

The prisoner is back, but now he is freer than he was before. He has freed himself from the despair his physical circumstances were pushing him into, from the pressure on him to submit his will to another. Now he takes a second look at himself. It dawns on him that, as in Dante's Divine Comedy, all his fears and doubts roam within the confines of his own mind. He has fallen into the trap of externalizing them, and then becoming their victim. Once again, he realizes that, if he is in charge of his own mind, then he has the capacity to control those fears and doubts. He cannot expunge them from his thoughts altogether. He realizes that they are natural instincts, often useful for human survival. But their use stops once they take charge. The trick is to coexist with them, but not to allow them to control him. He must be the master. Thinking this, our prisoner in effect has liberated himself from another circle. He is taking charge, from the inside, and now he has freed himself from being a slave to fear and doubt.

And so the process continues. Armed with renewed self-confidence, even a better mastery and understanding of himself, the prisoner feels that he has been able to carve out an even stronger identity for himself. He feels almost like a new person, and ready to fend his opponent. He knows now what the struggle is

exactly about. Instead of the interrogated victim, the hapless and isolated underdog he felt he was, now he assumes the poise of a fighter. He is an equal, but an equal to the sum of his opponents and their weapons. Slowly, he devises his strategy. The interrogation sessions become like battling rounds, and as each new round ends according to plan, he comes out of the session feeling even stronger than before. Much later, once the battle is over, whether among his cellmates or his friends, inside a jail compound or outside, his attitude to life becomes altogether different. He is more serene and controlled. He feels he has carved out a special identity for himself. He knows through experience what the secret of being free or autonomous really is. He knows what the secret of having a true identity is. Those who come into contact with him are immediately struck by the fulsomeness of his personality.

This description expresses the intensive interplay at the critical point of the biological continuum, of the individual and collective imperatives, or of the personal and national selves. At this critical point, these comments also express the process of identity formation as a function both of self-oriented as well as other-oriented instincts, as complementary rather than conflicting impulses. But while an extreme example of the human predicament, it reveals those tensions in the "twilight zone" experienced in more normal situations by the average person. In both cases, the affirmation of identity is very much an affirmation of the separate as well as the associative selves or impulses, with the latter being the underlying and necessary constituent of the whole.

Recognizing National Identities

Though we cannot with precision determine when the national identities of Israelis and Palestinians came into existence, the Oslo Accords reflect, finally, a mutual recognition and legitimization of these identities. There is no pretension of love, of course. Contiguous or noncontiguous national or collective selves inflict themselves

on the political stage in much the same manner as individual selves do. The question, given their existence, is what principle should be adhered to in the construction of a relationship between them. In my view, the most sensible and natural endeavor is one that applies to intercommunity relations those same principles I have argued one should apply to intracommunity relations: that the capacity or opportunity for selfenhancement and development exist (freedom), and that this capacity or opportunity be made available to each (equality). In the context of intercommunity relations, this dual drive for freedom and equality reinforces the continuity between the individual and national selves. In the context of intracommunity relations, this same drive should reinforce the continuity with the human race.

The adoption of these two principles (freedom and equality) does not mean that Israel and the Palestine to-be should have exactly equal amounts of technoPage

220

logical resources or equal budgets. It does mean, however, that a non-zero-sum arrangement be constructed in such a way that the Palestinian's newly provided opportunity for self-expression and self-enhancement be optimally used without allowing this to have a deleterious effect on that same opportunity that Israel possesses, and vice versa. Perhaps in the future it will be possible to have a rich mosaic (or even multilayered) 'asabiyyahs in the region coexisting in such harmony that the returns and benefits to each, as well as to the rest of the world, will be model for the human endeavor. Such an end will not simply be a rational, superstructural construction. In Humean terms, it would be a rational end dictated by the human heart.

Notes

Sari Nusseibeh's version of the two-state solution is elaborated in Heller and Nusseibeh (1991).Ed.

Research for this chapter was partly made possible by a fellowship grant from the

1. For a discussion of Aristotle's position as it relates to the contractual state, see Springborg (1986).

2. These reasons are in Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, respectively. It may be protested that this is too simplistic a generalization, but I think the general point remains valid, with whatever provisions or conditions one may wish to place on it.

3. See, for example, the references in Crittenden (1993). This article presents the interesting argument that one's atomism is incomprehensible in the first place except within a social context, whether for linguistic or social reasons. The argument is reminiscent of Strawson (1959, esp. ch. 3 on "persons").

4. See the rich exposition and references, in Sornarajah (1981), and the review of international legal instruments in Thornberry (1989).

5. The philosophical discussion on identity has itself undergone a transformation in the past few decades, but the classical anchor referred to may have best been articulated in Strawson (1959).

6. See Portugali (1993). For a specific recent discussion on Palestinian identity in particular, see Lindholm (1994).

7. The self I have been discussing, whether of the individual or the group, has to be of an Aristotelian "middle-ground" naturefeaturing in potentia as well as in actu aspects, thus as combining both sameness and change. It is neither a Kantian nor an existentialist self, to use simplistic categories. The Kantian self is indeed a function of the will, but it is an a priori self rather than an entity whose evolving identity is determined through objective and material interaction. The existentialist self, at the other extreme, an a posteriori self, can hardly be separated from such actions and interactions. Paradoxically, the process of constructing one's own identity on an

existentialist view would seem almost to be a self-defeating exercise in that it is never clear, at any one point at which a particular self is engaged in an action, whether the effort being spent will go toward the betterment of that self s future or toward some other future self. I do not wish to impute a thesis to either view that is not essential to it. But if this contrast is helpful at all, I hope it will at least point to the middle ground that I have been trying to treat in my exposition of the self's identity.