forms their context—and in teaching ways to form alliances with those less powerful in order to achieve equality together. One crucial element in that process is understanding why white people so often defend their privilege by failing to see that they have it, asserting instead a conflict of rights and interests with people of color. Conflict speaks of genuine problems; it is never born solely of psychological aberration or purely of ill will. Conflict is a language in which unattended crises are expressed. Life in America at the beginning of the twenty-first century is, for many, in crisis. I propose that we listen to the voices of conflict, even those racially-distorted voices we abhor, attentively enough to hear the story they—badly, perhaps, but truthfully—also speak. For only then do we stand a chance of playing a role in solving the intractable dilemma of racial hatred.

Notes:

1. The results of my study are published in Bitters in the Honey: Tales of Hope and Disappointment across Divides of Race and Time (University of Arkansas Press, 1999).

2. As well as other groups defined by gender, physical ability, sexuality and so on. I do not deal with other kinds of identity, and other kinds of discrimination, not to diminish their importance but simply to focus on the particular problems of racism.
insecurity. Northern Ireland's ambiguous political position within the UK has polarized communities along ethnoreligious lines. Both ethnoreligious groups maintain distinct identities by voluntary segregation in neighborhoods, schools and the workplace. Neither group is willing to compromise or to negotiate its identity.

**Conflict Protects Group Boundaries and Identity**

Conflict creates group norms, values and internal cohesion and mobilizes ethnic group sentiments toward others. Conflict escalates tensions and reinforces a homogenous group identity while making internal group boundaries more rigid. Identity needs become non-negotiable, and it becomes very difficult for the individual to detach from the identity needs of the group. Traitors who “cross over” become targets of in-group animosity with severe penalties for disloyalty. In Northern Ireland, women are tarred-and-feathered, mixed religious families are burned out of their homes, and young men are kneecapped for mingling with the “enemy.”

The religious label helps to categorize the national identities of Catholics and Protestants, even though both groups are divided into moderates and extremists. The processes of banding brings Church of Ireland, Methodist, Presbyterian and Free Presbyterians as well as moderates and extremists together. For example, Protestants banded together and marched on the streets of Belfast and Derry to protest against the British government's use of the 1985 Anglo Irish Agreement to push loyal Unionists out of the UK and into a united Ireland. Protestants believe that the Catholic majority will persecute them as a minority ethnic group in a united Ireland. The paramilitaries in both communities try to control intragroup conflict by preventing the moderates from coming together across the sectarian divide, thus continuing to preserve a bipolar society.

**Conflict Produces Intragroup Conflict**

Ethnic identity is also a trigger for escalating tensions within the group by intentionally provoking group members to demonstrate their attachment and loyalty to the group structure. The need to demonstrate “who is more Protestant or Catholic than others” often produces group splintering or intragroup conflict, endangering group identity and internal cohesion. The ethnic group can, for example, disintegrate into those who advocate ethnecentrism and the use of violence, and those who support working with members of the other community by using nonviolent political mechanisms.

In Northern Ireland, traditions, values, holidays and symbols reinforce ethnoreligious identity and maintain the communal divide, thereby hindering the development of a “shared identity.” The re-enactments of historical and cultural events emphasize the salience of territorial boundaries and group cohesion and promote a siege mentality within each ethnic group. Political elites use martyrdom, massacre, battles and the fear of genocide to reinforce intergroup conflict and emphasize territorial identity over cooperation with the other ethnic group.

Loyalists and Republicans are prepared, therefore, to use political violence in maintaining group divisions and opposing moderate Unionist and Nationalist efforts to use Northern Ireland's political institutions to share political power and bridge the sectarian wall. The paramilitaries use political violence to maintain group boundaries and trigger major animosities in attempts to permanently end relations. Bombings and sectarian assassinations are used by secret organizations to maintain the divide and to break any relationship between members of the middle ground.

Identity needs become non-negotiable, and it becomes very difficult for the individual to detach from the identity needs of the group.

The process of renegotiation can assist ethnic groups in addressing underlying identity needs by challenging stereotypes and fears of the other and by building trust and positive perceptions of neighbors. Dialogue groups, problem-solving workshops and storytelling can open up ethnic groups' thinking about conflict. Peacebuilding is a process. A multilevel,
multimodal, complementary and coordinated intervention effort must seek, therefore, to actively involve all citizens in the peace process if ethnic communities are to successfully transform the underlying nature of their conflict over time.

In Northern Ireland, traditions, values, holidays and symbols reinforce ethnoreligious identity and maintain the communal divide, thereby hindering the development of a “shared identity.”

Understanding the modern ethnic community is perhaps best accomplished by studying the complex and dynamic conflicts between, within and external to each community. Such a constructive conflict resolution approach can address the subjective and objective criteria that often fuel such conflicts and can also provide a healthy eclecticism for practitioners to draw on the knowledge and skills of the protagonists in developing multiple modes of intervention. How ethnic communities frame conflict in terms of identity issues suggests that practitioners should pay more attention to the psychocultural mechanisms that underlie protracted intercommunal conflict.

The recent formation of a powersharing interethic executive in Belfast suggests that the historic conflict has taken a new, interdependent road to a new future. However, the pathway to peace may remain difficult. Extremist Loyalist and Republican rogue break-away paramilitary units, who refuse to accept the peace process, have threatened to resume the violence that has rocked the foundations of Northern Ireland society over the past 30 years. It remains to be seen whether the majority of Northern Ireland’s people will successfully forge a new shared identity, transcending the insular-looking group identities of the past.

Transforming, Creating and Healing Identity through Ritual

By Lisa Schirch

What does ritual have to do with identity? How can peacebuilders use ritual to work with identity conflicts? You won’t find the answers in most books on peace and conflict studies.

First of all, it is important to recognize that people define themselves in part according to space or context. In the physical space of my home, for example, I perceive my identity differently than I do when I am at work. The space itself gives symbolic cues that help me determine who I am.

Humans create an idealized world in ritual. Ritual space tells participants, “This is not ordinary, this is special.” Peacebuilders can create a “safe space” or an “oasis for peacebuilding” through constructing a ritual environment that is set aside or separated from everyday time and space where conflict occurs. In this special oasis, rituals can transform, create and heal identities.

Rites of Passage: Identity Transformation

From weddings to inaugurations, rituals are often used to mark and invoke changes in identities. Rituals act as “passageways” from one identity to another.

Rituals may be particularly helpful to peacebuilders because of their ability to transform identity. Rituals shift the ways in which people perceive their own identity and that of their adversary. The rituals in and of themselves may symbolically “speak” to participants and help define who they are and how they behave.

In a 10-day workshop for Greek and Turkish Cypriots, I witnessed a transformation of identity in a series of evening social rituals that created a separate, safe space from the workshop itself. During