Peace and Conflict Studies

- Grassroots Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties: Elements of An Effective Model
  Olga Skarlato, Sean Byrne, Kawser Ahmed, Julie Marie Hyde, and Peter Karari

- On Success in Peace Processes: Readiness Theory and the Aceh Peace Process
  Amira Schiff

- From Positionality to Relationality: A Buddhist-Oriented Relational View of Conflict Escalation and its Transformation
  Ran Kuttner

- Facilitating Collaboration among Health Care Professionals
  Robin Cooper

- Relational Identities: Reclaiming Ourselves through Recreating Each Other in Collaborative Conversations in Group Therapy Work
  Celia Quintas and Christopher F. Burnett

- Book Review: Occupying New Levels: A Comparative Review of *Occupy Nation* and *Networks of Outrage and Hope*
  Kevin Revier
EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor-in-Chief: Robin Cooper
Consulting Editor: Howon Jeong
Senior Advisory Editors: Sean Byrne and Honggang Yang

Editorial Team: Elena Bastidas, Dustin Berna, Jason Campbell, Mark Davidheiser, Cheryl Duckworth, Alexia Georgakopoulos, Toran Hansen, Neil Katz, Judith McKay, Ismael Muvungi, Michele Rice, Robert Witheridge

Associate Editors: Alice Ackermann, Christopher Burnett, Laura Finley, Joseph Folger, Loraleigh Keashly
Assistant Editors: Patrick Hiller, Solomon Losha, Terry Morrow, Marcie Washington
Production Editor: Rebecca Arklie

EDITORIAL BOARD

Sami Adwan, Bethlehem University, Palestine
Chadwick Alger, Ohio State University, USA
Scott Appleby, University of Notre Dame, USA
Paul Arthur, University of Ulster-Coleraine, UK
Celia Cook-Huffman, Juniata College, USA
Morton Deutsch, Columbia University, USA
Franklin Dukes, University of Virginia, USA
Matthias Finger, Graduate Institute of Public Admin., Switzerland
Ronald Fisher, American University, USA
Linda Forcey, State University of New York, Binghamton, USA
Johan Galtung, TRANSCEND, Norway
Vasu Gounden, University of Durban, South Africa
Adrian Guelke, Queen’s University of Belfast, UK
Tamar Hermann, Tel Aviv University, Israel
Herbert Kelman, Harvard University, USA
Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, University of Sheffield, UK
Louis Kriesberg, Syracuse University, USA
John Paul Lederach, University of Notre Dame, USA
Richard Little, University of Bristol, UK
Neil MacFarlane, Oxford University, UK
George McCall, University of Missouri-St. Louis, USA
John McGarry, Queen’s University, Canada
Dominic Murray, University of Limerick, Ireland
Michael Nagler, University of California, Berkeley, USA

Joseph Nevo, University of Haifa, Israel
Brendan O’Leary, University of Pennsylvania, USA
Canada Frederic Pearson, Wayne State University, USA
Brian Polkinghorn, Salisbury State University, USA
Dean Pruitt, State University of New York, Buffalo, USA
Luc Rey Chler, University of Leuven, Belgium
Janet Rifkin, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA
Paul Rogers, University of Bradford, UK
Marc Howard Ross, Bryn Mawr College, USA
Robert Rubinstein, Syracuse University, USA
Dennis Sandole, George Mason University, USA
Jessica Senelli, University of Manitoba, Canada
Martin Shaw, University of Sussex, UK
Timothy Shaw, Dalhousie University, Canada
Janice Stein, University of Toronto, Canada
Lawrence Susskind, MIT, USA
Ramesh Thakur, United Nations University, Japan
Vibeke Vindelov, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Raimo Vayrynen, University of Notre Dame, Denmark
Kathleen Maas Weigert, Georgetown University, USA
Tom Woodhouse, University of Bradford, UK
Mitja Zagar, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
William Zartman, John Hopkins University, USA.
### PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES

**Table of Contents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue Authors</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties: Elements of an Effective Model</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Olga Skarlato, Sean Byrne, Kawser Ahmed, Julie Marie Hyde and Peter Karari</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amira Schiff</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Positionality to Relationality: A Buddhist-Oriented Relational View of Conflict Escalation and its Transformation</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ran Kuttner</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitation Collaboration among Health Care Professionals</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Robin Cooper</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Identities: Reclaiming Ourselves through Recreating Each Other in Collaborative Conversations in Group Therapy Work</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Celia Quintas and Christopher F. Burnett</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Review: Occupying New Levels: A Comparative Review of <em>Occupy Nation</em> and <em>Networks of Outrage and Hope</em></td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kevin Revier</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Issue Authors

Lieutenant Colonel (Retd) Kawser Ahmed is a PACS PhD candidate at the Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice, St. Paul’s College, University of Manitoba. His research interest is in Faith Based Organisations and peacebuilding. He earned an M.Phil. degree in PACS from the University of Dhaka Bangladesh. He is also a graduate of the Defence Services Command and Staff College, Bangladesh and he has served in the Bangladesh army’s UN peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara. He is also an alumnus of the National Defence University, Washington D.C.

Sean Byrne is Professor and Director of the PhD and Joint MA Programs in Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS), and Executive Director, Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice, St. Paul’s College, University of Manitoba. His current research interests include: ethnic conflict resolution, economic aid and peacebuilding in protracted ethnic conflict, children and war, women and peacebuilding, and third party intervention. Email: James.Byrne@umanitoba.ca

Julie Marie Hyde is a PACS PhD student at the Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice, St. Paul’s College, University of Manitoba. She holds a BA Honours in Peace Studies/Women’s Studies from McMaster University (Ontario, Canada) and MA in Peace Education from the University for Peace (Costa Rica). Her research interests include: critical pedagogy and peace education; education in emergencies; education system restoration in post-emergency contexts; and education services for Aboriginal students in Canada.

Peter Karari is a PACS PhD candidate at the Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice, St. Paul’s College, University of Manitoba. His areas of interest include: ethnopolitical violence, transitional justice, peacebuilding and human rights. His doctoral research is on ethnopolitical violence, transitional justice and peacebuilding in Kenya. He earned a Bachelor in Social-Work from the University of Nairobi in Kenya and a Masters in PACS from Otto-von Guericke University in Magdeburg Germany.

Olga Skarlato is a PACS PhD candidate at the Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice, St. Paul’s College, University of Manitoba. Skarlato earned a BA and an MA degree in North American Studies from the School of International Relations, St. Petersburg State University, Russia. Skarlato also studied and worked in Germany, the USA and Canada doing research on environmental conflict resolution and prevention, human security and international economic development.

Amira Schiff is a Professor of Political Science. She teaches in the program on Conflict Management and Negotiation in Bar-Ilan University. She has written on various issues relating to conflict management and negotiation in the Israeli Palestinian Conflict in the conflict in Cyprus and in Sri Lanka. Email: a_schiff@netvision.net.il
Ran Kuttner is an Associate Professor of Negotiation and Dispute Resolution at the Werner Institute, Creighton University School of Law. Prior to joining Creighton he was a Visiting Scholar at the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School (2005–2008). He has written on various issues relating to theory and practice of conflict management, mediation and dialogue from a relational point of view. Email: rankuttner@creighton.edu

Robin Cooper is Assistant Professor of Conflict Resolution and Ethnic Studies and Director of Doctoral Programs in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University. Her research interests include identity-based conflict, cross-cultural conflict resolution, collaborative practices in organizational contexts, qualitative research, and student learning. Email: robicoop@nova.edu.

Celia Quintas is a clinical private psychotherapist and an Associate of the Taos Institute. She was raised in Brazil but lived in Europe for years where she learned several languages, which also allowed expanding her understanding and flexibility in dealing with people. Celia completed a Masters Degree in Education and later in Mental Health Counseling. She has worked in community mental health centers, private psychiatric hospitals and currently in private practice. Her work and research focus on topics involving social constructionist ideas in our understandings of mental illness and social justice. She concluded her Doctoral Degree from Nova Southeastern University, Florida, last year. Email: mcelia@nova.edu

Christopher Burnett is a Clinical Psychologist, and an Associate Professor of Human Relationship Systems in the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Family Therapy, at Nova Southeastern University. He has worked in the mental health field for over 30 years, in both inpatient and outpatient settings, and has always had a strong interest in applying systems thinking principles to understanding issues associated with chronic mental illness. He has been a full time faculty member at NSU for 20 years, and has chaired a large number of dissertation research projects during that time. Email: burnett@nova.edu

Ken Revier is a graduate student in sociology at Binghamton University, New York. His current research focuses on the relationship between social movements, neoliberalism, and the state. Email: krevier1@binghamton.edu
Grassroots Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties: Elements of an Effective Model

Olga Skarlato, Sean Byrne, Kawser Ahmed, Julie Marie Hyde, and Peter Karari

We know that peace needs to be fought with more voracity than the war was fought...Peacemakers need resources to build peace so we can never take our eyes off that ball.

Community group leader from Derry

Abstract

Following the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement many community-based organizations became involved in localized peace-building activities in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties. Drawing financial support from the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation and the International Fund for Ireland, these organizations adopted various strategic mechanisms to implement their projects –synchronizing bottom-up development initiatives with top-level government policies. Their effectiveness has already been felt in Northern Ireland as reduced political violence and improved socioeconomic conditions. However, the long-term sustainability of this work is questionable, affected as it is by continued intercommunity segregation, low macro-level political support, and global economic instability. This article explores the perceptions of 120 civil society leaders regarding the peace-building practices employed by community-based organizations in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties. Key elements of an effective peace-building model are suggested that may contribute to the improvement of peace-building and reconciliation efforts in other contexts affected by ethno-political conflict.

Introduction

Lederach (1997) envisions peace-building as “a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relations” (p. 20). Peace-building is a long-term, dynamic process, which seeks to address relational, structural, and social issues through a vast array of mechanisms that co-create an infrastructure for peace (Lederach, 1997, p. 22). Ramcharan (2009) for example, emphasizes three general principles
Peace and Conflict Studies

of this process including the rule of law, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (p. 323). Further, local participation, capacity-building, relationship-building, and cross-community dialogue are also required to address the underlying causes of conflict (Jeong, 2005; Lederach, 1997; Zelizer, 2013).

Thus, while peace-building is a somewhat ambiguous term (Chetail, 2009), it is clear that it requires “long-term commitment to establishing an infrastructure across the levels of a society…that empowers the resources for reconciliation from within that society and maximizes the contribution[s] from [abroad]” (Lederach, 1997, p. xvi). However, when intervening in societies transitioning out of protracted conflict and political violence, transnational and international actors often apply a standardized assembly line form of peace-building “whereby the vision of peace is made off-site, shipped to a foreign location, and reconstructed according to a pre-arranged plan” (Mac Ginty, 2011, p. 39). Referred to as the liberal democratic peace model, this approach often results in dysfunctional and fragile peace processes that disempower local populations (Mac Ginty, 2013, 2008).

Consequently, the conflict in Northern Ireland is rooted in divided political ideologies, ethno-religious identities, and systemic poverty – issues which have fostered deep antagonism between the Catholic-Nationalist and Protestant-Unionist communities (Cairns & Darby, 1998). The apex of this conflict was a bitter period of violence known as the “Troubles” – an era spanning from the late 1960s to 1998 that resulted in significant social and economic damage that continues to affect marginalized communities (Coakley, 2008, p. 101). The Troubles began largely due to Catholic Nationalist oppression and British historic colonization and, hence, the peace-building process in Northern Ireland is aimed at addressing both the trauma and devastation caused by overt violence and the deeper historical divisions that form the conflict’s core (Buchanan, 2008). To attend to these underlying dynamics, the concept of reconciliation has been integrated into Northern Ireland’s peace-building process (Byrne, Arnold, Fissuh, Standish, & Tennent, 2009a).

Reconciliation situates the relationship between former antagonists at the centre of a conflict’s long-term solution and restores and rebuilds intra- and inter-community connections through creative storytelling discourse processes that foster the mutual acknowledgement of experiences and the integration of the principles of truth, justice, mercy, and peace (Lederach, 1997, pp. 26–29). Dialogue and transcultural story-sharing are accessible, low-tech practices that involve explorations of knowledge, emotions, morality, identity, socialization, time and memory, and geography in a flexible, open, and safe milieu.
wherein all participants co-create, negotiate, and share meaning from their lived daily experiences (Senehi, 2009a, 2009b). Through these processes individuals are empowered – their increasing levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, knowledge, and skill provide them with the capacity to contribute to society (Schwerin, 1995).

The reconciliation of polarized communities is an important step within any peace-building process (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009). In Northern Ireland, cross-community dialogue and contact have been fostered at the local level by the efforts of voluntary community organizations (McCall & O’Dowd, 2008). Parallel to political and institutional cooperation, grassroots initiatives have led to increased contact between members of both communities, promoting relationship-building, goodwill, and trust (Byrne, Skarlato, Fissuh, & Irvin, 2009b). However, the sustainability of these efforts is questionable; indeed, many years after the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, there remains persistent social segregation (particularly in education and housing) and low political support for parties promoting a “shared regional identity” (Nagle & Clancy, 2010, p. 218).

This article focuses on grassroots voluntary action that is supported by a wider peace process and underpinned by substantial financial aid. Drawing upon a qualitative study that explored the views and experiences of 120 grassroots actors in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties, this article sheds light on the role played by community initiatives in the region’s peace-building process. This article contributes to existing knowledge and policies by identifying the core elements of grassroots peace-building practice and highlighting the importance of the interplay between citizens’ on both sides of the ethno-religious conflict in these peace-building and reconciliation efforts. Thus, this article offers in-depth analysis of the scope and content of the local actors’ participation and might be useful to those working in other locations undergoing similar processes. Key elements of an effective peace-building model are suggested and specific examples of local action are identified that may contribute to the improvement of peace-building and reconciliation efforts in other contexts affected by ethno-political conflict.

**External Assistance and Grassroots Peace-Building in Northern Ireland**

Targeted external economic assistance may be an important tool in post-accord peace-building and reconciliation (Adam, Collier, & Davies, 2008; Byrne, et al., 2009a; Byrne & Irvin, 2001). In Northern Ireland both the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (Peace I, II, and III) and the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) were established to provide communities with financial assistance so as to support local peace-building and development.
efforts (Buchanan, 2008). The EU Peace Programme has employed a phased approach, fostering social inclusion, economic growth, and the transformation of civic culture through Peace I (1995 – 1999); facilitating economic development through Peace II (2000 – 2006); and promoting peace-building, reconciliation, and the consolidation of progress through Peace III (2007 – 2013) (Byrne et al., 2009b, p. 341; Mitchell, 2010, p. 381). The IFI was established in 1986 in the wake of the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) and has directed its efforts toward tackling the root causes of sectarianism as well as promoting reconciliation (International Fund for Ireland [IFI], n.d., p. 1). The focus of IFI initiatives has evolved from the promotion of economic regeneration toward challenging sectarianism, nurturing reconciliation, and creating a “shared future” for all citizens (IFI, n.d., p. 4–5).

While meant to support localized efforts, the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation and the IFI can also be understood as manifestations of a broader historical trend that Mitchell (2010) identifies as the post-Cold War “European liberal(ising) peace project” (p. 371). It should be noted, however, that this liberal peace agenda might not ultimately empower those in the grassroots who have to live with its consequences (Mac Ginty, 2013, 2011, 2008). This is evident in Northern Ireland. For example, the complexity of the funding application processes and externally imposed reporting requirements place considerable strain on understaffed voluntary organizations to the detriment of overall program delivery (Buchanan, 2008; Byrne et al., 2009b; O’Dowd & McCall, 2008).

Unsurprisingly, the transferability of the peace-building model implemented in Northern Ireland is the subject of debate. O’Neill (2007) suggests that the peace process can serve as a model for transforming antagonistic ethno-political conflicts in other regions, highlighting that the identity-based challenges faced within this setting are shared by other contexts. Hence, the current politics of cultural pluralism evolving in Northern Ireland may be “a model of political engagement that is likely to be of significant relevance to other nationally divided societies” (O’Neill, 2007, p. 429). Other scholars reiterate this. For example, Murithi (2009) examines the macro-level aspects of the peace-building process, arguing that the political and constitutional foundations created by the 1998 GFA, which centered on mutual consent and political inclusion, provide a “useful example of the practical implementation of conflict resolution and the initiation of peace-building in the context of a sub-national conflict” (p. 174–175). Further, Racioppi and O’Sullivan See (2007) conclude that the decentralized and multi-level peace-building approaches of the EU-funded projects are “innovative and may serve as a model for other conflicts” (p. 383).
In contrast, Hughes (2009) argues that the peace-building process in Northern Ireland has been judged as important mainly by virtue of the considerable financial resources devoted toward it (p. 288). Hughes suggests that a more accurate measure of relevance would be based upon an assessment of what is actually achieved as a result of the subsequent peace-building action. Moreover, Wilson (2010) contends that it is important to highlight the peace-building experiences of “relatively peaceful and tolerant regions” committed to the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law (p. 5). Given the continued challenges posed to peace in Northern Ireland, he suggests that this country “has more to learn from the wider world than it has to teach” (Wilson, 2010, p. 5). Finally, there is much critique of the liberal peace-building approach, which suggests that externally imported models of action are neither sustainable nor effective (Mac Ginty, 2013, 2011, 2008; Richmond, 2011). Rather, hybrid models of peace-building are required whereby local people envision and own their own peace (Mac Ginty, 2011). Indeed, the polarization of Northern Ireland’s society since the 1998 signing of the GFA “should in itself be sufficient cause of concern to give anyone viewing the Irish peace process as a model for other intractable conflicts pause for thought” (Guelke, 2003, p. 76).

Therefore, additional in-depth research on specific peace-building approaches and practices in Northern Ireland is needed to discern whether it is an appropriately exportable model of conflict resolution and peace-building. The Northern Ireland experience does demonstrate that “even apparently hopeless conflict zones may, given appropriate conditions, be converted into stable, peaceful democracies” (Coakley, 2008, p. 111). However, one must be cautious when applying the Northern Ireland peace-building model elsewhere due to the unique and complex nature of all conflict situations.

**Methodology**

For this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 120 respondents regarding the effect external economic assistance from the IFI and the EU Peace III Fund has had upon local-level peace-building, development, and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and Border Counties. This study’s respondents included community group leaders and program development officers from Derry/Londonderry and the Border Counties of Armagh, Cavan, Donegal, Fermanagh, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan, and Tyrone. The interviews took place throughout the summer of 2010. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and all were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis employed a grounded theory approach wherein many themes were generated from a review of the interview transcripts (Bogdan &
Biklen, 2007; Druckman, 2005). This article focuses upon themes related to the respondents’ perceptions and experiences of effective grassroots peace-building and reconciliation practices. Fictitious names are used throughout to protect the participants’ anonymity.

**Effective Practices of Grassroots Peace-Building in Northern Ireland**

*Relationship-building and cross-community contact.* Particular components of peace-building have been identified by many scholars as having significant implications for fostering reconciliation between divided communities. Such aspects include enhancing understanding and trust, promoting cross-community dialogue and cooperation, and developing shared spaces for mutual learning and collaboration. For example, de Vries and de Paor (2005) found that encouraging cross-community contact between political violence survivors and ex-combatants can help to bring about inter-group healing and reconciliation. The importance of relationship-building is also emphasized by Campbell, Hughes, Hewstone, and Cairns (2008) who suggest that projects which develop social capital have “the potential to mobilize communities toward collective action in tackling the problems inherent in deprived areas” (p. 32) so that communities may “better respond to opportunities for regeneration and renewal” (Campbell, 2008, p. 32).

