IDENTITY, INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM AND NEGOTIATING PEACE

Hamas and Ethics-Based Considerations from Critical Restorative Justice

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This paper conceptually examines one specific case of international terrorism, including the emergence and maintenance of membership-allegiance in its militant extremist group. This is the case of the Islamic Resistance Movement (or Hamas) and the manifestation of its corresponding Palestinian identity. Although the social person is constituted by symbols and objects, acts and social acts, meanings, and role-taking and role-making, questions persist about how best to promote peaceful coexistence, advance the interests of non-violence and ensure the protection of basic human rights. These practices constitute an ethic grounded in Aristotelian virtue. The delineation of key principles emanating from critical restorative justice helps to specify this brand of moral reasoning. The integration of these principles with the proposed symbolic interactionist framework demonstrates how extremist violence can be mediated. Suggestive examples of the same involving Hamas and those with whom it struggles (Palestine, Israel and the United States) are used to guide the analysis. The proposed conceptual framework is then briefly assessed for its overall explanatory capabilities, especially in relation to furthering terrorism studies.

Keywords: terrorism studies, postmodernism, critical restorative justice, symbolic interactionism, identity theory, virtue ethics, Hamas

Introduction

Recent investigations concerning the disturbing presence of international terrorism raise provocative questions about the symbolic meaning of militant extremist violence, especially as a noteworthy and legitimate basis to develop continuing prospects for global peace (Arena and Arrigo 2006). This is a peace that goes beyond the vilification to which terrorist individuals and collectives have been subjected not as an apology for such nefarious conduct, but as a novel contextual basis from within which to understand participation in such behaviour. The strategic framework for this humanizing reconciliation effort emanates from social psychology. At issue are the delicate and evolving constructed meanings that exist among theory, culture, self and society. This is the realm of symbolic interactionism (SI) (e.g. Altheide 2006).

Admittedly, this explanatory framework does not address such emerging concerns as governmental surveillance/control and the risk-society thesis (Mythen and Walklate 2006), or the associations between the new terrorism and complex systems science (Knorr Cetina 2005). Projects of this sort respectively address the management politics...
and the micro-globalization patterns (i.e. the asymmetrical, unpredictable and random microstructures or situated interactions of social actors) that are increasingly a part of the developing sociology (Nichols 2004), psychology (Stout 2003) and criminology (Deflem 2004) on terrorism. Still, a deliberately focused regard for the constructed meanings of symbols, social acts, roles, situational definitions and self-identifications tells us a great deal about the manifestation of the social person (Stryker 1980; Stryker and Burke 2000). Moreover, this interpretive understanding constitutes a sophisticated conceptual lens through which an assessment of one’s membership in and allegiance to a violent extremist collective can be delineated more systematically (Arena and Arrigo 2004; 2005).

One under-developed dimension of SI’s approach to terrorism is how its discrete logic can be linked to critical restorative justice (CRJ) (e.g. Cobb 1997; Pavlich 1996; Schehr 2000; Milovanovic 2001). Pivotal to CRJ ‘is the mediation session itself; a dialogical exchange in which participants endeavour to reconcile meaningfully the domestic or international conflict in dispute’ (Arrigo 2004: 92). At the core of CRJ is the goal of growing the character of all parties concerned while, correspondingly, repairing the injury that adversely impacts those involved in a volatile disagreement.

Specifically, CRJ builds individual integrity while recompensing those harmed by promoting inclusiveness strategies, replacement grammars, non-hierarchical modes of sense-making and the celebration of difference and identity among warring individuals or groups informed by postmodernist sensibilities (Arrigo et al. 2005: 97–113; see also Acorn 2005). When made more central to the negotiation process that ensues, these sensibilities cultivate both interpersonal civility and global citizenship guided by contingent (conditional) universals and standpoint (positional) epistemologies (Butler 1992; see also Arrigo and Milovanovic 2009, for a recent criminological application). This is an evolving sense of character or integrity in which the moral fibre of individuals is more provisionally and relationally acknowledged by others, and the flourishing prospects for human justice are temporarily, though more transformatively, realized for all parties in dispute (Acorn 2005; Arrigo and Schehr 1998; Morris 2000; Pavlich 2006; Schehr 2000).

What has yet to be specified in the literature, however, is how CRJ’s integrity-building core represents a form of virtue-based ethical thought (Aristotle 2000; see also Ferre 2001). This brand of moral reasoning promotes human excellence such that one’s character is determined not so much by what one does (e.g. balancing competing interests; identifying rights, duties and obligations) as much as by how one authentically endeavours to embody happiness and/or to experience fulfilment (Williams and Arrigo 2008: 247–62). For Aristotle (2000), the ongoing acquisition and refinement of virtues (e.g. non-harm) facilitates happiness, fulfilment or human flourishing. These are habits of character learned through practice; these are qualities that become a part of the person through regularly exercising their use. Indeed, as Aristotle (1976) noted, ‘anything that we have to learn to do we learn by the actual doing of it. People become builders by building and instrumentalists by playing instruments. Similarly, we become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones’ (Aristotle 1976: 91–2). Accordingly, this article makes a case for those postmodernist-informed habits of character that advance Aristotle’s teleology. In the context of militant extremist violence and the mediation exchange in which international reconciliation initiatives are undertaken, comprehending this ethic may very well signal
a path to fostering peaceful coexistence, cooperative non-violence and just human rights.

In order to conceptually specify how a CRJ-derived SI functions as a type of Aristotelian virtue ethics with relevance for de-escalating international episodes of terrorism, the case of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) is heuristically examined. As such, the present inquiry strategically addresses four matters. First, the key principles of critical restorative justice are recounted. This reporting entails some commentary on how CRJ’s overall logic is dissimilar to conventional restorative justice theory and how it nonetheless is compatible with postmodern and virtue-based moral philosophy. Second, the symbolic meaning of membership in the Islamic Resistance Movement is delineated. The purpose here is to indicate how the symbolic interactionist framework helps to elucidate the constructed identity (the social person) that emerges for participants in this terrorist organization. Third, the integration of CRJ and SI is presented. This undertaking—suggestively linked to examples of the same—demonstrates how militant extremist violence can be negotiated, especially when the mediation dialogue is informed by postmodernist-inspired virtue ethics. Fourth, the implications of the proposed reconciliation strategy are tentatively examined for their potential explanatory utility regarding the future of terrorism studies.

From Restorative Justice to Critical Restorative Justice: Outline of a Postmodernist-Inspired and Virtue-Based Ethics

Critical restorative justice is a response to the limits of prevailing international settlement practices or conflict resolution approaches in which the dialogic exchange is based on ‘conciliation, consultation, arbitration and mediation with muscle, and peacekeeping’ (Schehr and Milovanovic 1999: 208; see also Fisher and Keashly 1991). As a general proposition, this reconciliation approach, as a theory of justice (Acorn 2005: 20), legitimizes the modernist episteme. The modernist episteme—an outgrowth of the Enlightenment era and Cartesian epistemology—sees the individual as a purposeful, logical, calculating and determining actor, often in control of (exercising free will over) one’s own thoughts, feelings and impulses (e.g. Arrigo et al. 2005). The law’s juridic subject and criminology’s rational person (as developed in rational choice theory) phenomena are prime exemplars. In the modernist framework, ‘potential liberation’ from oppressive forces by way of scientific reasoning, ‘formal liberties, and economic progress’ are foundational absolutes that grow justice for all and ground ethical practice (Capeheart and Milovanovic 2007: 26–7).

However, some critics challenge the modernist perspective for its failure to acknowledge (let alone accept) alternative modes of sense-making, emergent forms of reality construction and replacement ways of being/becoming (e.g. Bauman 2007; 2008). These more heterodox notions represent a ‘calling into question of the Same by the Other’ (Levinas 1969: 33). This is an evolving moral philosophy in which one’s ‘responsibility to the Other’, including the Other’s ‘uniqueness and alterity’, is ‘infinite’ (Cornell 1998: 140). As such, several reformists recommend that a postmodernist framework may very well constitute a worthwhile orientation by which to forestall escalating violence and to grow transforming peace (e.g. Acorn 2005; Morris 2000). Indeed, following postmodernism, attention is directed towards a decentred (more determined than determining) subject; ‘nonlinear rather than linear historical
developments (genealogy); the manipulative effects of media, monopolies, and governmental agencies; restrictive assumptions embedded in [prevailing] ideology; and the imprisoning effects of dominant discourse[s’] (Capeheart and Milovanovic 2007: 27). Under these conditions, reasoning, liberty and progress are more fully situated in experimentation, innovation, inter-subjectivity and indeterminacy. This is how justice is restored critically and postmodern ethics is lived virtuously.

Based on the preceding summary observations, a methodology that addresses international terrorism by way of critical restorative justice necessitates a shift in the analytical lens from the modern to the postmodern. Consistent with this transition, several facets of CRJ theory have been applied in a number of postmodern-inspired criminological contexts. Selected examples include: the power of confessional dialogue in community mediation (Pavlich 1996; 2006), the domestication of violence in reconciliation language (Cobb 1997), the victim–offender reparation experience when juvenile offenders participate (Arrigo and Schehr 1998), the relationship between the agreement-driven process of restoration and dominant politico-economic interests (Schehr 2000), international dispute resolution efforts in the Balkans (Milovanovic 2001), the presence of imposed compassion lodged in the core logic of restorative justice (Acorn 2005) and the relevance of a critical race and feminist theory for Navajo peacemaking and domestic violence (Coker 2006).

However, in order to further the relevance of CRJ for purposes of ethically negotiating international terrorist disputes that grow habits of character, several modernist limitations must be hurdled. Commenting on the assumptions of prevailing conflict mediation practices, Schehr and Milovanovic (1999) succinctly delineated five such shortcomings. These included ‘the privileging of hierarchical representations, the supposition of order, the celebration of the ideal speech act and consensus dynamics, the continuous encroachment of legal discourse at the expense of alternative discourses, and . . . the lack of connected strategies between the macro and micro domains’ (Schehr and Milovanovic 1999: 208–9). In what follows, each of these deficiencies is further elucidated but from within the context of several counterpoint principles. These counterpoint principles include: (1) instability as the norm; (2) time/space configurations as unpredictable; and (3) knowledge as fragmented and localized. Collectively, these notions form the basis of CRJ’s postmodernist-inspired and virtue-oriented rationale.

Instability as the norm

Human social interaction is often messy, complicated and unpredictable. Several dimensions to this disorder include deviations from the norm, individual and group differences, and far-from-equilibrium (chaotic) geo-political conditions. Interestingly, the historical development of this perspective is found in the literature on consensus and conflict theory generally (Bernard 1983), as much as in studies of terrorist actors and actions specifically (Arena and Arrigo 2006). Thus, rather than interpret conflict and its role in social life as a destructive and dysfunctional phenomenon, CRJ recognizes ‘the normalcy of instability’ (Schehr and Milovanovic 1999: 215; see Simmel 1950; Coser 1956, for more on conflict theory in general).