In Northern Ireland and the Border Counties many community groups have developed and implemented projects that offer opportunities for healing, social capital development, and reconciliation. Several study respondents discussed the importance of building relationships and trust among members of both communities within the overall peace-building process. One approach to this work involves the usage of ritual, symbolism, and tradition – mechanisms that have been identified as central to the resolution and transformation of deep-rooted ethno-political conflict (Schirch, 2005). The symbols and rituals of the dominant political tradition such as flags, colours, and emblems are fixtures of “cultural violence” as the less powerful community becomes psychologically intimidated by the cultural trappings of the hegemonic group (Galtung, 1996). Consequently, within peace-building it is important to challenge and transform these manifestations of cultural violence so as to foster social inclusion. Ritual, for example, has the “capacity to make symbols speak for wider political concerns” and can be employed to challenge oppositional conceptualizations of identity (Nagle & Clancy, 2010, p. 131). Further, within Northern Ireland and the Border Counties it is also necessary to build relationships between communities in order to ensure the continuity of traditional cultural practices. This issue is discussed by a community group leader from Derry:
SIMON: We didn’t know a lot about building bridges. We probably didn’t even know very many people from other communities in our city. We felt safe and secure within our own community, our own confines...But we also recognised that if we wanted to continue to have our commemorations and celebrations then we would have to win the goodwill of a number of people from the Roman Catholic community. So, although we had no expertise and no advice or guidance we set about trying to create that goodwill. We set about trying to explain...why we had celebrations, so we set about trying to explain that to anyone that wanted to listen.

Simon realized that in order to build long-term sustainable peace the Protestant Unionist community had to foster goodwill within the Catholic Unionist community in Derry. Another community group leader from Derry also emphasized promoting contact between people from both communities so as to challenge misconceptions and mistrust:

OLIVIA: By putting in programs that allowed people to come in contact with each other they broke down mistrust rather than generating trust. I think...they had a big impact on breaking down mistrust, breaking down misconceptions...to make people step over the edge, to make them to step outside the box.

Similarly, Olivia opines that NGO programs have broken down sectarian barriers and generated cross-community trust-building. However, as identified by a community group leader from the Border Area, it is important to link contact initiatives with broader strategic efforts:

LIAM: At a local grassroots level, sometimes they do things without thinking in terms of where this fits into the political context of society. People are always more interested in doing as opposed to...looking at where [their action] fits in – but are they in sync or on track [with the broader context]?

Liam emphasizes the necessity of linking micro-level initiatives to the macro-level activities of local politicians. Relatedly, a community group leader from Derry emphasized the role of politicians in creating cross-community alliances:

ARNOLD: The political class in Northern Ireland is still very rooted in the community...Those same politicians are involved in the groundwork at the grassroots level. It is a very easy thing for us all to say, “Sure we are getting on doing it here [while] all the politicians are squabbling away.” And...the
reality is that the politicians have been doing it, they have made cross-community alliances, they have been…showing that this work can be done, it is possible.

Arnold points out the importance of recognizing the work of politicians in trying to move the peace process forward. In addition, practical concerns can also foster positive working relationships between communities. For example, a community group leader from the Border Area discussed the significance of sharing resources and space to achieve a common goal:

MATILDA: Here we have a kind of...working model of how that positive relationship...can be harnessed, the synergy of working together and using each other’s resources rather than a community organisation having to set up another office and have the overheads associated with that…I think the days of everybody pulling in different directions are gone, they have to go…you’ll achieve much more working together.

As Matilda notes, sharing resources in an interdependent fashion builds cross-community ties and improves the flow of communication.

Reflexive dialogue is another integral part of cross-community interaction and relationship-building. This is “a form of guided and interactive introspection [within] which disputants speak…in the presence of their adversaries…about their needs and interests viewed interactively through the prism of the conflict situation” (Rothman, 1996, p. 347). Such a process is identified by a community group leader from Derry as critical to conflict transformation and reconciliation:

LARRY: I think the only solution [is]...dialogue, so when we are meditating on a Tuesday night and the bricks get thrown from the wall across into the Fountain and the police vehicles arrive I make certain we open the windows and...that they see us mediating…That is the only way forward. I don’t think we can transform the stones when they go back into it. So, therefore, it has to be dialogue.

Larry observes that mediation and cross-community dialogue are necessarily to end violence and that it is important to publicize the effectiveness of this work. Such cross-community dialogue and contact is also necessary to challenge stereotypes and ethnocentrism (Ryan, 2007, p. 70). For example, a community group leader from Derry shared the following observations:
BOBBY: Before, a Protestant mightn’t have ever met a Catholic…Now they can mix and talk together better…The same Catholic mightn’t have met a Protestant for all his life until he started work…But I think people accept each other more now and work with people and realise that people don’t have horns growing out of their heads just because they are a different religion.

Bobby notes that when Protestants and Catholics meet and talk, they share experiences with each other that transcend stereotypes and build community. The improvement of intergroup relations at the grassroots level is also a necessary component of human rights work and is embedded within the institutional framework of the 1998 GFA. When local communities work together to promote human rights in Northern Ireland and the Border region, they can also address the issues that lie at the root of the conflict. A community group leader from Derry identified the relationship between grassroots cross-community interaction and human rights work:

BRIAN: I worked on one of the programmes about the potential for a Bill of Rights, human rights. It’s a good programme because…it works on community groups…and they took it right down to the grassroots levels of what human rights means to you and those groups.

**Economic development, cooperation, and leadership.** Economic development initiatives can also nurture peace-building and reconciliation by reducing material deprivation, improving self- and community-esteem, and offering opportunities for learning (Jeong, 2005; Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009). The private sector can be a significant actor within a peace-building process, although its impact depends largely on the regulatory framework and incentives provided by “public authorities, commercial and financial intermediaries, [and] local, national and global interest groups” (Carbonnier, 2009, p. 253). Hence, it is fundamentally important that the involvement of the private sector facilitates and not hinders local ownership of the peace-building process (Mac Ginty, 2013, 2011, 2008; Pouligny, 2009).

One of the important contributions made by both the IFI and EU Peace Funds has been to infuse resources into grassroots economic development activities. Through these efforts, two crucial peace-building objectives have been achieved: the level of inequality that has negatively affected the Nationalist community for many decades has been reduced and a large section of grassroots-level actors have been empowered to undertake creative sustainable development initiatives. However, respondents in this study also noted the need
for close cooperation between local actors and the central government to ensure the effective
disbursement of funds. For example, a community group leader from Derry expressed her
understandings of the funding allocation process:

LYNNE: I think on the whole it has been positive; I think it produced money, introduced money that wouldn’t have been forthcoming from anywhere else to engage in grassroots community work…and I have been impressed by the way the money is distributed and the attempt to involve communities in the allocation of funding through local District partnerships, in particular with Peace II.

Lynne appreciates how the external aid has contributed to grassroots community work in a distribution process that is fair and just. Another community leader from Derry emphasized the significance of economic regeneration and the need for changes in economic structure and practice:

ROGER: It’s about how you approach the whole issue of sustainable development and transformation, and I think it has to be done on a citywide basis…We are trying to devise a regeneration process that changes how we do things fundamentally at the core because we recognise that if you continue to do the things that you have always done you will always get the same result.

Roger emphasized the need for a regeneration process to develop core and local capacities so as to create a critical mass of human and social capital that can continue the developmental process after the external funding evaporates in 2013. He also noted that nurturing socio-economic development in post-accord situations is a long-term and incremental process. For example, Making Belfast Work (MBW) (an initiative of the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment) involves “a twin-track approach” that incorporates both the European Union and “indigenous policy evolution” (Hodgett & Johnson, 2001, p. 326) – a combination that has made this a very successful development initiative (Hodgett & Johnson, 2001). While elaborating on this theme, a community group leader from Derry identified the cumulative nature of peace-building work:

MICHAEL: I think peace is built by one, by one, by one…It has to do with…eventually creating a critical mass, and you reach a tipping point, and things change. But that isn’t always easily identifiable either in advance or even retrospectively. It takes some sort of long-term perspective before you see all this…I think the same is happening here…there are many, many things
Peace and Conflict Studies

happening here, which may not have that great single sun-burst impact but are much more gradual.

Thus, Michael suggests that peace-building radiates out from micro-level interactions that gradually culminate in broader systemic change. Moreover, another community group leader from Derry cited an example of effective partnerships in facilitating effective development:

PATRICIA: We…have had what was called the Local Strategy Partnerships….it may not have been perfect, but it was workable. It builds capacity, it showed inclusion. It allowed grassroots voices to be heard.

Patricia avers that strategic partnerships build local capacities and facilitate the inclusion of grassroots perspectives.

In contrast, other respondents identified the need to clarify the preferred definition of development, highlighting that it must include considerations of both economic growth and the empowerment of all societal actors. For example, the concept of Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) encompasses both notions of development and suggests that it is necessary for marginalized populations to participate in and access information for capacity-building (Unwin, 2009). In Northern Ireland, ICT4D played an important role in this process, as identified by a community group leader from the Border Area:

ROBERT: It’s very difficult for people in the Border region to access third level education…and we, through the funding that we have received, have been able to facilitate outreach programmes [that provide]…satellite broadcasting…so that people can participate and that the cost is minimum in terms of time and the financial output. [Also]…because many of the courses were cross-Border, networks – unofficial and official – were developed over time. I think that has had a very positive impact in bringing people together.

Robert highlights that distance education programs empower people, especially those residing in rural areas, to further their education and employment opportunities. Furthermore, many respondents noted that the maintenance of a sustainable peace-building process in Northern Ireland requires a synergy of developmental efforts between macro-level politics and micro-level actors. However, many respondents argued that coordination between these levels has fallen short of their expectations. For example, a community leader from the Border Area explained the role of local politicians in fostering important connections:
NIALL: We definitely need the political will, and if it’s going to be sustainable...we need to have the government, we need to have all of that body on board...But the local politicians have got more involved in the peace process and the programmes and engaging with communities, and you definitely see that now in the work when you’re out on the ground and even the groups would tell you that they are a bit more connected.

Niall recognizes the key role of local political leaders in moving the peace process forward to the benefit of all citizens. In addition, a community group leader from Derry explained how styles and perceptions of leadership have changed:

ALLYSON: At last in Northern Ireland a certain amount of common sense has come to the fore. Both communities’ people have realised these leaders in the past have led us down a dead end and we have hit the buffers on both sides. There are three thousand four hundred murders and twenty thousand injuries...[and] we are still living together. If this was to start again the whole thing would start all over again and where would that get us all? What is important is peace and prosperity. War brings want but only peace can bring prosperity.

Allyson notes that local citizens want to elect leaders who will shore up the peace process so that they can prosper economically. Thus, social economic development NGOs like Rath Mor Business and Community Enterprise Centre in Derry were created by Creggan Enterprises as a community economic development venture to address the social and economic needs of the people in the Creggan and the Bogside through the local ownership of business initiatives where all profits are reinvested in the community.

Local grassroots endeavours contribute to structural changes. Violent ethno-political conflict is often rooted in a social structure that privileges certain identity categories over others (Jeong, 2005). This “structural violence” is built into social institutions and the very fabric of society in a manner that sustains inequality, prevents some people from satisfying their basic human needs, and encourages the use of overt violence by sectarian political actors seeking to maintain the status quo (Galtung, 1996; Galtung & Höivik, 1971; Galtung, 1978 cited in Montiel, 2001). In the past, structural violence has negatively affected the working class Nationalist and Unionist communities and, consequently, peace-building in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties must involve restructuring society so as to ensure the equitable distribution of resources (Byrne et al., 2009a). Numerous respondents in this
study identified that the first step of this transformation is to educate people about the systemic nature of social inequality. A community group leader from Derry highlighted that externally-funded local peace-building and conflict resolution training initiatives have done much to achieve this objective:

AOIFE: How do we empower and enable people to carry out work at the grassroots level?...[O]ur ethos is based on the premise of “What is it that the people need to heal? What are the unresolved issues that they need to address before we challenge them to open themselves up to other possibilities?” If we are holding onto hurt, and it feeds into our prejudice and discrimination, we have to deal with that first.

Aoife recognizes that people need the space to be educated about the conflict and to heal from past atrocities. For example, the Corrymeela Community was established 48 years ago in Ballycastle, Co. Down with the vision of creating authentic interface experiences between both communities, especially through its youth and primary/secondary school projects. Further, youth in Northern Ireland and the Border Areas have been identified as a specific population requiring intensive long-term economic, political, social, and psychological support within the peace-building process (Senehi & Byrne, 2006). In an effort to meet these needs, many projects have been initiated, including the IFI-funded project described here by a community group leader form Derry:

NIAMH: One of the programmes that we [were] involved in...[took] young people from across the community out of Northern Ireland...We ran two [cross-community youth camps] in New Zealand, and we ran two to Boston.

Niamh notes that taking Protestant and Catholic youth abroad can build important ties among the projects participants. For example, Peace Players International brings Protestant and Catholic children together on mixed basketball, rugby, soccer, Gaelic football, and hurling teams to forge new friendships and to work with international facilitators that help participants develop leadership skills and create a common ground of understanding. Another NGO community group leader from Derry highlighted how youth perceive the peace process and how certain practices can expose them to a healthy and vibrant political system. She emphasized the importance of collaborative processes whereby various actors work together so that young people are prevented from reliving the trauma of the Troubles:

KATIE: I remember one of them telling me the reason he gave up his struggle and joined the peace process and became...part of an ex-combatant
organisation to help bring about the peace, was that he looked at his teenage son and saw the potential for him to go down the road that he went down, and he said “I didn’t want my son being in jail for 10 years or 15 years.” So he got involved in the peace process...We are all in it together, working with ex-combatants, working with community leaders, working with educators, colleges..., the youth service. Together we hope that there is a greater understanding that we cannot go back.

Katie’s NGO works with former Loyalist and Republican combatants. These participants desire a future for their children that is both peaceful and progressive.

Women have also been identified as a group with particular needs and assets that must be considered within peace-building processes. United Nations’ reports have identified that women and children are the most vulnerable populations within ethno-political conflict (McKay, 2007). Furthermore, the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (adopted in 2000) unequivocally reaffirmed the role of women in peace-building and conflict resolution. It identifies:

[t]he important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and [stresses] the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution. (United Nations, 2000)

As a consequence, many NGOs emphasize the need to ensure the equal participation of women at the governmental policy, programming, and planning levels (McKay, 2007). In Northern Ireland and the Border Counties the external funding has created opportunities at the local level for women to participate in educational, economic, and peace-building activities in numerous ways as explained by many respondents in this study. For example, an NGO leader from the Border Area highlighted such efforts in the following way:

JESSICA: There are groups that I could take you to in Derry where there is tremendous trust, women who would have been divided, and their partners would have killed one another and [they] are now the best of friends, and they are leading lights and champions. So I can bring you to places of real hope and desire.

Jessica’s NGO works with Protestant and Catholic women in the Border Area who have developed important relationships across the bi-communal divide over the years. Another
community group leader from the Border Area mentioned how the funding created opportunities for women to develop skills and learn new information:

ROBERT: One of the most important outcomes of European money to this Border Region was money that was given over to the setting up of [a programme aimed at creating learning opportunities for women]...During the years in which it was operating, women came out of their homes because it was a free programme, they came out of their homes for the first time to do this…the thousands and thousands of women who…left school maybe thirty years before or forty years before and came out to do this programme in personal development, skills assessment, skills transfer and mental health, physical health, and assertiveness and responsibilities.

Robert articulates that his NGO has fostered the empowerment of women in the Border Area by providing them with important capacity-building opportunities.

Finally, innovative peace-building methods such as music, storytelling, and the arts can also be used to help the survivors of violence heal from trauma. As a consequence, these creative processes can be catalysts for peace-building in divided societies (Senehi, 2009a, 2002). Some of our respondents noted that by using these methods strategically it is possible to create a common space wherein members of both communities can freely express their hopes and fears (Shank & Schirch, 2008). A community group leader from the Border Area mentioned a number of such projects as follows:

JENNIFER: One of our IFI approved projects…[involved] twelve towns and villages on a cross-Border basis and the idea was to give them a boost in development, but a certain amount of trust had to be developed between the different groups…It’s kind of like shared public art pieces that are developed…you had to get communities on a North-South basis to actually share their ideas or their creativity or their whole inspiration behind a project before you could develop a piece of public art that would actually meet the needs of both groups.

Jennifer’s NGO supported Protestants and Catholics in the Border area to co-create a public art piece that represented both communities. For example, Cooperation Ireland was established in 1979 to bring young Protestants and Catholics on the island together in joint projects and programs to break down sectarian walls by learning about each other’s cultural traditions and by providing the leadership skills to build a vibrant, tolerant and pluralist
Peace and Conflict Studies

Another NGO leader from the Border Area suggested that arts and music are apolitical tools that allow people to operate without the assumption of hidden agendas:

WILLIAM: I think the reason we see the arts playing such an important role in peace-building is because it is something that isn’t political or overtly political…I think what has happened is that…people view the political parties and the political individuals as very much coloured by their own education and upbringing…If you can change people’s perceptions through integration at a younger age…maybe if they do go on to politics they’ll take that with them.

William’s NGO provides a venue for young Protestants and Catholics to come together to play music infused with their cultural traditions and to work collaboratively to develop new joint pieces of music. This fosters mutual understanding and relationship-building.

Overall, the study participants’ responses indicate that a wide variety of strategies have been employed to address both the immediate effects of violent conflict and the underlying sources of social tension in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties.

Conclusions: Elements of a Peace-Building Model

While it may not be possible to construct a clear, bounded model of peace-building for export to other conflict situations, the Northern Ireland experience does allow for the identification of important lessons learned. The liberal democratic peace applied to societies transitioning out of protracted conflict and political violence offers lessons that can guide future practice – particularly in terms of the facilitation of cross-community interaction (Tannam, 2006, p. 274). For example, the lessons from these peace-building efforts could be applied in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cyprus, and Iraq – societies transitioning out of war and toward which the international community has directed considerable resources for rebuilding both infrastructure and tattered relationships in the wake of massive violence and trauma. At the same time it is important to recognize the complexity of each of these individual conflicts that necessitate localized-international hybrid interventions. In Northern Ireland and the Border Counties the external funding from the IFI and EU Peace Funds has nurtured the voluntary sector and created many positive cross-community ties across the bi-communal divide (Byrne et al., 2009b). By drawing upon the perceptions and experiences of grassroots actors, this study has allowed for the identification of several “key elements” of effective peace-building practice that – given their congruency with existing literature – may be conceptualized as applicable to other contexts of ethno-political conflict.
The first of these elements is the necessity of developing significant relationships between actors at multiple levels of social interaction. For example, former Loyalist paramilitaries are actively engaged in restorative justice, community leadership, and transformative work with former Republican paramilitaries (Shirlow, 2012). Further, in response to changing political and socioeconomic terrain, Unionist community development groups have organized “around cultural and historical traditions activities” that address the psycho-cultural roots of the conflict and provide a critical training arena for community development and peace-building workers (Smithey, 2011, p. 223). This is challenging work because, as identified by Smithy (2011), “changing the rules and norms with which many Protestants identify (such as accepting external funding or meeting with Republicans) or the symbolic displays that perform identity [is] a tenuous and sometimes delicate business” (p. 223). Despite this, both communities continue to experiment with and change their collective identities in constructive new ways “that are ontologically consonant but that open the group’s orientation to hear adversaries in a new constructive way or at least minimize the alienating effect of a particular cultural expression” (Smithy, 2011, p. 50). Such modifications are unfolding in the Unionist community, resulting in new understandings as both communities grapple with a shared past and reframe their stories to allow for intergroup collaboration and co-existence (Shirlow, 2012; Smithey, 2011).

Study participants identified that the formation of such relationships was necessary to ensure the effective targeting of aid and the efficient use of monetary and human resources. This approach is supported by Lederach’s (1997) integrated peace-building framework. He argues that effective peace-building is never strictly a top-down or bottom-up affair; rather, it requires the development of both vertical relationships (between top-level, mid-level, and grassroots-level actors) and horizontal relationships (across communities, among multiple sectors, and so on). In this manner a complex web of relationships is constructed that facilitates the emergence of approaches that creatively maximizes available resources and are responsive to changing conflict dynamics (Lederach, 2005). Some participants further expanded upon this notion, stating that such relationship development also requires significant investment in educational and skill development services.

Relatedly, the second element of effective peace-building practice is the need for external financial assistance to be appropriately targeted and effectively distributed – a criterion that can only be met if there is consultation with local communities and the grassroots organizations delivering peace-building programs. Participants in this study
identified that the aid monies provided through the IFI and EU Peace III Programme have benefitted local communities greatly, infusing vital resources for peace-building, reconciliation, and development efforts that otherwise would not have been available. However, many participants qualified this by emphasizing that the effectiveness of the assistance has been dependent upon the extent to which it has addressed community needs and has been disbursed in an accessible and equitable manner. Further, while participants expressed that both the IFI and the EU Peace III Fund have sought to adjust their funding delivery mechanisms in response to changing conflict dynamics and local concerns, the perception remains that the complexity of the funding application process has been a hindrance to marginalized groups. Thus, effective peace-building requires on-going collaboration between funding agencies and local communities so as to develop appropriate priorities and disbursement mechanisms (Mac Ginty, 2013, 2011, 2008).

Ensuring the sustainability of peace-building processes is the third element of effective practice. This was a central concern of many participants in this study – an unsurprising finding given that the external funding is set to expire in 2013. Numerous participants identified different mechanisms for ensuring the continuation of local peace-building efforts in the absence of outside assistance, some of which include: the development of interpersonal relationships; the challenging of inequitable social structures; the creation of a fertile pool of human and social capital at the local level; the fostering of hope and leadership amongst youth; the transformation of attitudes; and the re-conceptualization of cultural symbols and traditions. Overall, it was stressed that all peace-building activities should contribute to the realization of a long-term vision and help build a stable platform for continued change. In addition, many participants identified the development of a culture of collaboration amongst local NGOs in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties; that is, thousands of voluntary organizations are currently working together so as to share resources and attain common goals, thus creating what Boulding (1998) terms an “NGO peace-building community” (cited in Reychler & Paffenholz, 2001, p. x). This is another mechanism through which long-term sustainability may be achieved.

However, it should also be noted that external funding may also encourage a dependency culture wherein a plethora of community groups compete with each other to access limited resources (Mac Ginty, 2008; Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009). Indeed, several respondents in this study indicated that some community groups have developed “peace-building projects” in name only; that is, these groups engage in little cross-community
collaboration and operate primarily from a single-identity basis. Thus, it should not be assumed that external funding will, in and of itself, provide a pragmatic intervention for communities transitioning out of post-accord societies (Mac Ginty, 2013, 2011).

The fourth element of effective peace-building practice is the need to address both the immediate effects of violent conflict and the underlying conflict dynamics that give rise to social tension. Both of these peace-building avenues must be pursued simultaneously using a plethora of multimodal strategies. The participants in this study identified a variety of issues that require consideration within Northern Ireland’s peace-building process, including: trauma (and the transmission of trauma narratives to younger generations); socioeconomic inequality and unemployment; cultural narratives and symbolism; the lack of access to education and skills training; and misconceptions of the Other. Furthermore, specific groups (for example, youth) were identified as having particular needs that require tailored programming. Thus, there is no singular catchall cure for violence and conflict; rather, it is necessary to address multiple issues of concern, interpersonal and intercommunity relationships, and broader systemic factors simultaneously (Lederach, 1997, p. 56).

The need to address multiple conflict factors in a comprehensive and coordinated manner leads into the fifth element of effective peace-building practice: the usage of multiple strategies that are both linked to broader peace-building goals and directly relevant to local needs, capabilities, and visions. Participants identified a variety of specific strategies employed by their organizations that met this criterion, including: storytelling and engagement with the arts; the usage of ritual, symbolism and tradition; dialogue and contact groups; the creation of shared public spaces; training and educational initiatives; and job creation programs. Many participants noted that each initiative was designed to meet a variety of peace-building goals simultaneously. For example, cross-community economic development projects served to meet the immediate material needs of local populations while also fostering reconciliation by facilitating intergroup contact, the sharing of resources, and the pursuit of a common goal. Such efforts help to maximize the impact of external assistance while cultivating local capacities and relationships.

These five elements of effective peace-building practice – the development of significant relationships between actors at multiple levels of social interaction; the undertaking of on-going consultation with local communities so as to effectively target and distribute external aid; the development of mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of peace-building processes in the long term; addressing both immediate issues as well as underlying
conflict dynamics; and the usage of multiple strategies that meet both local needs and broader visions – can all together be considered elements of an effective model of peace-building practice that may be appropriately applied to other settings of ethno-political conflict. These five elements respond to the cumulative, organic nature of peace-building and directly address the complex and dynamic nature of conflict. Consequently, they provide a sufficiently flexible model of practice adaptable to other contextual conditions.

Acknowledgements
We are grateful to Jessica Senehi, Hamdesa Tuso, Tom Boudreau, and the anonymous reviewers of the Peace and Conflict Studies journal for reading and commenting on a number of drafts of this article. The article is dedicated to the memory of Sean’s mother, Patricia Byrne, who passed away on February 21, 2013. The research for this article is supported by a three-year research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

References


On Success in Peace Processes: Readiness Theory and the Aceh Peace Process

Amira Schiff

Abstract

The study presents an analysis of the conflict resolution process in the Aceh conflict between the government of Indonesia (GoI) and the Free Aceh Movement (“Gerekan Aceh Merdeka” or GAM). Starting with unofficial efforts by the Indonesian side from mid-2003, which eventually led the parties to the negotiation table and to the signing of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in August 2005, the peace process put an end to the 30-year conflict over the independence of Aceh. The peaceful resolution of the Aceh conflict will be examined using readiness theory, which posits the factors that lead parties to negotiate and indicates which factors contribute to success in reaching a mutual agreement. The aim of this study is twofold. The first aim is to better understand the factors that led to the MoU. The second aim of this research is to offer a systematic examination of the assumptions of readiness theory, which have been the subject of few case studies to date. The study's findings indicate that the Aceh process was characterized by an increase in the parties’ level of readiness – to the point of being fully ready to sign an agreement. In the pre-negotiation phase the motivation of both parties increased significantly, while the level of optimism rose moderately on the part of the GoI but not GAM, whereas during the negotiations motivation as well as optimism increased significantly on both sides. Nevertheless, the application of readiness theory to the case study also gives rise to a number of questions regarding the theory's hypotheses and scientific status.

Introduction

The phenomenon of “intractable conflicts” has been the subject of extensive theoretical exploration in the fields of conflict resolution and international relations during the past three decades (Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2005; Coleman, 2003, 2006; Gray, Coleman & Putnam, 2007; Kriesberg, 1998; Kriesberg, et al, 1989). Research in this area has focused on the conditions that lead parties in a conflict to enter into negotiations and to reach an agreement that resolves the conflict (Diehl, 1998; Diehl & Goertz, 2000; Kriesberg et al, 1989; Maoz & Mor, 2002; Pruitt, 1997, 2005, 2007; Pruitt and Olczak, 1995; Zartman, 2000,
As part of this research trend, the current case study presents an analysis of a conflict resolution process that was conducted in the conflict between the government of Indonesia (GoI) and the Free Aceh Movement (“Gerekan Aceh Merdeka” or GAM) over the independence of Aceh. This process culminated in the signing of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in January 2005. The Aceh peace process will be examined using readiness theory, which posits the factors that lead parties to negotiate and indicates which factors contribute to success and which to failure of negotiations (Pruitt, 1997, 2005, 2007).

The aim of this study is twofold. The first aim is to better understand the factors that led to the conflict resolution in Aceh. Towards this end, the study will address three central questions: 1. Why did the antagonists agree to negotiate? 2. Which factors led the parties to reach an agreement? 3. Is there a correlation between the factors that led the parties to the negotiating table and the success of the process? The second aim of this research is to offer a systematic examination of the assumptions of readiness theory, which has been the subject of few case studies to date (Pruitt, 1997, 2005, 2007).

This article includes three main sections. The first section presents a concise explanation of readiness theory, followed by the research questions, assumptions, and methodology. The second section describes the factors that led to the success of the Aceh process though the lenses of readiness theory, first presenting the factors that brought the parties to the negotiating table and then presenting the factors that affected the outcome of negotiations. The third section includes an examination of the assumptions of readiness theory as applied to the case study and a presentation of the theory’s limitations as revealed by this analysis.

Theoretical Overview and Methodology

Readiness Theory

A survey of the studies and approaches to research on the termination of intractable conflicts – such as the work of Zartman (2000, 2008), Diehl (1998), Diehl and Goertz (2000), and Maoz and Mor (2002) – reveals that each of these is limited in its ability to explain certain aspects of the resolution of these conflicts, and that there is room for the more comprehensive perspective that readiness theory proposes. The literature on enduring international rivalries (EIR) is limited to conflicts involving states, and the work in the area of

---

1 This research was supported by a grant from the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, Tel Aviv University.
Ripeness theory provides a limited understanding of the dynamics of the stages beyond the pre-negotiation stage or of the factors that lead parties in non-violent conflicts to choose negotiations. Readiness theory, in contrast, provides an opportunity to examine various factors that influence the resolution of conflicts that are not necessarily inter-state, intra-state, or violent in nature.

Readiness theory refers to a number of conditions that have the potential to bring parties to negotiation, as well as factors that encourage them to make concessions during negotiations and to reach an agreement. Pruitt notes that the theory is potentially useful for researchers seeking to scientifically test hypotheses about the significance of various factors in conflict resolution processes, including conflicts in which violence is not a salient factor. With the exception of a few articles by Pruitt (1997, 2007) in which he applies readiness theory, there has been no comprehensive study that systematically examines the variety of factors that play a role in bringing parties to the negotiating table and to the resolution of their dispute.

According to Pruitt, (2005, 2007), readiness theory describes the conditions appropriate for commencing negotiations in the language of psychological variables, with a focus on the processes underway on each side separately. The theory explains which factors could bring parties to the negotiating table, as well as which factors might lead them to make concessions during negotiations, to accept an agreement, and to also implement it (Pruitt, 1997, 2005, 2007). “Readiness” is a characteristic of a party in a conflict that reflects the thinking of the leadership regarding the conflict, and it can vary within a wide scale of conciliatory behavior (Pruitt, 2007). A low level of readiness fosters moderate conciliatory gestures. As the readiness level rises, the party’s behavior becomes more conciliatory and might take the form of a ceasefire or commencement of negotiations. In order for the parties to continue negotiating and make concessions, an additional increase in readiness is needed; thus, the greater the readiness on both sides, the more likely they are to negotiate and to reach an agreement (Pruitt, 2005, pp. 9-15; 2007, p. 1525). According to readiness theory, each side might have different reasons for entering negotiations and reaching an agreement. The level of readiness can also attest to the nature of the agreement reached. When readiness is unequal, the party with a higher level of readiness needs to make more concessions and, therefore, will be in a less desirable position in the final agreement (Pruitt, 2005, p. 13).
As Pruitt notes, readiness entails two psychological variables, which he terms motivation and optimism. These encourage a party to a conflict to agree to conduct negotiations and to reach an agreement (Pruitt, 1997, 2005, 2007):

1. Motivation to end the conflict derives from any or all of the following: (a) a sense that the conflict is unwinnable (that is, a sense that one is losing creates greater motivation), (b) a sense that the conflict generates unacceptable costs or risks, and (c) pressure from a powerful third party. The stronger the third party and the greater the pressure it applies, the more the parties will endeavor to demonstrate that they seek an end to the conflict (appearance of motivational change). This appearance turns into motivation to end the conflict if the third party is consistent, is in the appropriate state of mind, and demands actual motivational change.

2. Optimism refers to the possibility of concluding negotiations with an agreement that is acceptable to both sides. It requires a certain degree of faith that the final agreement will meet its objectives, as well as the perception that the negotiator on the other side can in fact make a commitment on behalf of that side and will indeed adhere to the agreement (Pruitt, personal communication, March 9, 2008). At the initial stage, when considering the option of negotiations, optimism is a function of trust between the parties. Preserving the optimism requires an understanding that a formula acceptable to both sides is achievable. The greater the apparent distance is between the parties, the lower the level of optimism (Pruitt, 2005, p. 8). Optimism derives from three states of mind: 1. lower aspirations; 2. working trust; and 3. a state of mind that perceives “light at the end of the tunnel” (leading to a higher level of optimism), meaning that an acceptable agreement is taking shape and that the other side is prepared to make the necessary concessions. According to the theory, the third element must exist in order for the peace process to succeed.

Pruitt notes that the variables that generate motivation and optimism may vary in intensity. Thus, the stronger the abovementioned states of mind, the greater the readiness of the parties will be. Full readiness exists “when the situation is symmetrical, such that both parties are motivated to achieve de-escalation and both are optimistic about reaching an agreement” (Pruitt, 1997, p. 239).

According to the theory, motivation and optimism have the following qualities:

1. They are necessary variables, and they must exist to a certain degree in order to proceed towards negotiations.
2. They are mutually related in a number of ways: (a) Optimism determines the extent to which the motivation to de-escalate shapes behavior (Pruitt, 1997, 2005, 2007). (b) Motivation to end the conflict can foster optimism through a number of mechanisms, which can potentially generate a confidence-building cycle, leading to negotiations and to mutual concessions once negotiations commence (Pruitt, 2005, pp. 19-21; 2007, p. 1529). First, motivation moderates the parties’ demands, thereby encouraging greater optimism regarding the success of negotiations. Second, motivation often leads to the accumulation of information that challenges preexisting states of mind. The third mechanism is wishful thinking. In seeking information, wishful thinking plays a part; that is, there is a tendency to find selective evidence of the other side’s logic or motivation to end the conflict. Fourth, when a party is interested in ending a conflict, it sends conciliatory signals or seeks clandestine contact with the other party. If the latter is also motivated, it will respond to these signals, thereby increasing the first party’s optimism and encouraging it to send even more meaningful conciliatory signals. The result is a cycle of conciliatory gestures and an increase in optimism. Fifth, a party’s motivation to end a conflict is often discerned by a third party, making the latter more optimistic about ending the conflict. The motivation of a third party to end the conflict can encourage it to take the initiative in bringing the disputing parties to negotiations (Pruitt, 2007, p. 1530). These third-party efforts can increase optimism on both sides and eventually lead to full negotiations. These mechanisms encourage optimism about the success of negotiations and generate new thinking about the rival. Optimism also develops in additional ways, such as through direct contact with people on the other side – for example, through workshops on problem solving.

3. Each variable can compensate for the shortcomings of the other. Although both variables are necessary to a certain extent in order for negotiations to commence and to reach an agreement, a greater degree of one element can compensate for a lesser degree of the other (Pruitt, 2005, p. 10; 2007, p. 1525).

Methodology

The present study employs the enhanced case study methodology of a single crucial case study for interpretive and analytical purposes (Bercovitch, 1997; Druckman, 2005; George & Bennett, 2005). In this capacity, the Aceh peace process will be analyzed in terms of the variables presented by the readiness theory and will be used as a theory-testing case.
study whose purpose is “to strengthen or reduce support for a theory, narrow or extend the scope conditions of a theory…” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 109).

The study includes two structures of dependent variables. The first relates to the beginning of the negotiations and focuses on the readiness that was required for commencement of negotiations. In this capacity, we will study the variables that influenced the decision of the parties to start official negotiations in January 2005. The second dependent variable is the outcome of negotiations. We will identify the factors that affected the readiness of the parties to sign an agreement in August 2005.

In order to maximize the theoretical value derived from the analysis, we will focus on the following questions: What were the factors that brought the parties to the negotiating table? What role did the third party play during the pre-negotiations stage? During the stage of negotiations, what were the factors that pushed the parties towards agreement or, alternatively, towards failure?

In addition, the following set of standardized theory-based questions will be used to generate case-based generalizations:

1. Is each of the factors cited by readiness theory as a source of motivation to commence negotiations indeed a sufficient condition, as the theory claims?
2. Is optimism a necessary condition for commencing negotiations, as readiness theory claims?
3. Can a high level of motivation during the pre-negotiations stage compensate for a low level of optimism or even the absence of optimism, in order for readiness to increase?
4. Does the case study confirm the assumption that the less trust there is between parties and the more rigid and disparate their positions (both sources of low optimism), the stronger their motivation to end the conflict must be if negotiations are to ensue (Pruitt, 2005, p. 11)?
5. Is increased optimism on both sides necessary for negotiations to begin?
6. What are the implications of the various sources of motivation for the outcome of negotiations?
7. When parties approach the negotiating table with low optimism, is an increase in optimism a necessary condition for agreement?
8. Can an increase in motivation – by urging the parties towards agreement – compensate for a low and unchanging level of optimism during negotiations?
9. Are there additional factors that affect the pre-negotiations process and the negotiations, which are not addressed by readiness theory?

The Aceh Peace Process

In August 2005, after three decades of violent conflict in Aceh entailing an armed struggle for Aceh’s independence from Indonesian rule (Aspinall, 2003, pp. 128-147; Schulze, 2010, pp. 82-84), GAM and the Indonesian government signed the Helsinki MoU, a broad framework agreement for peace. The process was mediated by the former president of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari, who chairs the Finnish non-governmental organization Crisis Management Initiative (CMI). The success of the Helsinki process – which produced a peace agreement in only seven months and included different conditions than the parties had previously demanded – is especially salient in light of past failures to reach an agreement. (Aspinall, 2005, 2008; Aspinall & Crouch, 2003; Biswas, 2009; Iyer & Mitchell, 2007; Schulze, 2006, 2007).

The official negotiations between the GoI and GAM stopped when the Geneva talks reached a dead end with the collapse of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in May 2003. The Indonesian army then launched a military campaign in Aceh to destroy GAM (ICG, 2005; Morfit, 2007, pp. 118-129; Schulze, 2007, pp. 90-91-93). In parallel to the military campaign, in mid-2003, unofficial efforts by the Indonesian side began, when Yusuf Kalla, with Megawati’s unofficial approval, sought to establish contacts with GAM in order to explore the possibility of reaching a peace agreement. These efforts became official Indonesian government policy upon the election of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) as president and Kalla as vice-president in October 2004, yet GAM did not reciprocate constructively until late-2004 (Morfit, 2007, p. 120). On December 24, two days before the tsunami disaster, the parties agreed to engage in talks to be moderated by Ahtisaari. After the tsunami disaster, the reconciliation spiral accelerated: GAM declared a unilateral ceasefire and announced its willingness to talk with the Indonesian government in order to facilitate the flow of humanitarian assistance. Although the Indonesian army continued its activities in Aceh, President SBY welcomed the unilateral ceasefire and called upon all sides to work together to end the conflict so that all efforts could be directed to the reconstruction of Aceh after the tsunami (ICG, 2005: 4; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2009, pp. 212, 218).

On January 26, 2005 a CMI-sponsored meeting took place between representatives of the two sides in Helsinki. During the first round, both parties held to their positions steadfastly: GAM insisted on winning Aceh’s independence from Indonesia, and the GoI
insisted on maintaining Indonesian territorial integrity while granting Aceh a substantial degree of autonomy. A significant breakthrough in the talks occurred during the second round, when GAM agreed to withdraw its previous demand for Aceh’s independence from Indonesia and to discuss a political framework for self-rule (Aspinall, 2005, p. 26; Schulze, 2007, p. 95). In light of the disagreements over various issues in subsequent talks, both parties had to compromise and retreat from their initial positions. After fifteen drafts, the parties reached an agreement and the MoU was signed on August 15, 2005. The six chapters of the agreement included the governance arrangements in Aceh and the relations between the province and the central government, the division of Acehnese resources between Aceh and Indonesia that was more preferential toward Aceh, human rights issues, amnesty and the integration of GAM’s fighters in the society, security arrangements and monitoring mechanisms for implementation of the agreement. The analysis below will first address the factors that led the parties to enter into the Helsinki talks and then consider the factors that motivated them to sign the MoU.