What this means in the context of ethically negotiating or arbitrating militant extremist violence virtuously is that a ‘minimalist morality’ is required (e.g. May 2005; Rosenberg 1996). This is a morality that acknowledges regional expectations, multiple and
discordant identities, fluctuating political and economic arrangements, and ambulant expressions of particularism. Indeed, as Walzer (1994: 83) noted when explaining prospects for reconciliation wherein conflicting cultures function as a critical part of the mediation equation, ‘The negotiation of difference will never produce a final settlement [because] we participate, all of us, in thick cultures that are our own’. Accordingly, CRJ’s efforts to address international terrorism through a postmodernist ethic of evolving peace ‘explain why and how the fit between justice and consensus must be disrupted . . . [C]onsensus is nothing more than a temporary state in dialogical exchanges. As such, it must not be viewed as an end in and of itself’ (Arrigo et al. 2005: 109).

Time/space configurations as unpredictable

Because the thick cultures that people embody are complex linguistically, symbolically, materially and culturally, they will ‘behave in ways that are unpredictable, are subject to variation or contradiction, are transient and diverse . . ., are serendipitous and, in the extreme, are absurd . . .’ (Arrigo and Williams 2003: 606). Although the instability this engenders can be challenging—especially in terms of advancing meaningful mediation exchanges—it also can be the source of ‘experimentation, creativity, and possibility’ (Giroux 1992: 34). Contributing to the potential innovation that emerges from such flux are spatial and temporal dynamics that function as the loci for reconciling a given international dispute. Here, too, following critical restorative justice, these experiences should not be defined as permanent, static or finite (Schehr and Milovanovic 1999: 216). Determinations of fact, constructions of truth and assemblages of responsibility are freighted with nuance and subtlety. However, ‘agreements between interlocutors that take too long to produce or are too costly to implement are regarded as inefficient’ (Arrigo et al. 2005: 109). Moreover, even when the mediation dialogue yields a settlement, the descriptions themselves are based on master narratives (Lacan 1977). These are fictions that privilege specialized ways of thinking, particularized ways of feeling and normalized ways of being, establishing nothing more than an artificially imposed order (Milovanovic 2001).

One of the more prominent master narratives—especially in the context of negotiating disputes regarding terrorist acts—is the intrusion of legal discourse (May 2005). As a totalizing explanation for reality, this narrative reduces difference to sameness, territorializes knowledge and vanquishes identity (Cornell 1998). Indeed, commenting on the imposition of juridical reasoning as a basis to reconcile conflict, Schehr and Milovanovic (1999: 220) noted ‘It is far from certain that contemporary juridical practices provide the forum for articulating positions by the traditionally marginalized. In fact . . ., by assuming the self-same juridic subject . . ., legal discourse all but forecloses the opportunity for articulating individual subject positions’ (for a critique of restoring ‘right-relation’, see Acorn 2005: 20–1).

Consistent with CRJ, a virtue-driven postmodern ethic employed for purposes of arbitrating international terrorist disputes would deconstruct dialogical exchanges that yield an ‘ideal type’ or a ‘grand narrative’ of communicative action (Habermas 1984), especially when strategically used to evaluate and sanitize all other renditions of reality. Rather than appropriating the modernist features of order that include cause–effect reasoning, deductive logic, purposeful rational actors, linear lines of analyses (i.e. fixed and finite) and the identification of ‘truth’, a moral sensibility grounded in contingency,
chance, spontaneity, randomness, alterity and fluidity is needed. This is an ethic in which ‘the fluctuating, heterogeneous, and changing features . . . of our identities, of our interpersonal encounters, and of our . . . definitions of situations [no longer] remain hidden amidst the (spoken and unspoken) pressure to domesticate violence (Cobb, 1997) and discipline (and normalize) the self (Pavlich, 1996)’ (Arrigo 2004: 95). This is an ethic in which conditional, relational and standpoint roles are articulated and embodied in the spatial and temporal confines demarcating the mediation exchange, without a ‘grand scheme’ or a ‘master plan’ to regulate or reconcile the dialogue (Schehr and Milovanovic 1999: 217).

**Knowledge as fragmented and localized**

The presence of instability as the norm and time/space configurations as unpredictable lead to CRJ’s third key principle. Knowledge claims about injury, reparation, justice, community, freedom, peace, belonging and so forth are, at best, fragmented, incomplete and local. Stated differently, the ‘what happened’ in an instance of international terrorism often leads to binary and ossified renditions of who was right and who was wrong. But this logic fosters I–Thou relationships (Buber 1958) in which the other is regarded as an object of condemnation, vilification, demonization and de-personalization. These are moments in dispute resolution wherein the ‘excessive investor’ (an individual, an international tribunal, the state) endeavours to redress injury or to reconcile conflict but does so (often unwittingly) by ‘denying others through harms of reduction or repression’ (Henry and Milovanovic 2001: 170). These are occasions on which the other is transformed into an ‘it’, ‘denied an identity, denied the ability to make a difference in the instant’ (Arrigo et al. 2005: 110).

In order to transcend the binary modernist rationale of entrenched rights claiming in which harm is recursively and cyclically reproduced as an I–Thou relationship, ‘the multiple and mutable forces of thick cultures and unpredictable identities constituting the stock of human social existence’ must always and already be regarded as ‘contingent’ (Arrigo and Williams 2003: 607). As such, mediating difference—including difference borne of international terrorism—entails receptiveness to alternative, ever-changing narratives. Among other things, these accounts include the validation of personal description, cultural mythology, oral histories, critical memories and ancestral legends (Walzer 1994). These stories recognize and accentuate ‘local knowledge’ as a necessary basis to become ‘more aware of the multiple sites of knowledge production, perceptual differences, and competing truth claims’ (Schehr and Milovanovic 1999: 216–17) that form one’s sense of self, the social and their mutuality. And it is here, then, that a postmodernist ethic situated in virtue by way of CRJ is made that much more realizable. When individuals speak their *true words* (Freire 1972), that is when aggrieved parties and those who mediate by way of excessive investment tell their *own* story, the uncertainty of our identities, the fragileness of our humanities and the particularity of our experiences are more completely announced. These dialogical exchanges increasingly make ‘radical transformations’ possible, including pivotal ‘breakthroughs or epiphanies . . . , languages of healing [and] of restoration . . . and [prospects for] transformative justice’ (Arrigo *et al.* 2005: 130; Morris 2000).