Readiness to Negotiate

Motivation

The motivation on the Indonesian side increased from 2003 and was galvanized after the change of government and the tsunami disaster due to the leadership’s perception that a continued military struggle would not lead to victory and its appreciation of the high cost of continuing the struggle under the circumstances and international pressure, and the perception of the opportunity to apply preferred policy. In contrast, the increase in GAM’s motivation developed at a later stage, towards the end of 2004, as it realized that the risks and costs of continued fighting were too high, especially in light of international pressure to restart negotiation.

The Government of Indonesia

The motivation of the GoI to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Aceh was a result of the complete political commitment of SBY and Kalla to resolve the Aceh conflict. This commitment was grounded in experience gained under previous administrations and derived from the belief that a purely military solution was impossible. In their view, only a negotiated agreement could resolve the conflict and establish a stable peace. SBY, who had a rich military past, served as the coordinating minister for political and security issues in the Megawati and Abdurrahman administrations. In this capacity, he was the major sponsor of the peace talks that took place between 2000 and 2003 (Sukma, 2005). SBY was the main
architect and proponent of the "integrated approach" that guided the government in previous administrations, which included both military operations and dialogue (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 13-15; Biswas, 2009, p. 13; Schulze, 2007, p. 93). In Megawati’s administration, SBY became a leading advocate of peaceful resolution of Indonesia’s conflicts with secessionist groups and was willing to offer concessions to GAM even before he was elected president (Harris, 2010, p. 342). Kalla was the leading figure in the negotiations that led to the resolution of the conflicts in Maluku, Poso and Sulawesi during Megawati’s administration, and he was also the most active figure in previous attempts to reach an agreement in Aceh. In light of this experience of both leaders, one of the election campaign promises made by SBY and his vice-president, Kalla, was to renew efforts to resolve the Aceh conflict peacefully. (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 13-15; Awaluddin, 2008, p. 26; Feith, 2007, p. 2; ICG, 2005, pp. 1-4; Morfit, 2007, pp. 118-120, 127-128; Schulze, 2007: p. 93; Wiryono, 2008: p. 26). It was apparent to both leaders that the military struggle had claimed many victims on both sides, and that Indonesian military activities in Aceh since mid-2003 (upon failure of the ceasefire) were very costly and stretched military and economic capability to its limits. It was clear to them that even though GAM had been hurt by three decades of military struggle, the Indonesian army was unable to eliminate the organization. Nevertheless, it appears that SBY and Kalla were not suffering from a sense of hurting stalemate; since mid-2003, the Indonesian army had scored some significant victories and was prepared to continue its military struggle if necessary (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 11-13; Kemper, 2007, p. 20; Kingsbury, 2006, pp. 102-103; Morfit, 2007, p. 125).

Moreover, SBY and Kalla adhered to the position that a peaceful solution to the problem of Aceh was necessary in order to improve the state’s economic situation and international image, which had been damaged by its insensitive military operations in Aceh and violent actions in East Timor. Indeed, among SBY’s election promises were the revival of Indonesia’s regional leadership and the advancement of its aspiration of being accepted as a stable and credible international partner. These required a peaceful resolution of the conflict (Biswas, 2009, p. 141; Kingsbury, 2006, p. 11; Morfit, 2007, p. 125).

Additionally, the GoI was subjected to international criticism because of its problematic transition to democratic rule. For this reason, a national consensus in favor of a peace agreement on Aceh could be expected to improve the state’s international legitimacy. Therefore, SBY and Kalla entered office committed to strong leadership, reform, and achievement of an agreement ending the conflict in Aceh through a unified policy dictated by
the government. Under this policy, civilian authority was vested in the military, which had traditionally been a very strong and significant player within Indonesian politics and had dictated the hardline policy of past Indonesian governments vis-à-vis GAM (Biswas, 2009, p. 132; Morfit, 2007, p. 125; Wiryono, 2008, p. 26; Yudhoyono, 2005).

By mid-December 2004, the efforts of SBY and Kalla to engage in dialogue with GAM’s exiled leadership were successful in securing Ahtisaari’s agreement to convene a meeting of both sides. Plans for the first round of negotiations in Helsinki were underway before the tsunami disaster (Gaillard, Clave, & Kelma, 2008, p. 518; ICG, 2005, pp. 2-3; Morfit, 2007, pp. 117-118). At this point, the motivation of both leaders was high. Still, the tsunami disaster of December 26-27 acted as a catalyst and turning point: The parties seized the opportunity for immediate negotiations. In terms of the process itself, the tsunami aggravated the problems facing Indonesia. But the disaster was also seen as an opportunity for SBY and Kalla to realize their long-held ambition and reach a peaceful solution for the conflict (Biswas, 2009, p.133; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2009, p. 219; Yudhoyono, 2005).

The scale of the disaster is Aceh – deliberately closed to global media and international aid by Indonesia since May 2003 – drew international attention and pressure on both sides to seize this limited opportunity to end the conflict with a peace agreement and to focus on the reconstruction of the province. The international community saw the resolution of the conflict as essential for the success of recovery efforts and made it clear that the reconstruction process depended on mutual progress towards peace.

The Indonesian military, which had also been hurt badly by the tsunami, was accused by the international community of blocking aid. The GoI, however, was unable to cope alone with the massive disaster and the international accusations against the Indonesian military, which in the immediate aftermath of the disaster refused to allow foreigners to enter the area. The GoI quickly submitted to the pressure, permitting and even requesting international aid and intervention (Biswas, 2009, p. 12; Gaillard et al., 2008, pp. 517, 519-522; Keizer, 2008, pp. 76, 78; Kingsbury, 2007. p. 104; Schulze, 2007, pp. 94-95; Wiryono, 2008, pp. 26-29; Yudhoyono, 2006). Moreover, it appears that SBY recognized the terrible scale of the disaster and the resulting moral, political, and economic obligation to end the conflict and to enable recovery. SBY sensed that the international community was waiting to see how his administration would resolve the conflict with GAM (Biswas 2009, p. 12; Morfit 2007, p. 129).
At the same time, the tsunami provided the GoI an opportunity to realize its interests, expediting the process towards negotiations and underlining the urgency of reaching an agreement. First, SBY and Kalla sought to leverage the international attention and desire to help after the disaster to reinforce support for their plans to end the conflict, and they encouraged the international community to pressure exiled GAM leaders to agree to negotiate by emphasizing the need to support Aceh’s reconstruction (Awaluddin, 2008, p. 26; Yudhoyono, 2006). Second, while the October-December pre-negotiations contacts mediated by Ahtisaari were clandestine in order to avoid stirring domestic opposition, the tsunami gave the GoI an opportunity to present peace talks as a response to a humanitarian crisis rather than a change of policy (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 20-21; Harris, 2010, pp. 342-343).

**GAM**

GAM’s strategy since the fall of the Suharto regime was directed at attaining international legitimacy and mobilizing the international community to exert pressure on Indonesia to grant Aceh independence, which GAM compared to East Timor’s independence from Indonesia. The contacts between GAM and the GoI during 2000-2003 did in fact lead to GAM attaining international recognition and legitimacy, while the organization remained firm in its official stance regarding independence for Aceh. GAM’s interest in internationalizing the conflict was the reason it did not respond to the GoI’s efforts in 2003 and early 2004 to begin talks outside the formal and international framework (Aspinall, 2005, p. 20; Kingsbury, 2006, p. 18; Schulze, 2006, pp. 236-244, 2007, pp. 91-92, 94).

Up until the collapse of the Geneva process in May 2003, the military leadership of GAM on the ground believed that Indonesia would not concede Aceh peacefully and that military force was therefore necessary to liberate it. But GAM’s circumstances and situation changed between May 2003 and November 2004. During this period its military, economic, and political situation steadily deteriorated. In May 2003, the Indonesian army launched an operation aimed at ending the conflict by dismantling GAM. This operation had a devastating effect on the organization’s military and civilian capability. The number of casualties within the organization grew, morale declined, and public support dropped. The civilian structure of the organization collapsed because its tax collectors were turned over to the authorities. There was less access to food and medical provisions. GAM suffered economic hardship, and the members of its shadow government were caught and put on trial (Aspinall, 2005:7, 11; ICG, 2005: 4; Schulze, 2006: 244-255, 2010:93). The situation worsened during 2004, but its
members evidently did not despair – despite the damage and distress facing the organization. GAM’s military capability declined significantly, but its members wanted to continue resisting the Indonesian army. Some even argue that the harm inflicted on the general population by the Indonesian military action boosted the enlistment of fighters for the organization, precisely because it was under fierce attack. (Aspinall, 2005, p. 7; Keizer, 2008, p. 78; Kingsbury, 2007, p. 102; Morfit, 2007, pp. 120-121; Schulze, 2006, pp. 244-255, 2007, pp. 94-95, 2010, p. 93; Wiryono, 2008, p. 29).

The organization's international standing also reached its lowest point since the start of the Geneva process. The international community was disappointed by the failure of the Geneva talks and affirmed Indonesia's right to defend its territorial integrity. During 2004, it became clear to GAM that the East Timor precedent would not be repeated and that they would never defeat the Indonesian army without the foreign support they lacked. GAM was desperate to secure international intervention again (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 27, 57; Kingsbury, 2007, p. 103; Schulze, 2007, p. 95; Thalong, 2009, pp. 334-335). An internal debate ensued within the exiled GAM leadership regarding a strategic alternative to the uncompromising position on independence: a step-by-step approach, including an interim agreement.

By November 2004, GAM leaders were receptive to a new approach: They were ready to explore “self-governance” as a possible solution, with Jakarta permitting local political parties in Aceh. As a result, contacts began between the GoI and GAM regarding a resumption of negotiations, and two days before the tsunami the organization agreed to begin talks in Helsinki. But the exiled GAM leadership was apparently very cautious during this process and the organization’s official policy remained unchanged. GAM viewed these contacts and the agreement to resume negotiations as a mere matter of courtesy (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 27-29; Cheow, 2008, p. 179; Keizer, 2008, p. 78; Kingsbury, 2006, p. 15; Schulze, 2007, pp. 94-95).

However, the tsunami disaster highlighted the urgency of negotiations for GAM. A return to the negotiating table now appeared much more attractive than continued fighting and offered an opportunity for GAM to realize its interests for a number of reasons, including its problematic military situation, the international pressure to end the conflict for the sake of reconstruction efforts following the massive devastation, and the fresh opportunity to internationalize the conflict. The scale of the disaster had worsened GAM's military and socio-economic situation and international standing. (Aspinall, 2005, p. 20; Stange & Patock, 2010, p. 99; Kemper, 2007, pp. 20, 26; Mahmud, 2005a, b, 2006; Schulze, 2007, pp. 93-95).
Moreover, although GAM declared a unilateral ceasefire immediately after the tsunami in order to enable international aid organizations to operate, the Indonesian army actually intensified its assault and the GoI announced that it was sending an additional 50,000 soldiers to Aceh (Irwandi, 2008; Mahmud, 2005a). The aftermath of the disaster generated an expectation within Aceh’s civil society of continued financial support and reconstruction assistance from the international community. GAM realized that continued fighting would endanger international aid efforts for the disaster-struck population. Given that the international community had indicated that post-tsunami funding for aid and reconstruction would be more readily available if Aceh were stable, GAM’s concern was that non-cooperation would render it irrelevant and marginal. The renewal of negotiations and their conclusion through an agreement resolving the conflict became the only way for GAM to have any influence over the reconstruction of Aceh. After the disaster, GAM’s prime minister in exile, Malik Mahmud, therefore announced that GAM would welcome any initiative by the international community aimed at transforming the organization’s unilateral ceasefire into a formal ceasefire agreement with the Indonesian army (Aspinall, 2005, p. 20; Stange & Patock, 2010, p. 99; Kemper, 2007, pp. 20, 26; Mahmud, 2005a, b, 2006; Schulze, 2007, pp. 93-95).

**Optimism**

**The Government of Indonesia**

Alongside the previous administration’s military attempt to eradicate GAM after the collapse of the Geneva talks, Kalla had been seeking unofficial communication channels with senior GAM leaders in Sweden since 2003, aiming to find common ground that would facilitate an agreement to end the armed struggle. These initial efforts were fruitless (Aspinall, 2005, p. 20; Kingsbury, 2006, p. 18; Schulze, 2006, pp. 236-244, 2007, pp. 91-92, 94). In early 2004, with the assistance of private businessman Juha Christensen, Kalla was able to enlist Ahtisaari in an effort to establish contact between the parties and bring them to the negotiating table before SBY came to power. But these efforts also proved unsuccessful (Aspinall, 2005, p. 18; ICG, 2005, pp.1-4; Morfit, 2007, pp. 126-127, 136-137; Schulze, 2007, pp. 90-93). Thus, immediately upon forming their new administration in October 2004, SBY and Kalla began intensive, clandestine efforts on a peace plan with the aim of finding Indonesia a negotiating partner. In addition to their unsuccessful attempts to create a channel of communication with GAM’s leadership in Sweden, they tried to establish a channel with one of GAM’s senior officers, Muzakkir Manaf and to approach senior imprisoned GAM
officials (Aspinall, 2005, p. 17; ICG, 2005, pp. 2-3). During these attempts, it was made unequivocally clear to Kalla that all contacts must be with the exiled GAM leadership in Sweden (ICG, 2005: 3; Kingsbury, 2006: 18).

The GOI's consent to start unofficial dialogue with GAM, mediated by CMI, was given prior to the tsunami. However, it seems that the factor that mostly influenced the government's readiness to start official negotiations after the tsunami was the minor change it its level of optimism. The government saw a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel, based on the hope that after the tsunami the international community would exert pressure on GAM to demonstrate flexibility. Thus, the government's strong motivation effected some change in its optimism level through a wishful-thinking mechanism and its readiness to negotiate was based on wishful thinking more than on any hard evidence of the other side's intentions and willingness to compromise.

In mid-December 2004, the efforts of SBY and Kalla to initiate dialogue with GAM’s exiled leadership were successful in securing Ahtisaari’s agreement to convene a meeting of both sides and plans for the first round of negotiations in Helsinki were underway before the tsunami disaster (Gaillard, et al., 2008, p. 518; ICG, 2005, pp. 2-3; Morfit, 2007, pp. 117-118). However, Kalla’s agreement to commence full and official negotiations with GAM came after the tsunami. It appears that at this stage the strong motivation that influenced Kalla's search for an Acehnese negotiating partner affected the development of a wishful thinking mechanism. The Indonesian side realized that GAM policy remained officially unchanged and that there was still a long way to go before reaching an agreement with its government in exile (Aspinall 2005, pp. 26-27; Kalla 2008; Schulze, 2007, p.95).

GAM

The contacts during 2002-2003 increased mistrust between GAM and the GoI. The inauguration of the SBY-Kalla administration signaled to GAM that the GoI would now be more flexible and supportive of peaceful conflict resolution based on mutual respect. However, from the perspective of GAM’s leadership, the new government still had to prove that it would take negotiations seriously (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 27-28). GAM had plenty of reasons to believe that the government’s real strategy was geared towards military victory, not peaceful resolution (Morfit, 2007, pp. 121, 137). In spite of the parties’ clandestinely mediated consent to resume negotiations, which was given just days before the tsunami struck, GAM did not trust the GoI to implement whatever agreement might be reached and therefore demanded guarantees that the agreement would indeed be implemented (Irwandi,
In light of the devastation from the tsunami, GAM declared a ceasefire and called for renewed talks; however, this call did not stem from heightened optimism that Indonesia would commit and adhere to an agreement. From GAM’s perspective, there was an enormous gap between the GoI’s declarations and its activity on the ground. After the disaster, Kalla welcomed the ceasefire and GAM’s readiness to assist reconstruction efforts and hold talks, and he stated that Indonesia would make a comparable effort. Yet this statement came a day after the GoI imposed new restrictions on aid workers in Aceh and announced plans to send 50,000 additional soldiers to the area. Moreover, Indonesia’s foreign minister declared that Jakarta wanted all aid workers out of Aceh within three months (Mahmud, 2005b).

Motivation

During the negotiation that took place between January and August of 2005, motivation of both parties grew due to third-party pressure on both sides, and especially on GAM. As will be elaborated, Indonesia also put pressure on GAM.

Several international actors intervened during the various stages of the peace process. Their involvement brought the parties closer to the negotiating table, made them more inclined to compromise during negotiations, and helped oversee implementation of the agreement. This intervention eventually played into the hands of both sides and served their interests.

The key international actor during negotiations was the mediator Ahtisaari, whose conduct during negotiations, his character, and his connections enabled the negotiations to conclude in only seven months. Ahtisaari brought substantial experience and authority to the role of mediator. Through his international connections, he secured the necessary international support and backing, which boosted his political leverage. His management of the negotiating process led the parties to moderate their demands and make compromises during the talks and, as elaborated below, it generated increased optimism in both parties (Ahtisaari, 2008, p. 10; Aspinall, 2005, p. 19; Cheow, 2008, p. 179; Keizer, 2008, p. 79; Kemper, 2007, p. 30).

In light of the urgency of the narrow window of opportunity resulting from the tsunami disaster, as well as the short-term nature of the planned international intervention (which was based on a recognition of the obvious imbalance of power between Indonesia and GAM), Ahtisaari applied pressure on GAM from the outset, both directly and through diplomats representing the international community (Djuli & Rahman, 2008).
international community was constrained by the various interests it held in Indonesia and, therefore, applied its pressure towards compromise primarily on GAM. During the first meeting, each side continued to insist on its own position: GAM on independence and the GoI on preserving the integrity of Indonesia, while granting a high degree of autonomy to Aceh. Ahtisaari made it clear to GAM that international support for independence was unattainable and that he would use all his influence to persuade European states and the rest of the world not to recognize Aceh’s independence (Awaluddin, 2008). Ahtisaari made it unequivocally clear that he had no time to waste on nonsense during negotiations (Keizer, 2008, p. 79). The GoI itself also applied pressure on GAM through the threat of continued military operations (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 24-26; Cheow, 2008, p. 180; Kemper 2007, p. 27). During the second and third rounds of talks, this collective pressure succeeded in leading GAM to concur that a solution to the conflict was possible only in an autonomous framework that would pragmatically and legally address GAM’s main concerns, while honoring the territorial integrity of Indonesia (Ahtisaari, 2008; Aspinall, 2005, pp. 19, 23, 25; Awaluddin, 2008, p. 27). GAM realized that they had no alternative under the circumstances and that the GoI would withdraw from the talks (which would then collapse); if GAM did not accept the GoI’s demand to discuss only autonomy, and not independence (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 22, 29; Djuli & Rahman, 2008).

Although most of the pressure exerted by third parties in the negotiations was directed at GAM – whose initial concession enabled the first significant breakthrough in the process – Indonesia faced some pressure too. The fact that pressure was brought to bear on both sides resulted in an agreement that included mutual concessions. Even though the peace agreement was drafted under conditions it had dictated – for example, autonomy as the basis for discussion and the integration of ASEAN in AMM (Biswas, 2009, p. 134) – the GoI realized that failure to reach an agreement would disrupt the supply of international aid necessary for continued post-tsunami reconstruction. Therefore, it recognized the need to make concessions (Aspinall, 2008, p. 12; Cunliffe, Riyadi, Arwalemmbun, Tobi, 2009, pp. 18-19).

In addition, Ahtisaari’s approach forced both sides, and especially GAM, to focus on reaching a workable compromise on the core issues, to set aside the past and focus on the future and on achievable demands. He did not allow the parties to digress from the issues on the agenda. He carefully oversaw the information submitted to the media, insisted on direct talks during each round of negotiations, and set a deadline of six months for the talks to succeed. Ahtisaari’s personality and contacts enabled both sides to satisfy their needs: GAM
received international legitimization and the GoI secured the unity of Indonesia in the agreement (Biswas, 2009, p.137).

**Optimism**

At the start of the Helsinki talks, neither side trusted the other side or believed that during official negotiations the other side would display the willingness and flexibility necessary for reaching a mutual agreement to end the conflict. GAM was very skeptical about the government’s commitment and intentions, and did not expect the talks to succeed. It was not committed to the process at this point. Nonetheless, GAM regarded Ahtisaari as a person of high international standing, contacts and credibility, so it decided at least to listen to what the GoI had to say (Mahmud, 2005a, b; Morfit, 2007, pp. 121, 137). From the GoI’s perspective, despite the gathering in Helsinki and the indication Kalla had received that GAM was willing to consider being flexible about independence, GAM’s policy remained officially unchanged and there was still a long way to go before reaching an agreement with its government in exile (Aspinall 2005, pp. 26-27; Kalla 2008). During the first meeting, it became clear to the Indonesian side that it had to persuade GAM to renounce violence and to be more realistic about its political power after the tsunami; the Indonesian representatives to the negotiations also realized that they had to convince GAM that Indonesia had something to offer (Schulze, 2007, p. 95). The level of optimism did not change in the first round.

During the negotiations, the parties gradually became more optimistic about reaching an agreement, which contributed to the parties’ readiness to sign an agreement. This optimism resulted from the mediator’s tactics, the willingness of the parties to moderate their demands and compromise, and the third party’s willingness to oversee implementation of the agreement. In light of his experience elsewhere and lessons learned from past efforts on Aceh, Ahtisaari appreciated the need for a realistic perspective regarding a peace agreement that would preserve the dignity of each side, as well as the need for the gradual building of lost confidence (Ahtisaari, 2008, p. 10). Therefore, he adopted a negotiating approach and tactics that allowed each side to offer compromises while pursuing its most important interests, all within a limited timeframe. It was clear to Ahtisaari that there was little room for compromise on Indonesia’s part: The GoI was only willing to offer a special form of autonomy. At the same time, he understood that it was important not to demand that GAM declare a concession on the issue of independence at the outset of the process. Accordingly, he adopted the formula that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.” This strategy permitted bridging the foremost gap between the parties without the talks collapsing over
initial disputes. This in turn made it possible to reach a general agreement that would address
the important issues within a reasonable amount of time. Consequently, neither side could
claim victory of any sort during the course of negotiations. All points of agreement were
included in the MoU and announced only at the end of the process. This approach helped
persuade GAM to systematically examine the option of autonomy and allowed the
negotiators to work in peace and concentrate on the issues under discussion. (Ahtisaari, 2008,

Furthermore, it was clear to Ahtisaari that in order to reduce uncertainty surrounding
the agreement (given past failures), a certain degree of international intervention – in order to
support the agreement and oversee its implementation – was crucial for both parties. Towards
this end, Ahtisaari succeeded in enlisting the European Union (EU) to cooperate with the
Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the activities of the oversight committee
(AMM) for implementation of the agreement to the satisfaction of both sides (Aspinall, 2008,

As noted, the willingness of the parties to moderate their demands and compromise
also generated a positive change in the level of optimism. In exchange for GAM’s flexibility
on autonomy and willingness to disarm, the GoI showed willingness to meet all of GAM’s
demands in the agreement. For example, GAM demanded that the GoI’s term “special
autonomy” not be used and insisted on calling the political arrangement “self-governance.”
For GAM, the term “autonomy” conveyed the suffering and oppression of the past, and the
GoI’s empty promises (Cunliffe et al., 2009: 18-19; Kingsbury, 2006, p. 17). The final
agreement included the right to establish political parties and hold local elections, partial
withdrawal of the armed forces, the immediate release of imprisoned GAM members and
amnesty, elements of restorative justice, a truth and reconciliation commission, and
reparations for victims of the conflict. From the outset, the GoI’s acknowledgment of
responsibility for human rights violations in Aceh was a salient issue for GAM
representatives. At first, they insisted on clauses requiring the GoI to account for past crimes.
In order to lessen GAM’s initial insistence, Ahtisaari urged the representatives to focus on the
future rather than the past (Aspinall, 2008, pp. 16-17; Cunliffe et al., 2009, p. 19).
Eventually, GAM’s main objective during the talks – establishing its rule over the area
through local, democratically elected political parties – overshadowed that demand, and
ultimately GAM acted pragmatically, recognizing that in the current political reality, it would
be unrealistic to conduct trials of Indonesian generals who had committed crimes (Cunliffe et al., 2009, p. 19).

The agreement also included an economic dimension whose management influenced the confidence-building process between the parties and which was used as a vehicle to sustain the talks when, during the third round, the parties reached a deadlock regarding international involvement in overseeing the agreement. During this round, the parties were able to reach an agreement on a new division between Jakarta and Aceh of the revenues derived from the gas- and oil-rich province, as well as an agreement with regard to the use of Indonesian currency in Aceh. Under this new agreement, 70% of the profits would go to Aceh (Aspinall, 2005, pp. 39, 43-45; Cunliffe et al., 2009, pp. 19-20; Wennmann & Krause, 2009, pp. 1, 16-17). The GoI did not object to the new division of revenues, and therefore had no difficulty accepting the agreement, since the parliament had already approved the “Special Autonomy Law” in 2001 (Wennmann & Krause, 2009, p. 17).

Two of the key elements at the core of the dispute were also deliberately left to the final stage of the talks, thereby enabling confidence to be built between the parties through discussion of “lighter” issues: The first was the number of Indonesian soldiers to remain in Aceh, a matter on which agreement was reached only when the talks had nearly collapsed, after tough, marathon-style negotiations. GAM had originally sought a presence of only 4,000 soldiers, while the government sought 25,000 – an enormous discrepancy. Eventually, the parties agreed on 14,700 soldiers and 9,200 police personnel. Towards this end, the GoI agreed to concede somewhat, but apparently GAM had no choice other than significant compromise in order to avoid deadlock (Aspinall, 2005, p. 43; Cunliffe et al., 2009, p. 19). As two of GAM's negotiators explained: “Had we decided to reject this, the peace talks would have been at a stalemate” (Djuli, Abdullah, & Kingsbury, 2005).

In this respect, GAM’s concerns were somewhat eased by one of the AMM’s assignments: ensuring that the Indonesian security forces were indeed engaged in protecting against foreign enemies.

The second element was the government’s agreement to allow political parties in Aceh, which was considered a major government concession and a key factor in achieving agreement (Aspinall, 2008, p. 16; DeRouen, Ferguson, Norton, Lea, Park, & Streat-Bartlett, 2010, p. 341; Kingsbury, 2006, p. 17). From the GoI’s perspective, independent political parties in Aceh posed a significant threat. Historically, they had been prohibited, as their existence was seen as encouraging sentiments of secession and threatening national unity. For
GAM, the status of political parties in Aceh was the top priority. The significance of recognizing national political parties was that GAM representatives could thus be elected and gain control of the constitution and government of Aceh, which would in turn grant legal and democratic legitimacy to their aspirations and their relations with the central government.

As shown, the parties’ readiness to compromise during the negotiations resulted in a warming of relations (Djuli & Rahman, 2008), which in combination with the mediator’s confidence-building tactics and the willingness of the EU and ASEAN to oversee the agreement, increased each side’s perception of the possibility of realizing their interests through the agreement (Kalla, 2005a, b; Mahmud, 2006; Schulze, 2007, p. 95). The turning point at which the GoI became gradually and increasingly optimistic about the possibility of reaching an agreement occurred after the second round of talks, when it became clear that GAM had undergone a paradigmatic shift in its thinking (Kalla, 2005a, b; Schulze, 2007, p. 95). During the third round, when the serious bargaining began, the Indonesian negotiators publicly expressed optimism about the possibility of an agreement, and asserted that Indonesia was willing to compromise on some issues, especially the symbolic ones (Aspinall, 2005, p. 31). Another factor that increased the GoI’s impression that GAM would abide by the agreement was the outcome of a meeting in the jungle during the Helsinki talks between Kalla’s personal representative, Farid Husain, and GAM commander Sofyna Dawood. After this meeting, it became clear to Indonesia that GAM fighters would adhere to an agreement emerging from their talks (Kalla, 2008).

During the negotiations, there was also a change in GAM's perception of the chance of realizing their interests in an agreement. This change was reflected in the following statement by GAM's exiled prime minister: “The policy of previous governments was that they did not want Aceh to gain independence and, at the same time, they imposed a system that was not acceptable to the Acehnese, and this caused many problems. Under the new government, we saw that this had changed. They were more flexible on that point and, of course, we have responded accordingly. If Aceh can achieve what it wants peacefully without separating itself from Indonesia, why should we go to war? ... So, we feel that we got our rights back” (Mahmud, 2006).

Discussion and Conclusions:

Readiness Theory and Explanation of the Outcome of the Peace Process

Readiness theory appears to be attractive as an explanatory theory, as it includes many factors affecting the willingness of parties to negotiate and reach an agreement. The concept
of readiness theory, which addresses influential factors that vary over time and can lead to negotiations and agreement, seems to allow flexibility and an understanding of the complexity of the factors that influence negotiating processes in conflicts of various kinds, as well as an understanding of the influential factors beyond the stage at which the parties sit down at the negotiating table. In this research, readiness theory served to explain the success of the Aceh peace process in bringing an end to the thirty-year armed conflict and to study the strengths and limits of readiness theory in identifying the factors that encourage parties to enter into negotiations and reach an agreement. The analysis demonstrates that the readiness theory, more than any other theory in the field, may support Pruitt's aim to present a comprehensive picture of the different dimensions that play a role in bringing parties to reach an agreement. Still, the analysis raises a number of questions with regard to the theory's hypotheses and scientific status.

In accordance with Pruitt's analysis in his studies applying readiness theory (Pruitt, 1997, 2007), it may be argued that the peace process in Aceh was characterized by an increase in the parties’ level of readiness – to the point of being fully ready to sign an agreement. In the pre-negotiation stage, the motivation of both parties increased significantly, while GoI’s level of optimism rose moderately and GAM’s optimism did not increase. During the negotiations, however, both motivation and optimism increased significantly among both parties in the conflict. On the Indonesian side, motivation increased from 2003 and was galvanized after the change of government and the tsunami disaster, as a result of the leadership’s perception that a continued military struggle would not lead to victory and its appreciation of the high cost of continuing the struggle under the circumstances. The increase in GAM’s motivation developed at a later stage, towards the end of 2004, as it realized that the risks and costs of continued fighting were too high. These perceptions on the part of the GoI and GAM served as fertile ground that made it possible, immediately after the tsunami, for international pressure to effect changes in the parties’ positions and perceptions of the opportunity to benefit from management of the process and from the outcome of an agreement.

Towards the end of the pre-negotiation stage, Indonesia’s optimism increased somewhat but remained limited, whereas GAM’s level of optimism did not change during this time. Although the Indonesian side came to the negotiating table with a certain level of optimism, which derived from the mechanism of wishful thinking, it was still clear to Indonesia that it would have to work hard to persuade GAM to compromise. Given the GoI’s
conduct on the ground, GAM was skeptical about the government’s willingness to compromise. At the start of negotiations, neither side was certain that the other was prepared to compromise on its official position in order to reach an agreement. The intervention and conduct of various international actors played a significant part in increasing the motivation and optimism of the parties during negotiations; that is, they influenced the parties’ level of readiness to sign an agreement. During the negotiations that took place between January and August of 2005, the parties’ increased motivation was further reinforced as a result of third-party pressure on both sides, particularly on GAM, as well as the pressure Indonesia applied to GAM and GAM's realization that the alternative to the talks would be a return to the path of war, which had already proved to be expensive and useless. It appears that the parties’ readiness to compromise led to warmer relations and, together with the mediator’s tactics for increasing mutual trust and the willingness of the EU and ASEAN to oversee the agreement, boosted the parties’ optimism during the negotiations.

With respect to the theory-based questions, we can draw a number of conclusions from the analysis. First, we sought to examine whether each of the factors the theory cites as creating motivation to come to the negotiating table is indeed a sufficient condition, as the theory holds. In the Aceh case, a number of factors contributed to the parties’ willingness to negotiate and more than one condition was met. The attempts by the Indonesian side to start a process already began in 2003 when Kalla and SBY considered pursuing the negotiation option for several reasons: their philosophical belief that there was no military solution to the conflict, their perception of the high costs and risks entailed in continuing the conflict, and third-party pressure. GAM motivation grew gradually by the end of 2004 in light of changing circumstances, growing perceptions of present and future risks, international pressure and an opportunity GAM recognized in the re-involvement of the international community in the process. Interestingly, the tsunami catastrophe served as a turning point for both the Indonesian government and GAM, providing them an opportunity to take advantage of the situation and the international community’s involvement in order to improve the chances of reaching an agreement under the difficult circumstances.

This issue corresponds with the questions raised about the importance of strong motivation to end the conflict in cases in which mutual trust is low and a large gap exists between the parties’ positions and with respect to the implications of the various sources of their motivation regarding the outcome of negotiations. In the case of Aceh, the sources of motivation for the parties’ readiness during negotiations remained valid throughout the
process, which was relatively short. The pressure applied by a third party that understood the importance of financially backing its strategies was a significant factor in both sides’ realization that the alternative to talks was a return to the bloodshed that had proven to be costly and ineffective. Throughout the Aceh process, the parties’ motivation to end the conflict was strong and compensated for their mutual mistrust and the gap between their positions when negotiations began, and it served to soften their stances during the process.

Therefore, with regards to our question about the compensation ability of the variables and whether an increase in motivation can compensate for a low level of optimism during negotiation in pushing the parties to reach an agreement, it appears that the Aceh case confirms Pruitt’s argument that: “... The compensatory part of the theory implies that with stronger motivation, less optimism is required to create a given level of vigor and concession making and to reach and adhere to an agreement” (personal communication, March 9, 2008).

Interesting conclusions can be drawn from the Aceh case in regard to our question about the theory’s claim that optimism is a necessary condition for commencing negotiation and our question about the compensatory potential of the variables – that is, whether increased motivation can compensate for a low level of optimism or even the absence of it during the pre-negotiation stage and negotiations. In the pre-negotiation stage that took place in the Aceh conflict, the parties’ strong motivation compensated for the low level of optimism on the part of the GoI and, even more so, for the lack of optimism on the part of GAM. This compensatory trait led both parties to seize the opportunity to examine the possibility of reaching agreement. Thus, motivation did successfully compensate for little or no optimism with respect to the parties’ readiness to begin negotiations. In GAM's case, the strong motivation compensated for the lack of optimism in persuading the organization to agree to negotiate.

However, the dynamics of the negotiation process demonstrated that a certain level of optimism and an increase in this variable – that is, the understanding of both parties that it is possible to overcome their differences – is a necessary condition for reaching an agreement. Despite having agreed to negotiations, GAM was very skeptical about the possibility of reaching an agreement with the GoI when they sat down at the table. Any change in optimism on the GoI’s part that occurred in the pre-negotiation stage was minimal. Other factors affecting motivation played a part in determining the timing of the GoI’s agreement to negotiate. During the negotiations, GAM's optimism increased as a result of its realization that, in light of the changing reality and international pressure, negotiations could produce an
agreement that would serve its interests better than the military option could. A similar change took place in GoI’s level of optimism only during the negotiations.

It appears that in the Aceh case – in which at least one of the parties came to the negotiating table with no optimism about the possibility of reaching an agreement or about the ability of the other party’s leader to implement an agreement – is not exceptional. A comparable example is the agreement between Israel, under the leadership of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and the Palestinians, led by Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, to embark on the Annapolis process in October 2007 (Schiff, 2013). Yet another example is the process that led to negotiations in the Cyprus conflict between the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in February 2004 (Schiff, 2008). In both cases, the parties came to the negotiating table with low optimism or no optimism at all. Yet, it should be noted that in contrast to the Aceh case, in which optimism increased during the negotiations, in both these cases one of the reasons negotiations failed was that the parties were unable to generate any sense of optimism during the negotiations. The dynamics of the Aceh negotiations illustrate that during negotiations an increase in the level of optimism and an understanding by both parties that differences can be overcome are necessary in order to achieve an agreement. One might propose a revision of readiness theory in the form of a research hypothesis deserving further study: Strong motivation during the pre-negotiation stage can be a sufficient condition for the parties’ readiness to enter into negotiations. Full readiness, however, requires both variables – motivation and optimism – and an increase in at least one of these is a necessary condition.

Furthermore, regarding the interaction of motivation and optimism, during the pre-negotiation stage, Kalla’s strong motivation fueled a wishful thinking mechanism regarding the possibility of reaching an agreement with GAM. The theory holds that one of the mechanisms by which a strong motivation to end a conflict can foster optimism is the mechanism of wishful thinking. However, the theory does not offer details about the significance of this mechanism in terms of its influence or the role it plays in relation to other variables during negotiations. In the case of Aceh, strong motivation during the negotiations successfully led to a spiral of concessions by the parties, which ultimately also resulted in increased government optimism regarding the success of the process, beyond the mechanism of wishful thinking that originally motivated the GoI to enter into negotiations. In light of this finding, the following might be an interesting hypothesis for further research: When one or more of the parties is motivated to conduct negotiations because of optimism that derives
from wishful thinking, then this mechanism is not a sufficient source of increased readiness. In this case, in order to increase the parties’ readiness to reach an agreement, the mechanism of wishful thinking must be replaced during negotiations with a solid understanding that a final agreement is expected to meet the objectives and that the other side can commit and adhere to the agreement.

Analysis of the case study also reveals a significant element the theory overlooks: the influence of the asymmetry between the parties on their readiness to reach an agreement. This dynamic revealed in the analysis raises questions the theory should address, but does not: Does the status of the parties need to be perceived as equal, and how does inequality influence their level of readiness throughout the peace process? What is the role of a third party in a process characterized by asymmetric levels of readiness? As we saw in the case of the Aceh negotiations, where asymmetry between the parties was clear to all, in order to minimize the significance of the blatant asymmetry, the third party adopted certain tactics (such as the establishment of AMM) that influenced the weaker party’s level of optimism regarding the potential of the proposed formulation for addressing its interests.

An additional point regarding the asymmetry issues that arise from the analysis of the Aceh case relates to the theory’s assertion that when the parties’ level of readiness is unequal, the side whose readiness level is higher needs to make more concessions and is therefore in a less desirable position when crafting the final agreement (Pruitt, 2005, p. 13). Indeed, the case of Aceh demonstrates that GAM’s strong motivation at the start of negotiations, the opportunity to realize its interests in light of the difficult military situation, Indonesia’s threat of continued military operations, and international pressure to end the conflict all combined to bring about GAM’s first meaningful concession as well as the turning point that allowed the talks to continue. Although the parties’ level of readiness increased during the process, and both were required to make concessions, as Aspinall states, “GAM was in some crucial respects a relatively weak actor even in the Helsinki peace process, which was largely concluded according to the Indonesian government’s agenda” (Aspinall, 2008, p. 11).

Regarding the questions that arise from examining the hypotheses of the theory. The analysis notes some methodological issues concerning the application of the theory to the case study and challenges the scientific status of the theory by questioning whether its hypotheses are what Popper calls “conclusively decidable” and whether the theory itself meets the criterion of falsifiability (Popper, 1963a, pp. 17, 18; 1963b). For example, the theory holds that the parties’ level of readiness influences the extent to which they engage in
conciliatory behavior. However, beyond Pruitt’s observations that “Some readiness is needed on both sides of a conflict for negotiation to start and agreement to be reached” (Pruitt, 2007, p. 1525) and that “…both [motivation and optimism] must be present, in some degree, for any conciliatory behavior to be enacted” (Pruitt, 2007, p. 1525), it is entirely unclear what level of readiness is needed in order for negotiations to commence and agreement to be reached, or how fluctuations in the variables that represent readiness are to be measured.