To be clear, the emphasis on narrative as a requisite for grasping the importance of local, fragmented and incomplete knowledge does not hierarchically privilege discourse.
Rather, the emphasis on narrative recognizes the various desires of human beings and the complex political–economic–cultural relations in which they emerge (Coker 2006; Schehr 2000). In response to these material conditions, justificatory vocabularies and neutralization rhetorics will likely follow; however, these dimensions of the dialogical exchange should not be interpreted as distracting or as irrelevant. Articulating the material ‘conditions that maximize negative energy flow’ along with the rationalization techniques that ‘are often lurking in the background’ provide additional understanding regarding the relations of harm (Arrigo et al. 2005: 111; see also Unger 1987: 530). These are occasions for linking situational or micro-level expressions of violence with global or macro-level experiences of injustice. When spoken as true words or as a ‘third way’ peace rhetoric (Milovanovic 2001), CRJ constitutes an ethic of transformation. This is a moral sensibility in which being steadily gives way to becoming ‘Other’ (Levinas 1969; Morris 2000).

**Constructing Identities: The Case of Hamas**

Brief background on Hamas

Hamas was formed in 1987 by the Palestinian wing of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood (Caplan 2009; Misha and Sela 2000). Its founding was a strategic effort to address Israeli occupation of several territories including, among others, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Golan Heights (Arena and Arrigo 2006). On 8 December 1987, following the collision of an Israeli truck with an automobile carrying several Palestinian workers, four persons were killed in the crash. The incident became the first *intifada* (rebellion) when mass demonstrations, riots and violence ensued. In the wake of the uprising, the Muslim Brotherhood met to assess how the mêlée could be used to spur religious and nationalist fervour. They drafted a communiqué stipulating that ‘hundreds of wounded and tens of martyrs offered their lives in the path of God [in order to] uphold their nation’s glory and honour [and] to restore [Palestinian] rights in [their] homeland’ (Hroub 2000: 265). The document went on to specify that the *intifada* represented an undeniable rejection of the Israeli occupation, its land confiscations, its planning of settlements and its Zionist subjugation (Caplan 2009). The statement was signed *Harakat al-Muqawwamah al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Resistance Movement), with its acronym, HAMAS (Arabic for ‘zeal’ or ‘enthusiasm’), affixed to it. The document marked the birth of the Palestinian Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Misha and Sela 2000).

**Symbols**

A symbol can either be a concrete, physical object or an abstract, non-material social object. In the former instance, the symbol can be a specific target such as a bank, trade building or centre of commerce, as all of these may be emblematic of capitalism or Western democracy. In the latter instance, the symbol is a social construction (the meaning of a flag) that invites or instigates action (displays of nationalism or patriotism) expressed through non-physical objects (e.g. loyalty, respect, veneration, justice). Both types of symbols are significant for their capacity to situate, interpret and classify the social world and one’s relationship to it through a meaning-making process that is rooted in history, culture, social structure and socialization (Stryker 1980: 56–7; Stryker and Burke 2000).
Key symbols found within Hamas discourse contributing to Palestinian identity consist of the ‘Zionist’ presence (Caplan 2009; Misha and Sela 2000), the emergence of the Islamic awakening (Kepel 2002) and the Oslo Accord signing (Hroub 2000). Dimensions of the Islamic awakening include the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the National Liberation Movement (or Fatah), the period of mosque-building and social institution building, and the ongoing presence of the Palestinian Islamic jihad (holy struggle). Symbolically speaking, these concrete efforts informed Palestinian identity, especially as young male Islamic citizens were indoctrinated into a culture of service and sacrifice on behalf of their people.

The Oslo Accord, also known as the Declaration of Principles (DOP), supported mutual recognition for the rights of Palestinians and Israelis to coexist, as well as a planned agenda regarding future negotiations on Palestinian self-government in the occupied territories. The DOP was not endorsed by Hamas because land believed to be sacred and assigned to the Arab–Muslim people was forfeited to Israel. Moreover, Hamas alleged that trade with Israel would ‘intensify Israeli land confiscations, prevent Palestinian control over resources, and increase Palestinian economic dependence on Israel’ (Reuveny 2000: 232). Symbolically, the DOP helped to solidify the role of Hamas as the new champion of the Palestinian resistance, as a guardian of Islam and as a legitimate voice calling for the establishment of the Islamic Palestinian state.