Furthermore, analysis of the Aceh case makes it clear that operationalization of the “optimism” variable under the theory is not trivial, and that the attempt to point out changes in the level of optimism can lead the researcher to a tautology. According to Pruitt, “Optimism is a sense that it will be possible to locate a mutually acceptable agreement… Some optimism is required for a party to enter negotiation” (Pruitt, 2005, p. 8.). Apparently this sense of optimism is not always subject to a precise definition under the theory, and it is especially difficult to measure changes in the level of optimism. The theory itself does not clearly indicate how much change is needed in order to effect a change in the degree of readiness that will enable movement through de-escalation efforts towards the negotiating table and beyond, to “full readiness” to sign an agreement.

The case of Aceh proves that it is difficult to know with certainty whether optimism exists at the low level required by the theory for negotiations to begin. The question we need to ask when applying the theory is whether Kalla’s appreciation of the window of opportunity for initiating peace talks after the tsunami indeed led to a perception of the light at the end of the tunnel and to the “certain degree” of change in optimism that is required by the theory for the parties to agree to begin negotiations, or whether another factor was at work. For indeed, it is clear that the parties came to the negotiating table without a relationship of mutual trust, and not until after the second round did they have a sense that it would be possible to reach an agreement. It appears that the answer is a matter of the researcher’s subjective interpretation.

Another illustration of the problem of operationalizing the optimism variable can be found in a study by Pruitt regarding the process that led the parties to sign the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Pruitt states, “It can be argued that optimism about the viability of negotiation grew steadily on both sides from 1988 onward. The sequence of gestures shown ... is evidence of growing optimism. Furthermore, if we assume that each side was reacting to the other side’s most recent move, we are looking at a conciliatory
This analysis by Pruitt indicates that in the context of the Northern Ireland conflict resolution process, the parties’ dynamic of a conciliatory spiral and their sitting down to the negotiating table is what led Pruitt to conclude that their optimism had indeed increased. Apparently the distance from the difficulty of operationalizing the variable of optimism to falling into the trap of tautology is short.

Moreover, it appears that the inclusiveness of the theory and the complexity of the variables it embodies burden their operationalization and the ability to refute its hypotheses (Popper, 1963a, 1963b). In an effort to address some of the limitations of ripeness theory, Pruitt (2005, 2007) presents two variables, motivation and optimism, each one of which may depend on a number of factors. What happens, however, when one of the factors influencing motivation or optimism decreases while another increases? How then do we measure the change in the level of motivation or optimism? Do we conclude that it has decreased or increased? The Aceh case study is a somewhat clear-cut case in which all factors affecting motivation and optimism were increasing at some point. However it is not always like this. There are cases in which one factor affecting motivation or optimism may grow while the other may decrease. An example of this can be seen in the Sri Lanka peace process that took place between the end of 2001 and beginning of 2004. On the one hand, the pressure applied by a third party increased as the process advanced. However, on the other hand, the ceasefire established on February 2002 created a comfortable situation for the parties, which undermined their motivation to make concessions during negotiations if these concessions did not serve their interests. How would the change in motivation be measured and presented in this situation, as an increase or a decrease? It appears that in such cases determining whether motivation increased or decreased depends on the researcher’s subjective interpretation. Another issue this theory fails to clearly explain is: How can an increase in motivation or optimism possibly be measured? These questions become even more acute when assessing the extent to which each variable compensates for a deficiency in the other variable, as the theory posits.

In conclusion, Pruitt holds that readiness theory is more heuristic “in part because it allows use of a compensatory model and in part because it can be extended to make
predictions about more outcomes, including concession making, agreement, compliance and third-party intervention” (Pruitt, 2005, p. 30). The analysis of the Helsinki process in the Aceh conflict demonstrates that readiness theory enables us to identify and map many more factors that influence conflict resolution processes than any other theory in the field. However, the analysis also highlights the shortcomings of readiness theory, which in fact derive from its comprehensiveness and complexity.

References


Volume 20, Number 1


From Positionality to Relationality: A Buddhist-Oriented Relational View of Conflict Escalation and its Transformation*

Ran Kuttner

Abstract

Through a theoretical analysis, this paper suggests that the Buddhist philosophy and psychology offer a unique contribution to our understanding of conflict escalation and the potential for its transformation from a relational point of view. In particular, it presents an in-depth analysis of conflict escalation, applying the Buddhist Four Noble Truths and Twelve Links models. With the help of these models, it analyzes the psychological process that invokes the escalation of conflict, resulting in what is considered “suffering” (Duhkha) in Buddhist thought, seen also as lack of relational awareness. The paper demonstrates how a Buddhist-oriented view of conflict adds value to current scholarship of relational conflict resolution and has the potential to help conflict specialists transform adversity into dialogue. Furthermore, it argues that the suggested framework can help scholars and practitioners who implement Mindfulness practices into ADR processes assist disputants cultivate relational awareness.

*This paper was first presented at the Taos Institute Conference entitled “Exploring Relational Practices in Peacebuilding, Mediation and Conflict Transformation: From the Intimate to the International” held in November 2012 in San Diego, California. Peace and Conflict Studies was a co-sponsor of the conference.

Introduction

Conflict and its transformation have been mostly analyzed in the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) literature from an individualistic standpoint. The underpinnings of the individualistically-oriented frameworks have as their foundation a perception of the self, stemming from Aristotelian philosophy and reinforced through Descartes’ philosophy, that emphasizes separateness, autonomy, individuality, and self-interestedness (Bush & Folger, 1994; Gergen, 1999). However, in recent decades many scholars in philosophy (Seigel, 2005; Taylor 1989;), feminist theory (e.g. Gilligan, 1993; McClain, 1992), psychotherapy (for example Mitchell, 1993; 2000; Mitchell & Aaron, 1999), social-constructionist thinking
(E.g. Gergen, 1999, 2009; McNamee & Gergen, 1999; Shotter, 1993), political science (e.g. Avineri & De-Shalit, 1992; Sandel, 1982, 1996), and other disciplines have argued that “the self” should be understood from a relational perspective. Different understandings of relationality offer different understandings of the “self”, though they all share the setting of a radical alternative to the individualistic standpoint on many facets. This paper will focus on one such facet – conflict escalation, and will argue that the Buddhist worldview and its relationally-oriented psychological analysis of the causes of human suffering and their transformation can add value to the understanding of interpersonal conflict escalation and its potential transformation to dialogue.

Since the notion of self is central to this paper, “Section I” describes the individualistic underpinnings of this notion and how they lay the ground for mainstream conflict resolution methodologies. This section also presents a growing body of scholarship in ADR that offers an understanding of conflict escalation and transformation from a relational worldview. It argues that the Buddhist philosophy, psychology and practices provide a different perception of relationality from existing scholarship, with emphases that add important value to these frameworks.

“Section II” presents how the teachings of the Buddha help clarify the relational understanding of conflict escalation and transformation. It first outlines in brief central philosophical underpinnings of the Buddhist worldview. It then presents an analysis of conflict escalation as a gradual process of withdrawal from relational awareness to the crystallizing of a false, non-relational sense of self, using the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths model. Then, it elaborates on how the process of escalation occurs and can be transformed, micro-focusing on the psychological stages of escalation as understood in the Buddha’s Twelve Links model.

“Section III” outlines the potential embedded in further adopting the analysis offered in this paper in the ADR scholarship in order to add value to ADR scholarship that incorporates relational foundations as well as scholarship that incorporates mindfulness-based practices to help parties transform their interpersonal dynamics into dialogue.

Background

The Governing, Individualistically-Oriented Theories of Conflict

The predominant, interest-based models of negotiation and conflict analysis (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1991; Lax & Sebenius, 1986; Lewicki & Saunders, 1985) are rooted in an individualistic worldview. The individualistic worldview construes the individual as a
Peace and Conflict Studies

separate being, autonomous and unconnected, who fulfills her potential and actualizes her freedom and independence by personally developing her own values and subjective life experiences. The individualistic worldview and ethos, which has governed Western thought for many centuries (Seigel, 2005; Taylor, 1989), has its origin in Aristotelian metaphysics. According to Aristotelian premises, knowing a person (subject) or an object demands inquiring and gaining knowledge of her or its “essence,” her core – that is, her inalterably fixed and determined inner substance. This Aristotelian perspective is reinforced in modern times, as Kenneth Gergen (2009, p. xxi) writes:

From the early writings of Descartes, Locke, and Kant to contemporary discussions of mind and brain, philosophers have lent strong support to the reality of bounded being. In many respects, the hallmark of Western philosophy was its presumption of dualism: mind and world, subject and object, self and other.

These traditions posit the “other” as an outer-bounded self with whom one interacts by situating oneself in separation from. Such understanding of human dynamics focuses on separately situated individuals who interact by exchanging ideas. This view is the basis of the common understanding of conversation and negotiation.

An interest based framework of negotiation that encourages going beyond one’s positions to explore one’s interests and needs reflects these underpinning; one of its foundations is the assumption that by exploring interests and concerns, each side can develop better understanding of her own as well as her counterpart’s standing-point, and that an exchange in which the parties will try to meet as many interests and concerns of all sides will assist in finding mutually agreed upon solutions (Fisher, et al., 1991; Moore, 1986; Susskind & Field, 1996). Even when emphasizing aspects of interdependence, the foundational philosophy remains unquestioned: Morton Deutsch, laying the bases for the cooperative-competitive continuum analysis of conflict, claims that people’s inclination towards cooperation or competition depends on how they perceive their interdependence – whether positively or negatively, along a continuum (Deutsch, 1973). Positive goal interdependence means that when one party wins, the other wins, whereas negative goal interdependence means that when one wins, the other loses. Although emphasizing the importance of interdependence, Deutsch and other scholars approach interdependence from an individualistic perspective, understanding it to signify how separate actors or agents that are

**Tendencies Toward Relationality in ADR Scholarship**

In recent years various scholars have been criticizing the interest-based approaches to conflict resolution, claiming – in the name of relational foundations – that they are based on a worldview that needs to be reconsidered (Cobb, 2006; Greenhalgh & Lewicki, 2003; Jones, 1994; Shailor, 1994).

The transformative approach to mediation, for example, offers an alternative to the individualistic approach in the name of a relational worldview according to which individuals are “seen as both separate and connected, both individuated and similar . . . to some degree autonomous, self-aware, and self-interested but also to some degree connected, sensitive, and responsive to others” (Bush & Folger, 1994, p. 242). The individualistic worldview, the authors argue, misses the fullness and complexity of the human situation because “human nature includes both the capacity for self-interestedness and the capacity for responsiveness to others” (1994, p. 242). Awareness of agency and connection is the essence of human consciousness, the core of our identity as human beings, according to the relational worldview as portrayed by the transformative approach. Conflict, write the authors, “alienates [the parties] from their sense of their own strength and their sense of connection to others, thereby disrupting and undermining the interaction between them as human beings” (Bush & Folger, 2005, p. 46). The parties’ abilities to exercise their relational nature — experiencing both separateness and connectedness, strength of self, and responsiveness to others — are disrupted. The alienation from strength of self is manifested by fear, confusion, and unsettledness, and results in self-absorption, manifested by shutting down, self-protectiveness, self-defensiveness and hostility towards the other. The mediator’s role in this process, according to the transformative approach, is to help parties realize their strength of self, and to assist them in becoming calmer, clearer and more confident, which would in turn result in responsiveness to others, openness and attentiveness, and reversing the negative conflict spiral.

A different relational approach is offered by the narrative approach to mediation (Cobb, 1993, 1994; Cobb & Rifkin, 1991; Winslade & Monk, 2000, 2008), which also has at its starting point a worldview that questions the individualistic view of the self. Through a postmodern lens, the narrative approach offers a different understanding of relationality and consequently a different theory of conflict than the transformative approach. The narrative
approach offers a critique of the category of the “self” as a fixed entity. It views conflict as a clash between competing narratives that the parties have constructed regarding their situation. It proposes that people live their lives according to stories rather than according to inner drives or interests, stories that are relationally formed within the social-discourse in which they partake. People establish coherence for themselves through their constructed stories, and during conflict, these stories hold much divisiveness (“us/them,” “good/bad”) and create “victims” and “victimizers.” In order to transform conflict interaction, according to the narrative approach, the conflict stories need to be deconstructed or destabilized, so that an alternative, joint story can be constructed.

Conflict de-escalation and transformation, according to the transformative approach (Bush & Folger, 1994), can happen when disputants regain their sense of agency and strengthen their sense of self followed by increased recognition of the other. In the narrative approach (Winslade & Monk, 2000) de-escalation and transformation occur when the parties deconstruct their conflict stories; acknowledge how they are socially constructed, and develop a third story that all parties can live with. The following section will present a perspective of conflict escalation that derives from the Buddhist philosophy and psychology. As will be described, the Buddhist foundational understanding of relationality and the psychological analysis that follows lead to different emphases regarding conflict escalation and transformation.

Conflict Escalation and its Possible Transformation: A Buddhist-Oriented Perspective

Key Concepts in Buddhist Philosophy on the Nature of the Self

Buddhist philosophy, in the words of the Japanese Buddhist philosopher Izutsu, “is ontologically a system based upon the category of relatio, in contrast to, say, the Platonic-Aristotelian system which is based on the category of substantia” (Izutsu, 1977, p. 23). According to Aristotelian premises, as mentioned earlier, knowing an object demands knowledge of its ‘essence,’ its inalterably fixed and determined inner substance. According to the Buddhist worldview, on the other hand, knowledge cannot be attained as long as an object’s fixed and determined inner substance is sought.

A key term in understanding the Buddhist worldview is the term ‘dependent co-arising’ (pratityasamutpadā): any object – “self” included – is a product of causality, dependently co-arising with other objects that co-arise with it (Izutsu, 1977). According to the principle of dependent co-arising, any given situation is a set of connections and relations
in which separate entities arise, entities that through a process of abstraction we grasp as having characteristics of continuous separate substances.

Seeing entities as continuous, separate substances is an abstraction that results from observing a situation from an external perspective and from ignoring the process of dependent co-arising as it occurs in the moment. In doing so, we create notions of entities that we perceive to be existing separately from their arising, having a substantial and permanent inner nature with which “they” then enter a process of interaction with “another” – a similarly substantial and permanent entity (Kuttner, 2010). This illusion, according to the Buddhist worldview, relates not only to the perception of human beings as having a substantial and independent “self,” but to the perception that any entity - whether object, idea, or feeling - is a separate, self-substantive entity. From the perspective of Buddhist philosophy, attributing these characteristics derives from the human need to arrange the world, creating an illusory understanding of one’s perceived reality (Rahula, 1959; Welwood, 2000).

A key term in understanding dependent co-arising is the idea of emptiness (sunyata). Emptiness is a central term in Buddhism that needs much clarification in order to prevent nihilistic interpretations. The claim that everything is empty means that nothing exists independently, having an internal, substantial, fixed, and permanent nature of its own; the view of objects with an internal core or inner nature (svabhava) is replaced by a view that sees separate entities as products of causality or dependency on other things to which they stand in relation (Garfield, 1994; Hoffman, 1980; Kasulis, 1981).

Buddhist Psychology: Conflict Escalation as a Process of Rigid Self-Formation

The first lesson the Buddha taught is known as The Four Noble Truths, considered to be the foundational teaching of the Buddha, the quintessence of all the Buddha’s teaching (Tsering, 2005). The first truth describes the basic nature of human being as suffering and dis-ease (duhkha). It is important to note at this point that one should not conclude that the Buddhist worldview is pessimistic, as the Four Noble Truths describe a process, describing how to overcome this state of dis-ease and suffering. However, the first noble truth involves the experiencing of the dis-ease without avoiding it. Among other meanings, the term duhkha includes the notions of imperfection, impermanence, insubstantiality, and emptiness (Rahula 1959, p. 93). This recognition of imperfection, therefore, precludes the ability to grasp onto firm, unifying, and well-defined positions/concepts/views as the means for overcoming the sense of dis-ease and distress. Translated into conflict dynamics, the first noble truth
identifies that when in adversity we experience dis-ease. We have positions and perceptions we cannot impose on the other party; we are left dissatisfied, worn out, or alienated.

The second noble truth – duhkha-samudaya, the cause of suffering – addresses the origin of suffering and dis-ease, locating it in the craving to escape the dis-ease by grasping at or clinging to “things,” holding on to the notion that things have fixed qualities of being, rather than recognizing that they continuously co-arise. These “things” can include “my thoughts,” “my positions,” “my worldview,” as well as the firm view of “the other.” The second noble truth stems from the recognition of an illusory attachment to the “self,” and is aimed at diagnosing the causes of the continuous attachment to this illusion. The second noble truth is not aimed at filling the incompleteness or emptiness described in the first noble truth, but at observing the manner by which the human being craves to overcome the dis-ease by escaping into a firm, clear, and distinct definition of an independent self. The craving for the preservation of firm separate “things” is, in the Buddhist perspective, the nature of ignorance (Avidya), an ignorance that only reproduces and amplifies itself by grasping to whatever represents “me” and “mine” and preserving it as standing in opposition to whatever is not-me and not-mine (“you” and “yours”). Paradoxically, the desire to eliminate the dis-ease increases it. This is accomplished by further investing in sensory pleasures, as well as by further investing in the process of solidifying and grasping onto well-defined ideas or positions, seeking to see in them a definite and reliable proof of oneself and one’s identity. Ignorance, according to the Buddhist worldview, is whatever keeps producing the attachment and the craving to it (Abe, 1985; Izutsu, 1977; Kasulis, 1981).

The root of the suffering is in the craving itself, craving to “be,” to maintain and preserve the permanent and continuous existing self, a continuous form that wishes to avoid the first noble truth, suffering. This also brings about the craving for “not-being,” craving for the annihilation of the form (Brazier, 2003; McConnell, 1995). Translated into conflict dynamics, the dis-ease is understood to be caused by attachment to a firm sense of self, manifested by the positions, presuppositions, and beliefs we hold on to, by identifying ourselves with them and fortifying them, by craving to be independent of the other party, and by wanting to impose that firm and unchanging positions, presuppositions and beliefs on the separately and firmly perceived other.

The third noble truth – Dukkha-Nirodha, cessation or extinction of suffering – provides the possible treatment for the dis-ease. It asserts that there is a way to cease that process, to cease the constant re-creation and re-formation of self-substantive entities or
views: “Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is remainderless fading and ceasing, giving up, relinquishing, letting go and rejecting, of that same craving”

(Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion, SN LVI.11, as brought by Rahula 1959, p. 94).

One must let go of the process of ascribing characteristics of self, of seeing “them” as firm, fixed and independent – both oneself and the thing wished for. The craving that needs to be uprooted is the craving to preserve and maintain the “I” and the “thing,” or the sense of wanting such. This craving is almost instinctive and immediate; the Buddhist worldview and practice helps to cultivate, at first, an awareness of this almost-automatic act, mindfulness of the creation and re-creation of suffering, followed by its cessation (Biderman, 1995; Brazier, 2003). The possible treatment for the cessation of the dis-ease in conflict dynamics, therefore, can be understood as the letting go of the ongoing craving toward becoming a self-substantive, firm, and distinct party with self-substantive, firm, and distinct positions, presuppositions, and beliefs, cultivating awareness instead to the dependent co-arising process in which “one” partakes with “the other”.