The perceived usurpation and acquisition of Arab territories by immigrating Jewish settlers and entrepreneurs resulted in the dislocation of the region’s indigenous people. Perhaps nowhere else has the meaning of this displacement been more profoundly interpreted symbolically than in the 1948 Israeli War of Independence (Rouhana 1997). ‘Experts estimated that between 600,000 to 760,000 Palestinian Arabs left their villages, homes, and farms to find refuge in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and nearby Arab countries’ (Arena and Arrigo 2006: 128; see also Khalidi 1997). Described as ‘al-Nakka’ or ‘the catastrophe’, roughly 70 per cent of the area’s inhabitants experienced a sense of helplessness, victimization and fear, and these sentiments permeate the marginality many residents engender to this very day. Indeed, the material objects that symbolize Palestinian disenfranchisement are located in the Israeli power structure consisting of borders, airport checkpoints and security agents who ask that Palestinians step out of line and follow them to a special room for interrogation and searches. Commenting on these shared experiences of wrongdoing as constitutive of their collective identity construction, Khalidi (1997) noted the following:

What happens to Palestinians at these crossing points brings home to them how much they share in common as a people. For it is at these borders and barriers that the six million Palestinians are singled out for ‘special treatment,’ and are forcefully reminded of their identity: of who they are, and of why they are different from others. (Khalidi 1997: 1)

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1 The Oslo Accords were completed in Norway on 20 August 1993 and were officially signed in Washington, DC on 13 September 1993. Yasser Arafat (PLO), Prime Minster Yitzhak Rabin (Israel) and President William Jefferson Clinton (United States) were in attendance for the signing. The Accords themselves represented an historic, face-to-face agreement between Israeli and Palestinian leaders. In return for postponing discussions regarding Jerusalem statehood, Palestinian sovereignty and refugees, and security and borders, these and similar issues were to be negotiated within five years after Israeli Defense Forces vacated the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area. The intention with the Oslo settlement was for Palestine to eventually experience self-rule of these locales, following an appropriate transition period. The joint cooperation and partnership between Israel and Palestine was required for the success of the Oslo Accords; otherwise, they would become obsolete. Significant strain was placed on the Oslo Accords after Hamas won Palestinian elections in 2006, taking military control from the Palestinian Authority in Gaza in 2007.
Acts and social acts

Violence is a regularized act engaged in by Hamas members (Hroub 2000; Kepel 2002). Expressions of violence represent a compelling dimension of the Palestinian struggle for sovereignty, justice and self-determination (Berman 2003; Caplan 2009). In this respect, then, the violent social act serves two purposes: it ‘express[es] disdain for the current status quo and enhance[s] the group’s sense of cohesiveness and the movement’s solidarity’ (Arena and Arrigo 2004: 149). The goal of this violence is the disruption of the established peace process and various strategies—including propaganda campaigns, road blocks, organized strikes by workers, protests and sit-ins by students and teachers, kidnappings, car bombings, beatings and murders, and suicidal practices—have all been employed (Misha and Sela 2000). The interpretation of these violent acts varies: for Israelis, they are assaults on their freedom, livelihood and security; for Palestinians, they symbolize disobedience or empowerment. However, for Hamas religious zealots, these strategies are expressions of faith. Indeed, by identifying with the ‘influential roles of being a Palestinian, an Islamic fundamentalist, and a martyr’ (Arena and Arrigo 2005: 493), the goal is to sustain a holy war waged by the Islamic people against the state of Israel. The impulse to act violently is based on the perception that Jewish settlers historically have victimized Palestinians by wrongly taking their property, depriving them of their culture and livelihood. Hamas members both embody and manipulate this perception through their violent actions, symbolized most especially in suicide attacks (Caplan 2009; Hroub 2000; Kepel 2002).

Interpreted symbolically as a supreme act of faith rather than as a routine act of violence, the suicide bomber identifies with his or her self-sacrificing conduct. Kushner (1998: 24) explained how karbala (the historical sense of self-sacrifice) transcends suicide. As he observed, ‘Islam forbids the taking of one’s own life. [Karbala] symbolizes the supreme willingness to submit to the will of Allah with the understanding that rewards will come after death . . . A suicide bomber is making a transition that will put him or her alongside the other heroes of Islam and next to Allah’. As such, Hamas members believe that the holy war they wage ‘will bring about not only the establishment of a Palestinian state but the resurrection of an Islamic government in the region’ (Arena and Arrigo 2004: 149). And when met with Israeli counter-terrorism resistance, then the Palestinian social act of violence (self-sacrificial suicide as affirming a faith-based identity construction) is recursively consummated, thereby repetitively completing the social act’s sequencing.

Meaning

According to SI, meaning permeates every (social) object and act found within a person’s surroundings. As Hewitt (1976: 48) explained it, ‘meaning is anchored in behaviour. The meaning of an act is neither fixed nor unchanging, but is determined in conduct as individuals act toward objects’. Meaning entails the interpretation of symbols and their physical and/or abstract relationships to one’s behaviour. Typically, this interpretation includes an assessment of intent, although it is not a prerequisite (Alexander and Wiley 1981; McCall and Simmons 1978).

As the previous section made evident, identity for Hamas is situated most deeply in religion, permeating every facet of a group member’s cultural, social, economic and political life (Misha and Sela 2000: 44–5). Religion gives Hamas loyalists ‘a sense of self-worth and
self-importance by teaching them that they are special to Allah and to the movement’ (Arena and Arrigo 2004: 151). This meaning provides a justification for collective behaviour, including the endorsement and use of extremist violence (Berman 2003). Moreover, as followers maintain, the holy war (jihad) is the only way to attain a Palestinian state (Caplan 2009; Kepel 2002). Both of these notions are conveyed in the popular saying, ‘To raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine’ (Misha and Sela 2000: 42). As Hamas members interpret the symbols of their religious and subjugated existence, engaging in the process of assigning meaning to the social objects and acts that confirm this, they conclude that liberating Palestine and resurrecting an Islamic nation represent the duty of all Muslims. Thus, participating in these behaviours, at times violently, helps Hamas members experience a sense of purpose in their lives otherwise marked by political occupation, economic deprivation and religious persecution.