The fourth noble truth – Dukkha-nirodha-gamini-patipada, the path that leads to the extinction of suffering – elaborates on how to let go, describing the practice in everyday life that may lead to that cessation. The Buddha spoke of The Eightfold Path, a practice to help transform the dis-ease through the cultivation of wisdom, which is the existential realization of emptiness, impermanence, and dependent co-arising (Rahula, 1959; Welwood, 2000). The Buddha taught cultivation of wisdom – relational awareness – in one’s views, intentions, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. This paper will not delve into The Eightfold Path and the suggested practices.

The wish to grasp a separate, fixed and permanent substance – according to the Buddha’s teachings – is thus an illusion that causes human suffering and dissatisfaction or “dis-ease” (duhkha) (Rahula, 1957; Brazier, 2003). The term dukkha the Buddha uses, which is traditionally translated as “suffering,” has a broader meaning and can apply also to the state of discomfort experienced in adversarial negotiations. Dukkha in Sanskrit is the opposite of the term sukha, which means comfort or satisfaction, and therefore the term dis-ease conveys most accurately its meaning. When used as “suffering,” it seems to apply only to people in a state of great misery; however, when seen in its broader interpretation, dukkha and the first noble truth, seem to address a human condition applicable to all, thus describing a general
truth, applicable also to the state in which people find themselves in when in conflict or adversity.

Dis-ease involves attachment to psychologically formed entities, perceived as objects with such characteristics. This constant process of self-formation (I.e., of forming entities with inner “selves”) needs to be transformed, according to the Buddhist worldview, because such a mindset and mental activity is a partial and insufficient realization of reality, and a form of what is described in the Buddhist framework as ignorance (avidya) (Rahula, 1959). Avidya, “ignorance” or “confusion” means not seeing things as they are. Vidya (the prefix 'a' is a negation prefix) means clear vision or sight. A-vidya therefore means having no clear sight, or having false knowledge (White, 1956, p. 252).

The attitude toward the dis-ease is somewhat paradoxical: the cessation of dis-ease passes through making it fully present, where both parties face, while in conflict, the truth of the dis-ease and the inability to get what they want. When cultivating awareness to that disease and the inability to get what they want, and if observing mindfully the craving involved with this process, the realization that this inability does not call for satisfying one’s interests in separation to the other can occur and the conflict can be seen in a new light. This does not imply adopting an accommodating personality or giving up on one’s own views (positions, interests, needs or feelings) as a solution, but giving up “positionality,” viewing each of them in a manner that grants them characteristics of a firm, fixed, unchanging “self.” The Buddhist underpinnings can therefore be understood as suggesting that what is needed is not a shift from “positions” to “interests,” but from the distinct, bounded, and firm self-substantial positions and arguments to a relational awareness of positions, seeing them in the ongoing dynamics of dependent co-arising (Kuttner, 2010).

According to this worldview, the process of developing ignorance is a mental process that veils sight from the circumstances as they are and from the relational dynamics, substituted by clinging to a coherent and consistent sense of self. Gergen, Gergen, and Barrett (2004, p. 54) write:

One unfortunate aspect of traditional conversation is that we are positioned as unified egos. That is, we are constructed as singular, coherent selves, not fragmented and multiple. To be incoherent is subject to ridicule; moral inconsistency is grounds for scorn. Thus, as we encounter people whose positions differ from ours, we tend to represent ourselves one dimensionally, ensuring that all our statements form a unified, seamless web. As a result,
when we enter a relationship defined by our differences, commitment to unity will maintain our distance. And if the integrity or validity of one’s coherent front is threatened by the other, we may move toward polarizing combat.

Following the four noble truths, interpersonal conflict escalation can be seen as a gradual process of self-formation, in which parties shrink and then withdraw from their relational space of co-arising, thus developing a sense of coherent, firm separate selves, a polarizing mindset and rigidity. When disagreement about a certain issue arises, a sense of distress or dis-ease also arises. Caroline Brazier (2003), a practicing psychologist and teacher of Buddhist psychology, describes the process of the formation of the self as an escape from and avoidance of the suffering and distress involved in a difficult sensory experience:

> Grasping after identity arises out of seeking sensory comfort. Life is uncertain, and when we face duhkha, we look for certainty. As we come to terms with the reality of duhkha, we struggle with the experience of impermanence. We want to believe that there is something reliable that cannot be taken away from us by the cycle of birth and death. In a changing uncertain world, there can be comfort in believing that something is permanent and reliable… When all else fails, however, I may end up feeling that the only thing I can rely on is myself. There is a kind of security in ‘knowing who I am.’ (Brazier 2003, p. 30)

When in conflict, parties often entrench into separate spaces, creating and then clinging to firm, fixed, independent perceptions of self and interpretations of the situation. By so doing, they further their suffering and in order to transform it, according to the Buddhist worldview, there is a need to let go of the clinging to that illusive sense of identity and cultivate relational awareness as understood within the Buddhist worldview.

**Conflict Transformation: Cessation of the Process of Self-Formation**

While the four noble truths provide a descriptive analysis of the process of fortification, the Buddha’s *Twelve Links model* explains how crystallization occurs in the mind and offers a detailed analysis of the psychological process of that withdrawal (McConnell, 1995; Brazier, 2003). As will be elaborated, the Buddha explains the Twelve Links model through the process of self-formation of an individual. This paper suggests that applying the principles presented in the model to interpersonal conflicts may enrich the understanding of current theories on interpersonal conflict escalation and transformation.

Friedrich Glasl, in a nine-stage step-by-step model of conflict escalation suggests that the escalation of interpersonal conflict can be understood as a change in in-group and out-
group images, motives, moods, and forms of interaction (Glasl, 1982; Jordan, 1997, 2000; Smyth, 2012). The slip from cooperation is perceived by Glasl as a gradual process of withdrawal into a more-firmly entrenched, separately and differently perceived sense of the conflict situation. Cooperation slips into tensions and frictions, crystallization into standpoints and “consolidated into more well delimited parties” (Jordan, 2000, p. 1), and clear, strict boundaries definitions. To gain strength, parties become increasingly locked into inflexible standpoints. Growing mistrust among the parties lead to a sense of insecurity and loss of control, which the parties try to compensate for with an increased emphasis on a strong, righteous self-image, followed by a more global picture of “the other” and images of typical behavior patterns which – as the conflict escalates – is developed into the other’s “true nature” and questionable moral character and identity. Such images, Glasl explains, serve an important role in providing a sense of orientation: one has the feeling of knowing what to expect from their environment. He also describes the process as a gradual loss of interdependency in the other and a growing intent to enforce one’s agenda on the dialogic space, while ignoring the other’s perspective as part of the joint space. There is an increased sense of entrenchment in one’s firm and unchanging perception of himself, the other and the situation, becoming more and more a survival mechanism manifested by a growing attempt to preserve the “formed” self.

In Buddhist terms, Glasl’s model of interpersonal conflict escalation can be seen as entrenchment into a fixed, firm, separated self that result in further suffering and dis-ease. The Buddha’s presentation of The Twelve Links model offers a detailed analysis of the psychological process of that entrenchment, or rather – of the formation of a sense of self in which one entrenches, or attaches to (McConnell 1995; Brazier, 2003).

The Twelve Links are a wheel that keeps constantly spinning and creating dis-ease. However, it can also – as the third noble truth describes – be ceased. Each link leads to the following link in a continuous manner, the twelfth followed by the first, and so on, in a manner in which it is impossible to put the finger on the “first” or “last” link (see figure next page).
Figure 1. The Twelve Links

The first link is ignorance (avidya), but it is at the same time also the last link, the outcome or derivation of the whole process that preceded it. Ignorance therefore both leads to a self-oriented mindset and is also an outcome of a self-oriented mindset. The process should not be perceived as a linear process with a starting point of self-formation (the first link) and an end point (the twelfth link), but a continuous process of spinning the wheel of ignorance and dis-ease, once cycle after another, endless unless ceased through the transformation of ignorance into wisdom (Rahula, 1959). As each cycle is a continuation of previous cycles, it therefore relies on the ignorance previously created, which conditions the “present” cycle. Moreover, it is a process of dependent co-arising: the model is consistent with the notion that no link, just as no cycle, exists independently, but rather is dependent on the other links for its arising (and in the same manner – each cycle depends on previous cycles).

The first link, as mentioned, is “ignorance” (avidya). Because of the confusion or lack of clarity manifested in that link, conditioned by previous cycles, it lays the terms for the formation of “the world” through the eyes of “the self,” and also invokes the effort to create meaning that would support the view one already possesses. Batchelor (1997, p. 68) describes what avidya is responsible for: “I set out on the absurd task of reordering the world to fit my agenda.” This is usually a tendency with which disputant arrive at to the mediation process. Ignorance conditions the second link: primary volitions, mental formations called samskara. This is a primary, almost abstract, mental force, an impulse or inclination that reproduces mental power based on patterns of behavior that have been repeated. Coming right after
ignorance and suffering, the *samskara* state is an attempt to escape that suffering. Brazier (2003, p. 184) explains: “Samskaras are the constructions that people build in their minds as they try to make their experience yield evidence to support their self-construct. Because they hold on to the deliberately limited view, they build samskaras.” Samskaras set the ground for the arising of the third link, consciousness’ activity (*vinayana*), which is sometimes translated into English, as “distinctive knowing” or “discriminative consciousness” (McConnell, 1995). *Vinayana* is the ordinary mind that separates the world into ‘me’ and ‘everything else’ (Brazier, 2003). At this stage “the other” is formed in the consciousness, perceived to have similar characteristics of selfhood in need of conformation. This is maybe the most important, most dangerous of all links, because people tend to generalize and to mistakenly assume that there exists in them – and in others - a unifying and permanent “self”. This is where the division into what is “mine” and what is “not mine” occurs.

This link sets the terms for the arising of the fourth link – *nama-rupa* (name-form), where the “me” grants name and form to both oneself and the discriminated “other” in order to organize it/them in a manner that would fit the self-picture already created and to create order.

With the inclination to escape the confusion of the conflict situation which one cannot control through the formation of a firm, permanent self, distinguished from all other entities, at this stage both oneself and the other entities are structured in separation from one another, each organized in a well-defined form and identifying name. The process of ascribing name and form allows one to sustain the discriminative act between oneself and all other things, as in the previous link, and to fix and establish that discrimination, assisted by the ascribing of their firm permanent names and forms. As Brazier (2003) explains:

> Naming is a form of possession. In the act of putting a word to an object, you put your mark on it… in naming an object you are picking out that object from its surroundings… This is a kind of extension of the selective viewing that we have already seen operating. It is an effect of self-material creeping into your world-view. (Brazier 2003, 66)

However, ascribing *nama-rupa* completes the escape from the intimidating, unknown, and unfamiliar to defined, clear, and distinct forms and categories that one perceives. It alienates one from both one’s experience and from the immediate surroundings, securing one’s “own” form and the objects’ form or selves. It allows law and order, it brings steadiness and structure, but also an almost automatic selection of familiar categories, patterns and forms based on previous “knowledge” and “familiarity” from previous life-cycles, cycles of
psychological birth and death and of suffering. Disputants are trapped in their own, private
language games, their separately constructed meaning of concepts and of the situation,
selecting what in their eyes is important to deal with individualistically, in separation from
the dynamics of the situation they partake in.

The conditioned consciousness and the structured nama-rupa prescribe a certain
manner of dealing with dis-ease and preparing to meet the discriminated objective world in
accordance with previous engagements. The sensory contact, which comprises the
engagement in the world, is now directed at identification of the familiar and known. The
senses, shadayatana, are described in the fifth link. The naming process conditions the way
that the senses are drawn. This sets the terms for the sensory contact in a way that makes the
contact less intimidating, as the sense faculties ‘lock on’ the sense object. Each sense tends to
be attracted to things to which it has been attracted in the past and repulsed by things it has
previously avoided, thus creating an illusion of continuity (Brazier, 2003). It is important to
note the Buddhist worldview sees the thinking as a faculty with a status similar to the senses.
While within Western foundational premises reasoning is perceived as being of higher order
then the five senses, Buddhism describes six senses, thinking (manas) being one of the six
and equally important. The generation of thoughts, positions and ideas, can be therefore
understood in the same manner: the same activity that conditions the meeting and the
seeking-out of objects also conditions the formation of positions and consolidated views. The
grasping onto ideas, positions, and worldview, which we tend to identify with our continuous
and independent selves, can be therefore understood to be an illusion created in order to
overcome the insecurity and confusion of the conflict situation, vulnerability that can be
taken advantage of by the threatening other party in the conflict dynamics.

The sixth link – spashna, “invested contact” or “self-interested contact” – is the actual
contact of the all-ready “me” with what is perceived as the “not-me” objects. The contact is
made with the commitment to the duality of “me” and “other” (Brazier, 2003). This and the
following link can be seen as the origin of the expectation from “the other” and the increased
commitment to “oneself”.

One’s reaction to the contact is the concern of the seventh link, vedana (feelings). The
contact with the object conditions the reaction to that meeting: does the contact match the
presuppositions with which I have arrived (and therefore is attractive, or pleasant, to me), or
is it not in line with my expectations, as formed prior to the contact (in which case the feeling
is unpleasant and my resentment and hostility arise)? The word vedana literally means
knowingness, the feeling of recognition: ‘I know what this means’. It means “knowing” in the sense of familiarity and possession, and if I don’t know or recognize, it threatens to breach the order that has been created (Brazier, 2003). This is true also of the views and positions one holds: ideas and positions one has consolidated now react to the other’s consolidated positions. These other’s positions are now examined through their relatedness to one’s own maintenance: one reacts pleasingly to them if they match one’s presuppositions and affirm oneself, or reacts in hostility if they are not in line with one’s expectations. The object is therefore used for the attainment and maintenance of “my” forms and views and “my” innermost subjective goals. This is an immediate response, almost automatic, at times described as an immediate physical reflex, with which the reacting person identifies because of its immediacy.

However, both the pleasing and resisting identification stem from the ignorance described, and set the terms for craving, craving for the attractive, pleasing experiences from the point of view of the self. The eighth link focuses on craving or thirst (trishna). McConnell (1995, p. 31) explains:

Variously described as thirst, hunger, and blind desire, tanha is the restless yearning which stimulates the search for something which will quench it…

The sense of unease and dissatisfaction, the restless search for an object that will fulfill the need, are key characteristics of craving.

The thirst becomes the foundational impulse, and satisfying that thirst the central need. I crave the things that entail the preservation of the mental formation that has become my own, and reject those that bring confusion. One – as elaborated by the next link – attempts to detect the object/view/position that would fill the sense of discomfort and deficiency one experiences.

The ninth link deals with the linkage between clinging and objects, with the attempt to cling or attach to certain objects, craving for their continuous fulfillment of a certain need. This can also be ascribed to thoughts, perceptions, and opinions. It is a process of feeding the consciousness, both by clinging to opinions and positions, as well as by assuming that ‘if only I could possess this or that, the suffering and confusion would be gone.’ A sense of goal or purpose aimed at solidity, structure, and permanence is formed, but, as Batchelor (1997, p. 74) writes, “While creating the illusion of a purposeful life, craving is really the loss of direction. It is a process of compulsive becoming.”
Clinging to existence is fundamentally expressed in the *becoming* and the attachment to the subjective “self” and one’s “identity.” Such entity holds the characteristics of selfhood in a more concrete manner than all other objects to which one attributes these characteristics. The tenth link, *bhava* – ‘becoming’ or ‘conceiving’ – describes the becoming of the self. After a certain pattern is created, and as a result of the wish to preserve it as a characteristic that describes one’s behavior, certain mental structures are formed. Assumed to describe a picture of “who I am,” these structures form a firm perception of oneself, thus serving one’s craving for permanence and stability, for being. The awareness of incompleteness and change is suppressed because “self” pictures are now being formed (McConnell, 1995). A shift occurs from seeing change as the constant process of dependent co-arising, with no agent behind the process, to a mindset in which a consolidated self perceives and experiences change (‘I was like this, I have gone through changes, and now I am like that’). In fact, at this point the category of ‘change’ is consolidated; the idea of a fixed entity is now for the first time present. The craving and clinging can be viewed as a platform for increased interest in oneself while not taking into account the other. In a conflict situation, one develops firm commitment to the image of one’s self, committed to consistency and coherency while attacking the other party’s image of self as she perceives it (Glasl, 1982), attempts to prove her inconsistency and incoherency and drawing attention to flaws on the personal level rather than dealing with the merits of the situation at hand.

The tenth link of becoming sets the terms for the eleventh link, birth (*jati*). It refers to the psychological birth of the substantive, solidified self as an independent, separate firm entity, now having life of his own. This includes not just the psychological birth of oneself, but also the attribution of similar characteristics to all entities, people, and objects (McConnell, 1995). At this stage one wishes to preserve not only the patterns as described above, but a pattern that confines the way the “self” relates to “the object,” a steady relation that maintains its continuous, separate existence, to which one attributes a firm independent identity, even if that identity “changes.”

In fact, at this stage the realization of dependent co-arising is hard to recover. However, all that is born, the Buddha asserted, will also decay and die; birth sets the terms for death and decay, which is the twelfth link (*jaramarana*). According to this psychological interpretation, we constantly create mental pictures, crave to preserve them, make use of formulated relations to objects in order to preserve them, and then are compelled to see them decay and die (McConnell, 1995). It is the decay of our concocted self-picture, a picture in
which much has been invested in creating, and therefore its decay brings frustration, suffering, and dis-ease.

This is the cycle of suffering that the Buddha explains can be ceased. The more energy and potency are invested in forming and preserving firm, independent, permanent mental formations or self-pictures, the greater the pain and suffering involved in their loss. Uprooting the suffering does not include further solidification of a more firm and stable mental picture of the self, but rather developing awareness of the process of its formation, followed by cultivation of qualities of mind that would allow the cessation of that process and of letting go of the attachment to “them,” as the third noble truth suggests (Welwood, 2000).

The formation of the “self” and the craving for its preservation while losing awareness of the process of dependent co-arising, set the ground for the creation of ignorance and unclear vision, thus creating barriers to seeing things as they are. With the belief in self and ignorance of reality, another round of the cycle begins, “our minds spinning new meanings on the old theme of self” (McConnell, 1995, p. 139).

The mechanism described in the Twelve Links model is the process of granting a status of self-substantive, permanent, independent entity to both objects and subject, drawing parties in conflict into adversity and lack of awareness of their relational dynamics. This solidification process, therefore, plays a central role in the process of conflict escalation and the cessation of it, can help transform it into dialogue (Kuttner, 2012). The mediator or third party’s role is hence differently perceived than the transformative and narrative frameworks, her emphases directed at the dynamics in the here-and-now of the communication and focused on helping detect the manifestation of suffering and ignorance as described in the Twelve Links model and the usage of various mindfulness practices that can help transform these non-relational dynamics. Further research on how this intervention is practically conducted should be carried out.

A conflict specialist or negotiator who is able to identify the tendency to fortify within the firm, separate self and can be mindful of the inclination towards spinning the wheel of suffering can then help transform this tendency into relational awareness (Kuttner, 2010). Therefore, it is important to be able to identify both the mental dispositions and the manifestations of such withdrawal, and the Twelve Links model provides an entry point for such identification. Further research is needed to help identify various manifestations of each of the twelve psychological dispositions described.
The relational emphases of conflict escalation and transformation suggested in this section perceives the path from adversity to collaboration differently from the ones suggested in the interest-based framework to negotiation and mediation or the relational frameworks offered by the transformative and narrative approaches. The next section will explicate why following the relational approach offered by the Buddhist worldview is important if wanting to cultivate dialogue and therefore add important value to other relational approaches to conflict intervention.