**Role-taking and role-making**

Role-taking and role-making are imaginatively derived and cognitively executed processes that entail an examination of one’s self and/or one’s standpoint from the vantage of another. More specifically, role-taking requires that an individual “‘gets inside” the perspective of another in a particular situation and “observes” his [or her] own conduct from the other’s point of view’ (Hewitt 1976: 131). When a person engages in this deliberative activity, then one’s conduct has social meaning and enables role-making outside the purview of one’s self-contained and self-referential interpretations. Moreover, by interpreting symbols, acts and roles from the perspective of significant and generalized others (the latter represent the constellation of society’s attitudes, beliefs or expectations), the possibility for assigning, defining and making meaning in specific situations increases and diversifies (Mead 1934/1967). Unsurprisingly, then, as dimensions of the socialization process, role-taking and role-making ‘influence how a person defines her or his position in society and, subsequently, the development and organization of the self’ (Arena and Arrigo 2005: 495).

Hamas roles have evolved and these transformations have contributed to reconstituting the Palestinian identity. Doctrinaire flexibility and Islamic service represent two key examples of how the social person that signifies allegiance to Hamas has been modified. Indicative of the first alteration in identity construction is the group’s calculated movement ‘away from dogmatic positions in a quest for innovative and pliable modes of conduct, the opposite of doctrinaire rigidity, ready to respond or adjust to fluid conditions without losing sight of their ultimate objectives’ (Misha and Sela 2000: 7). This is change guided by a willingness ‘to adopt the various roles of those in their environment and adapt their behaviour accordingly’ (Arena and Arrigo 2004: 152). This role-taking activity includes appropriating the perspective of the generalized other for the Islamic government, Palestinians located in refugee camps and, to a lesser extent, the Palestinian National Authority. Thus, the ambulant and dynamic role-taking activities engaged in by Hamas faithful advance an image of a social person (or collective) without ‘fixed identities, distinct boundaries, and stable, well-established preferences’ (Misha and Sela 2000: 9). In part, this is how the Islamic Resistance Movement has managed to rally support in the region and to function as an emerging decision broker for the Palestinian citizenry.

Consistent with this reconstituted identity construction are the role-taking activities of Hamas members as servants of Islam (Khalidi 1997). This includes providing charity
to the poor (zakat) and promoting a unified Arab nation freed from Israeli occupation and rule. In the first instance, ‘community service programs like education, welfare and health’ care are made available, winning ‘the hearts of the Palestinian people and in turn [expanding Hamas] public support among the needy’ (Arena and Arrigo 2004: 152). In the latter instance, adopting the ‘public image as a standard bearer of Palestinian national values’ (Misha and Sela 2000: 153) has enabled Hamas to garner the populist persona and mobilize citizenry approval. In both illustrations of Islamic servitude, reconfigured identity construction vis-à-vis role-taking and role-making has enabled this extremist group to adapt its strategies and to create an image that maximizes its appeal among the Palestinian and the Islamic people.

Regrettably, however, since Hamas’s takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007, its role-taking and role-making efforts have become somewhat strained. For example, the raid of a Hamas hideout on 29 May 2009 in the West Bank town of Qalqilya by Fatah forces loyal to the Western-back Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas, resulted in a violent shootout and the death of six people. Prompting the atrocities were two Hamas officials who resisted Palestinian questioning and arrest, and then escaped by seeking refuge at the fortified home of a Hamas sympathizer. Arguments persisted, shouting intensified and gunfire followed. The mêlée that ensued was the bloodiest internal clash in the region since Abbas initiated a security drive and renewed peace talks with Israel after breaking with Hamas over its occupation of the Gaza Strip (Schneider 2009).

The recent hostility is troubling, especially since an inter-reconciliation dialogue was scheduled to take place in June 2009 with the expectation that an agreement between rival Fatah and Hamas leadership would occur later in July as a precursor to brokering a settlement between Palestine and Israel (Ramadan 2009). Concerns related to government formation, security reconstruction, elections, Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) reforms and reconciliation remain largely unresolved. However, what does seem clear is that any effort to reach a just settlement likely will not proceed without Hamas participation. Indeed, as long as Palestinian support for Hamas is strong and Arab citizens favour a negotiated peace with Israel, dynamic role-taking and role-making activities will help the Islamic Resistance Movement reconstitute Palestinian identity.

Hamas Identity and CRJ: Ethically Mediating Conflict

Table 1 depicts a three-by-four matrix. The matrix integrates the key principles derived from critical restorative justice with the symbolic interactionist–identity theory

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framework. The proposed synthesis yields a postmodernist-inspired virtue ethics whose discursive logic is relevant for mediating instances of (Hamas) international terrorism. This is reconciliation involving Israel, Palestine, the United States, all three entities or some combination of them (e.g. Hamas and Israel). This is restoration in which a trained negotiator invites parties in dispute to restore justice critically and to embody ethics virtuously. In what follows, the habits of character (Aristotle 1976; 2000) that ground the dialogical exchange and the evolving peace process are delineated, mindful of targeted, though limited, examples of the same. When nurtured over time, these qualities increase prospects for growing interpersonal civility and global citizenship in provisional, positional and relational ways.

Negotiating the peace process in the face of international terrorism entails navigating ‘thick’ cultures. Traversing this mediation course—one steeped in history, struggle and difference—means that consensus dynamics is not emblematic of a just settlement, nor is it an optimal solution. Hamas symbols such as the ‘Zionist’ presence, the Islamic ‘awakening’ and the Oslo Accord are physical and non-material reminders of the social person (the identity) that is, in many ways, indistinguishable from the holy war strident Palestinian adherents profess to be waging. These symbols constitute artefacts of identity construction. Their meanings are steeped in culture and language. As such, resolving the facts or agreeing on the truths about these value-laden (social) objects is less important than discerning group-based interiorized meanings about them through dialogical interaction. This is signification absent a grand narrative or a master discourse guiding the peace negotiation. This is meaning in which one’s knowledge about a symbol’s significance for another does not deny the other’s humanity, difference or identity in the process. This is a process in which social reality itself is negotiated locally, relationally and contingently.

One illustration of this mediation strategy in which the integration of CRJ and SI ostensibly has forged habits of character in mediating international disputes of political violence is found in the ongoing peace efforts conducted by former US President, Jimmy Carter. Commenting on the symbolic and material challenges for peace in the Middle East generally, Carter (1993) has noted that:

... there is no way to escape the realization of how intimately intertwined [is] the history, the aspirations, and the fate of two long-suffering peoples, the Jews and the Palestinian Arabs ... [T]he Arab-Israeli conflict is a struggle between two national identities ... What each wants is no less than recognition, acceptance, independence, sovereignty, and territorial identity. (Carter 1993: 106)

More recently—and commenting on the possibility of Palestinian–Israeli peace, the role of Hamas and the symbolic significance of the US and Israeli governments’ unwillingness to convene with Hamas leadership in the negotiations—the former President observed the following:

... the problem is not that I met with Hamas in Syria [referring to a meeting with exiled Hamas leader, Khaled Mashaal]. The problem is that Israel and the United States refuse to meet with these people, who must be involved ... I think there’s no doubt in anyone’s mind that, if Israel is ever going to find peace with justice concerning the relationship with their next-door neighbours, the Palestinians, that Hamas will have to be included in the process. (Ruff 2008: 17)

For Carter, navigating ‘thick’ cultures, recognizing group-based values (including Hamas values) and negotiating the social realities of those in dispute are emblematic of an ethic that honours and affirms the humanness of warring factions (Carter 2006).
For Hamas, the impulse to engage in (social) acts of international terrorism (i.e. expressions of violence) is fuelled by historically and culturally anchored perceptions about injustice and victimization perpetrated by Jewish settlers against the Palestinians. Self-sacrifice through martyrdom-suicide (karbala) symbolizes both the manipulation and consummation of this perception, especially when Israeli counter-terrorism represents a familiar (and devastating) refrain. However, navigating the thick culture of Hamas identity construction requires a minimalist morality in which fluid renditions of reality, unpredictable standpoints, dynamic situational definitions and permeable narratives are themselves to be validated and celebrated. Collectively, they constitute a ‘different’ stock of knowledge. Engaging in mediation with such receptiveness in mind affirms the cultural mythology, the critical memories and the ancestral legends of disputing nations. It also supports the fragmented, incomplete, fragile and uncertain dimensions of speaking one’s true words, absent judgment or rebuke.

On 15 April 2008, over multiple objections from the US State Department and members of his own Democratic Party, President Carter visited the West Bank city of Ramallah, where he attended a reception with Nasser Shaer, a senior figure in the Hamas organization. While there, Carter visited the gravesite of former Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat. Carter is credited with calling Arafat ‘a dear friend’, a ‘peace fighter’ and a ‘partner in representing the question of justice in the world’ (Klein 2008). During his encounter with Nasser, Carter embraced, hugged and kissed the Hamas official, an interaction with a Palestinian authority that is frowned upon by many Western leaders and diplomats (Klein 2008). These symbolic acts by Carter demonstrate a minimalist morality in which the celebration of different identities (including the uncertainty of one’s situational definitions, epistemological standpoints and search for true words) need not be met with an ethic of rejection, ridicule or reprimand.

The symbols and acts that seed Hamas membership allegiance are rooted in religious zealously. Indeed, Islamic jihad (the holy war) is interpreted as the pathway to establishing Palestinian statehood, and this conviction both nurtures and sustains participants’ militant extremist violence. Here, too, conflict and disequilibrium rather than consensus and stability inform the dialogical exchange and such expressions of discordant particularism—as manifestations of situational definitions—warrant mediation. The ensuing negotiation does not advantage meaning that extols preferential speech codes or scripted systems of communication. They yield totalizing (and marginalizing) narratives. In order to promote languages of possibility, of growing prospects for more humanely reconciling, such ideal speech acts must be de-centred. These speech acts, as master discourses, sanitize reality often consistent with dominant, privileged and hierarchical views of rights-claiming, justice, freedom, injury, restoration, peace and the like. This is nothing more than the choreographed logic of control, and a postmodernist-inspired virtue ethic resists and disassembles such storied renditions.

In this regard, the social-psychological contributions of Herbert Kelman (e.g. 1979, 1982, 1986 and 1995), the Richard Clarke Cabot Professor of Social Ethics, Emeritus, at Harvard University are particularly noteworthy. Commenting on Kelman’s interactive problem-solving model of (international) conflict resolution and the meaning-making process it engenders, Fisher (1997) indicated that Kelman’s workshops:

... provide a unique opportunity for communication and mutual analysis of a conflict, promote a collaborative, problem-solving process, and use social scientist-practitioners in a facilitative third party
role... The typical workshop brings together unofficial representatives of conflicting parties in a relatively isolated and preferably academic setting to engage in face-to-face communication... [T]he discussions are relatively unstructured, yet guided by a third party. Several aspects of the workshop (setting, norms, ground rules, agenda, procedures, third party interventions) are designed to overcome the usual accusatory, legalistic, and hostile interactions, and replace them with an analytical, task-oriented atmosphere, which has the potential for changing attitudes and creating ideas that can be fed into the policymaking process... The workshop thus casts the third party in a unique role as the facilitator of communication, conflict analysis, and the development of creative solutions. (Fisher 1997: 59–60)

Mediating conflict requires that role-taking and role-making inform the dialogical exchanges. Evaluating one’s own behaviour from the lived perspective of another amplifies social, rather than self-referential, interpretations about the sense-making process, one’s status in a group, situational definitions and society’s organization. The porous, transient and liquid nature of this activity—of temporarily embodying the standpoint of significant and/or generalized others—reconstitutes one’s identity as fluid and adaptable. It is this ephemeral, though authentic, malleability that makes positional, relational and provisional knowledge about the self and the social possible, including the constructed meanings of terrorist violence. Negotiating and navigating this often turbulent nexus of identity, culture and society entails mediation steeped in an ethic of the ‘Other’. This is moral engagement without condemnation or vilification of those in dispute. This is integrity-based arbitration that de-realizes the offence while humanizing the participants. In other words, injury is owned contextually and contingently without denying the other’s identity; the other’s difference; and the possibilities for insight, change and renewal that correspondingly follow from both.

Kelman’s (1978) blueprint for getting past gridlock in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict resonates with the role-taking and role-making practices relevant to reconciling Hamas identity construction by way of critical restorative justice and postmodern virtue ethics. Fisher (1997: 67) described Kelman’s six social-psychological ‘prerequisites for mutual acceptance’ wherein Jewish and Arab representatives had to adopt ‘complimentary and reciprocal actions’ as a part of the interactive problem-solving pre-negotiation strategy. More specifically, these actions included the following:

First, the two sides had to acquire insight into each other’s perspective so that they could understand the resistances to acceptance. Second, each side had to see that there were reasonable people on the other side and that there were issues to talk about, rather than that the two sets of demands were mutually exclusive. Third, each side had to distinguish the ideological dreams and rhetoric from the operational programs of the other... Fourth, both sides had to see the mutual concessions could bring about change leading toward resolution. Fifth, each side had to believe that leadership changes conducive to a stable peace could take place in the other side. Sixth, and finally each side had to see a responsiveness to its human psychological needs by the other through symbolic gestures, and jointly redefined issues in ways amenable to resolution. (Fisher 1997: 67, emphasis added)

These prerequisites endorse liquid sociality (‘insight into each other’s perspective’ akin to perceiving one’s situation from the generalized other); fluid identities (‘reasonable people on the other side’); and an ethic of the ‘Other’ (‘believe leadership changes...
conducive to peace could take place in the other side’ and ‘responsiveness’ to one’s ‘human psychological needs by the other through symbolic gestures’). Restoring justice critically and living ethics virtuously necessitates that Hamas and parties in conflict with it embrace a similar interactive problem-solving blueprint if the possibility for a developing peace is to emerge.

**Implications and Conclusions**

Broadly speaking, the integration of critical restorative justice (including its postmodernist-inspired virtue ethics) along with symbolic interactionism (including its identity theory framework) raises provocative challenges for mediating global disputes of terrorism and for advancing our understanding of the same. This is especially the case when considering the limits of the preceding inquiry. First, the novel vocabulary and alternative reasoning integral to critical restorative justice, postmodernism and their nexus warrant further and more detailed theoretical refinement. Second, the conceptually derived habits of character spawned by the proposed CRJ–SI synthesis represented a more heuristic and nomothetic assessment whose potential explanatory properties therefore merit careful analysis and subsequent testing. Third, the application of the suggested integration to the case of Hamas militant extremist violence only evocatively illustrated where and how the cultivation of integrity-based moral reasoning could facilitate an evolving peace that deepened the well-being of warring groups, collectives and/or nations. While this more speculative treatment included a consideration of related participants such as Israel, Palestine and the United States, additional amplification is in order here. Fourth, the specific training required of and strategies employed by peacemakers were not systematically delineated. Thus, the ongoing future work of diplomatic envoys must be more thoroughly developed. Given these collective shortcomings, the fusion of ideas as developed throughout this article should be cautiously pursued in any subsequent research on militant violence.

Notwithstanding these very legitimate concerns, the thesis developed herein resonates with forging a ‘third way’ reconciliation rhetoric (Milovanovic 2001), particularly when mediating instances of international terrorism. This is what is meant by the potential for a transformational ethic (Acorn 2005; Morris 2000). Salient and salubrious responses necessitate the use of a non-hierarchical and inclusive grammar whose linguistic coordinates more completely acknowledge the symbolic, material and cultural realities of disputing participants. The interactively constructed narrative that emerges—freed from the modernist trappings of consensus dynamics, master plans and rigid epistemologies—both affirms and celebrates the social person and the difference engendered by such fluid identities. Moreover, among other things, the dialogical exchange itself endeavours to embrace the presence of thick cultures, a minimalist morality, liquid sociality and languages of possibility as constitutive of an ethic of the ‘Other’.

To date, the discourse and logic of critical restorative justice and postmodernism have found some legitimacy in conflict resolution analyses (Acorn 2005; Pavlich 2006). However, the framework’s transition to ethics and its significance for the constructed identity of the social person do not currently engulf the domain of terrorism studies, especially including any policy pertaining to it. As this article has argued, the proposed
reorientation in language and epistemology is one crucible in which uncertain identities, fragile humanities and particular experiences can more fully thrive. It is a novel site for negotiating peace and transforming justice. Accordingly, the resulting challenge is to encourage warring parties to live the identified moral qualities as habits of character. This task belongs to mediators who are called upon to navigate the constructed selves of terrorists and the social realities of their violence wherever both are found, whenever injury follows in their wake.

References