**Cultivating Relationality, Cultivating Dialogue**

By developing awareness of the mental processes involved in self-formation, and consequently developing mindfulness of the process of entrenchment in separate selves, negotiators and conflict specialists can help cease destructive conflict-interaction and transform it into more collaborative dynamics. Moreover, the relational framework as presented in this paper can help set the terms for a form of communication that requires the cultivation of relationality – dialogue. Dialogue, unlike other forms of communication, requires the cultivation of awareness of the self as co-arising through and within the process of relating. Martin Buber, when writing on dialogue, drew a distinction between two modes of conversation: “I-Thou” and “I-It.” While the I-It relation is the more common and non-dialogic way of being, characterized by cold indifference with respect to the other, the I-Thou is a dialogic relation, in which there is acknowledgment that “Through the ‘Thou’ a man becomes ‘I’” (Buber, 1987, p. 28), meaning that only in the presence of the I-Thou primary relation can the self be wholly apprehended. Similar to the Buddhist philosophy, Buber made a radical claim that the relation precedes the knowing of the self. He wrote: “In the beginning is relation—as category of being, readiness, grasping form, mould for the soul, it is the a priori of relation, the inborn Thou” (Buber, 1987, p. 27). Kenneth Gergen, when describing from a social-constructionist perspective what the uniqueness of dialogue is, also emphasizes that as individuals we are born of relationship. Meaning, he explains, is not the private individual’s meaning, but rather co-constructed through dialogic interpretation: “We remove meaning from the head of the individual, and locate it within the ways in which we go on together” (Gergen, 1999, p. 145). Social understanding, he explains, is not a matter of penetrating the privacy of the other’s subjectivity, but rather a relational achievement that depends on coordinating action: “When we view dialogue as a relationship between separate, autonomous individuals, each with private interests, perceptions and reasons,” he emphasizes, “we intensify the sense of conflict” (1999, p. 152). In dialogue meaning is perceived to be a
joint process and as emergent from the interaction; the emphasis on self-expression is therefore revisited:

In part the importance of self-expression can be traced to the Western tradition of individualism. As participants in this tradition, we believe we possess inner thoughts and feelings and that these are essential to who we are; they virtually define us. Thus, if dialogue is to proceed successfully, it is critical that one’s voice is heard. (Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett, 2001, p. 701)

However, this false sense of dialogue should be transformed, according to Gergen, McNamee & Barrett (2002), into awareness of dynamics in which the “inner” me and “outer” world cannot really be distinguished, and in order to learn about myself – my needs, my interests, my positions, my fears, and my sensations – awareness of the manner in which “my” needs, interests, and so on, relationally co-arise in the present moment is needed (Kuttner, 2010, 2011).

While presenting his dialogic view of human understanding and thinking, Charles Taylor draws a distinction between ‘monologic acts’ (single-agent acts) and ‘dialogic acts’, the later not emerging, he explains, from the common epistemological tradition. He claims that the:

‘I’ has no content of its own. It is a sort of a principle of originality and self-assertion, which can lead at times to impulsive conduct, or to resistance to the demands of society, but does not have an articulated nature that I can grasp prior to action. (Taylor, 1991, p. 307)

Within a ‘monologic act’, one fails to capture that:

The self neither preexists all conversation, as in the old monological view; nor does it arise from an introjection of the interlocutor; but it arises within conversation, because this kind of dialogical action by its very nature marks a place for the new locator who is being inducted into it. (Taylor, 1991, p. 312)

The framework offered by the Buddhist philosophy and the analysis described in this paper is aimed at describing conflict dynamics in terms of deficiency of awareness of the relational, dialogic nature of the parties and the perpetuation of a monologic, individualistically-based mindset. By using this framework, the conflict specialist can intentionally help disputants cultivate relational awareness in which the monologic dynamics, common in a world in which the individualistic worldview prevails, is transformed into dialogue.
As mentioned in the introduction, in the late twentieth century thought at large and in the field of ADR in particular, there has been a growing interest in mindfulness-based practices, stemming from the Buddhist worldview. ADR scholars have begun incorporating Buddhist techniques into the theory and practice of conflict management since the beginning of the current century (e.g., Bowling, 2003; Freshman, 2006, 2010; Freshman, Hayes, & Feldman, 2002; Noble, 2005; Peppet, 2002, 2004; Riskin, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2010; Rock, 2005). Riskin (2004) has argued that negotiation and mediation trainings fail to provide what he calls foundational training, training that would allow the practitioner to cultivate the skills needed to implement collaborative practices, and that mindfulness-based trainings can help cultivate these capacities. Riskin and other ADR scholars have advocated that practitioners should develop mindfulness-based capacities such as maintaining equanimity, being nonjudgmental, developing awareness of the present moment, improving concentration and improving analytical capabilities, attending to one’s own emotions as well as of others, increased attentiveness and listening capabilities, increased awareness of one’s own habits and reactions, increased ability to see beyond one’s own needs, and developing ethical conduct. Much of this work has involved borrowing tools from Buddhist meditation. However, the literature lacks an analysis of conflict escalation from a Buddhist perspective and its potential transformation from a relational standpoint connected to the foundational philosophy and psychological analysis offered by the Buddhist worldview.

This paper therefore offers an analysis of conflict escalation that can add value to the existing ADR scholarship that focuses on incorporating mindfulness practices into ADR processes. In addition, it argues that, in order to de-escalate conflict interaction and develop a creative mindset that overcomes dualistic thinking and polarization, there is a need to help parties re-think the individualistic sense of self and adopt a relational sense of dependent co-arising, as described in this paper. This may help set the terms for dialogue even where such quality of interaction did not previously exist among participants. Moreover, the proposed framework is relevant in settings where there exist no apparent conflict among participants but rather an individualistically-oriented conversation that participants may wish to improve, cultivating a quality of interaction that negotiations, conversations and discussions do not necessarily hold. The practical means to achieving such transformation should be further researched.
Conclusion

Buddhism offers a 25-centuries long worldview and method of transformation of suffering and dis-ease. Buddhist psychology offers us a micro-level explanation of the process of withdrawal from relational awareness to what is described in this article as the illusory sense of selfhood that escalates conflict dynamics and perpetuates human suffering. This paper suggests that from a relational point of view, conflict escalation is to be viewed as a process of self-formation, analyzed as clinging to firm, independent consistent and coherent sense of self. From a relational point of view we cannot suffice with a shift from positions to interests, offered by the mainstream scholarship and practice of ADR but should aim at ceasing the human tendency to withdraw from the relational, dialogic space in the midst of conflict.

A conflict specialist or negotiator who is able to identify the tendency to fortify within the firm separate self and can be mindful of the inclination towards spinning the wheel of suffering can then help transform this tendency into relational awareness. Therefore, it is important to be able to identify both the mental dispositions and the manifestations of such withdrawal, and the Twelve Links model provides an entry point for such identification.

Further research is needed to examine the manners in which the process of self-formation as described in the Twelve Links model is applicable for the process of interpersonal conflict escalation, and how to practically assist disputants to cease the cycle. However, the Twelve Links model can shed light on the processes of conflict escalation and conflict transformation, providing a thorough analysis of the enforcement of dis-ease in human interaction in the midst of conflict and offering to see the conflict situation as an opportunity to cultivate relational awareness and dialogue.

References


Facilitation Collaboration among Health Care Professionals*

Robin Cooper

Abstract
This paper explores how principles and practices of mediation and facilitation can be applied to facilitate collaboration among health care professionals. Certain techniques of mediation and facilitation are uniquely suited to address issues of values, roles, communication, and teamwork—four core competency domains of interprofessional collaborative practice—within the organizational context in order to transform workplace conflict into constructive collaboration. This paper discusses how one might draw upon those mediation and facilitation skills and techniques in order to address profession-centrism, professional prejudice, and us vs. them thinking, which hinder interprofessional collaboration. Those trained in the theories and practices associated with conflict analysis and resolution have a unique opportunity to foster mutual understanding and respect among health care professionals, and to heighten the salience of health professionals’ shared superordinate identity as members of the health care team.

*This paper was first presented at the Taos Institute Conference entitled “Exploring Relational Practices in Peacebuilding, Mediation and Conflict Transformation: From the Intimate to the International” held in November 2012 in San Diego, California. Peace and Conflict Studies was a co-sponsor of the conference. The development of this paper was supported in part by grant funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The Call for Collaboration in Health Care
Over the past dozen years, there has been a series of calls within the health care community to improve patient safety and health care outcomes through training and practices that help health professionals to communicate and collaborate more effectively. In a report entitled To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) (2000) reported that as many as 98,000 patient deaths each year in the United States are the result of errors in the healthcare system. The following year, the Institute of Medicine (2001) published a report entitled Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century, which noted that the health care delivery system needs to be redesigned to prepare the health care workforce to provide safe, quality, team-based care. This report called for a
number of changes to improve health outcomes, including both evidence-based and patient-centered practice. In addition, recognizing that patient-centered care requires collaboration among health professionals, the IOM also recommended interprofessional training of healthcare professionals. The theory behind interprofessional training is that “once health care professionals begin to work together in a collaborative manner, patient care will improve. Interprofessional teams enhance the quality of patient care, lower costs, decrease patients’ length of stay, and reduce medical errors” (Buring et al., 2009, p. 1).

From the patient perspective, the lack of collaboration among health professionals is experienced in part as having to undergo multiple assessments from multiple caregivers gathering the same information. This is not only inefficient and a waste of patients’ time, but it is frustrating for patients who wonder why their health care providers cannot communicate with one another and share such information. In addition, people see themselves as whole beings, rather than a set of different parts, each requiring a different specialist. “The problems encountered by people are typically not as divisible as some professionals might assume. Professionals need to develop frameworks that ensure that individuals are seen as holistic beings rather than as a set of distinct problems, illnesses” (Geva, Barsky, & Westernoff, 2000, p. 11).

In addition to the benefits of collaboration among health professionals for patients, there are public health benefits as well. Public demographics are shifting; people are living longer. The percentage of people aged 65 years and older in North America will double from 13% to approximately 25% in the next 20 years (Reeves, Lewin, Espin, & Zwarenstein, 2010). As a result, there will be increasing numbers of those with complex chronic conditions, such as arthritis, hypertension, and diabetes. For health care professionals, the implications are clear. There will be a growing need to focus on these chronic illnesses, and effective management of chronic illnesses requires health and social care professionals to work together.

The “team” concept in medicine is not new. The mid-20th century gave rise to interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary health care teams. For example, rehabilitation departments in the 1940s were using the team concept in caring for war veterans, though they tended to use a multidisciplinary approach. “Within this model of care, team members are only responsible for the activities related to their discipline. As expected, there is little sense of shared responsibility for patient outcomes or team development” (Pecukonis, Doyle, & Bliss, 2008, p. 419). Geriatrics, pediatrics, and surgery are medical areas that have utilized
the team concept, as well. Interprofessional care, however, is a concept that goes beyond multidisciplinary health care teams. Interprofessional practice has been defined as occurring when multiple health workers from different professional backgrounds work together with patients, families, caregivers, and communities to deliver the highest quality of care (World Health Organization, 2010).

Collaborative Training of Health Professionals

In 2003, the IOM proposed a new approach to the training of health professionals in order to achieve the goal of team-based and truly interprofessional care. In this report, entitled *Health Professions Education: A Bridge to Quality*, the IOM called for interprofessional training of healthcare professionals so that they can collaborate effectively. As opposed to interdisciplinary education, which is education that involves two or more areas of study or branches of science, interprofessional education (IPE) is “when students from two or more professions learn about, from and with each other to enable effective collaboration and improve health outcomes” (World Health Organization, 2010, p. 7).

Although the team concept is not new in health care, there remains considerable confusion regarding the definition and design of interprofessional education. “Interprofessional education is an important pedagogical approach for preparing health professionals students to provide patient care in a collaborative team environment” (Buring et al., 2009, p. 1). In the decade since the landmark IOM report *Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century*, there has been a growing call for interprofessional education (IPE) to be incorporated into the curriculum across the health professions. IPE is seen as an educational approach that will better prepare students to work in interprofessional teams. As has been noted, “students trained using an IPE approach are more likely to become collaborative interprofessional team members who show respect and positive attitudes towards each other and work towards improving patient outcomes” (Bridges, Davidson, Odegard, Maki, & Tomkowiak, 2011, pp. 1-2). The basic concept is that in order to collaborate successfully in the workplace, health professionals need to incorporate collaboration into their training programs, as well. According to the World Health Organization, “Interprofessional education is a necessary step in preparing a ‘collaborative practice-ready’ health workforce” (World Health Organization, 2010, p. 7).

Historically, health care was provided in the context of family and community-based care. With the era of modernism and the development of distinct health professions, however, each profession developed its own unique theories and models of practice, as well
as its own language/jargon and professional values. This provided for more consistency within each profession, but an unanticipated side effect was the “silo” model of health profession education. IPE is seen as a means of ameliorating these divisions in the educational processes which in turn have negatively impacted collaboration among health professionals. “To develop collaborative skills that can bring down the walls of the professional silos, health professional students need opportunities to spend time together, to learn and to work together in meaningful ways” (Hall, 2005, p. 193).

In an effort to provide support and guidance to those developing IPE programs, an Interprofessional Education Collaborative, representing multiple health professions, was formed to develop guidelines and identify core competencies associated with interprofessional practice. The Interprofessional Education Collaborative Expert Panel (2011) published a lengthy report, Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaborative Practice, which identified four core competency domains, each of which includes a number of distinct competencies. The four core competency domains are: Values/Ethics for Interprofessional Practice, Roles/Responsibilities, Interprofessional Communication, and Teams and Teamwork.

Best practices of interprofessional education exist, but there is no one-size-fits-all model (Bridges et al., 2011). IPE is meant to strengthen the non-technical professional competencies, such as interpersonal communication, team-building and leadership skills, and conflict management skills (Bridges et al., 2011; Buring et al., 2009). This is where social scientists trained in the theories and skills of conflict resolution can assist health professionals. Social scientists and practitioners of conflict resolution recognize that medical education and health care both occur within a social context, and that sociohistorical, sociocultural, and socioeconomic factors influence attitudes and behaviors of medical professionals, patients, and students. The theoretical and epistemological orientation of social constructionism is particularly helpful in this context, as this perspective acknowledges that learning is co-constructed. Bringing a relational focus to education and to professional practice, the social constructionist acknowledges the importance of social learning and of shared meaning-making (Gergen, 2009).

**Facilitating Collaboration**

The knowledge and skills associated with conflict resolution add value not only in the realm of interprofessional education but also interprofessional practice. Workplace conflict is a significant hindrance to effective collaboration across health care teams and among health professionals. To develop collaborative skills that can bring down the walls of the professional silos, health professional students need opportunities to spend time together, to learn and to work together in meaningful ways” (Hall, 2005, p. 193).

In an effort to provide support and guidance to those developing IPE programs, an Interprofessional Education Collaborative, representing multiple health professions, was formed to develop guidelines and identify core competencies associated with interprofessional practice. The Interprofessional Education Collaborative Expert Panel (2011) published a lengthy report, Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaborative Practice, which identified four core competency domains, each of which includes a number of distinct competencies. The four core competency domains are: Values/Ethics for Interprofessional Practice, Roles/Responsibilities, Interprofessional Communication, and Teams and Teamwork.

Best practices of interprofessional education exist, but there is no one-size-fits-all model (Bridges et al., 2011). IPE is meant to strengthen the non-technical professional competencies, such as interpersonal communication, team-building and leadership skills, and conflict management skills (Bridges et al., 2011; Buring et al., 2009). This is where social scientists trained in the theories and skills of conflict resolution can assist health professionals. Social scientists and practitioners of conflict resolution recognize that medical education and health care both occur within a social context, and that sociohistorical, sociocultural, and socioeconomic factors influence attitudes and behaviors of medical professionals, patients, and students. The theoretical and epistemological orientation of social constructionism is particularly helpful in this context, as this perspective acknowledges that learning is co-constructed. Bringing a relational focus to education and to professional practice, the social constructionist acknowledges the importance of social learning and of shared meaning-making (Gergen, 2009).
care professionals, which negatively impacts not only the professionals themselves but also patients. Dana (2003) has noted that over 65% of performance problems result from strained relationships between employees. Dana also highlights the multiple costs associated with workplace conflict, including wasted time, reduced decision quality, sabotage or theft of equipment, and the expense of lost employees and restructuring. Beyond these economic costs, there are health costs associated with workplace conflict that are suffered by the individuals involved and their organizations, such as more sick days and treatment costs for stress-associated illnesses.

While workplace conflict can be significantly destructive, conflict holds the potential to act as a constructive force for positive change in the work environment, as well. Conflict can inspire healthy competition, which in turn can inspire creativity and innovation. In addition, conflict can help groups and organizations reevaluate and clarify goals and missions (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2005). The opportunity for those involved in conflict resolution in the health care arena is to help health professionals to transform destructive workplace conflict into constructive interprofessional collaboration. To do so, one can draw upon various principles and techniques associated with best practices in facilitation and mediation. This paper will now consider a few examples of such principles and practices that a facilitator might apply in order to foster collaboration among health care professionals.

One of the first considerations of a facilitator organizing any session designed to foster more effective collaboration is the question of who should be participants of the session. This involves conducting some form of stakeholder analysis. In asking, “Who needs to be included?” Justice and Jamieson (1999) highlight four “I”s to consider: Influence, Interest, Impacted, and Intelligence. Those organizing the session would want to address the following questions:

- Who has power to block decisions/actions?
- Who cares about these decisions/actions?
- Who can/will support the work of the group?
- Who has special skills or interests relevant to the group?

The answers to these questions indicate individuals that it would be important to include in order for collaborative action to lead to meaningful outcomes. In the health care context, the questions might be altered to address questions of interaction across health professions. For example, a facilitator might ask participants: What other professions do you interact with on
Peace and Conflict Studies

a regular basis? Does a successful outcome in your work require participation from people in other fields/professions?

Having identified the appropriate participants, the facilitator has several responsibilities in supporting a constructive interaction. These responsibilities include environmental, relational, and procedural aspects (Isenhart & Spangle, 2000). The facilitator will manage the setting so that optimum conditions exist for discussion (environmental); manage group dynamics to promote collaboration (relational); and select procedures that are best for helping the group achieve its goals (procedural). Cross-cutting these aspects, there is an additional responsibility to facilitate effective information sharing. Best practices of this dimension of facilitation include establishing ground rules for communication, monitoring communication, assuring that valid information is provided equally to all participants, and inviting the commitment of all participants to commit to sharing relevant information (Schwarz, 2002). Isenhart and Spangle (2000) also note that this dimension of facilitation includes reframing “toxic” comments that would undermine collaboration (p. 113).

Once the right people are in the room, and guidelines for behavior have been clarified and agreed upon, a facilitator may find it beneficial throughout the session to make use of the diagnosis/intervention cycle (Schwarz, 2002). According to this model, the facilitator will observe behavior, infer meaning based upon that behavior, and decide whether to intervene. Should the facilitator decide to intervene, he or she will then describe the behavior, share the inference, test the inference with the participants, and then help the group decide whether and how to change the behavior. Facilitators working in the health care arena might also find it beneficial to organize the session based upon the four core competency domains of interprofessional collaborative practice, which are: Values/Ethics, Roles/Responsibilities, Interprofessional Communication, and Teams/Teamwork (Interprofessional Education Collaborative Expert Panel, 2011).

Core Competency Domain 1: Values/Ethics

Health professionals are generally aware of the importance of taking into account differing cultural values when interacting with patients; cultural competency is part of training programs for health professionals. Social science research provides evidence of the fact that the ways in which people make meaning out of their health conditions is socially constructed and varies from one cultural context to another (e.g., Scheper-Hughes, 1993). Likewise, researchers have explored how health professionals might better understand and negotiate patient choices and action as they pertain to their health (e.g., Farmer, 2005). The
focus on culture in educational programs, however, is on the relationship or interaction between the professional and the patient. Health professions training may not often address the need to recognize and respect the cultural differences between various health professions. Yet, just as surely as social groups function in socially constructed cultural contexts, so, too, do the various health professions.

The educational experiences and the socialization process of training solidify the professional’s unique world view. One could also say that each profession has a different “cognitive map” by which practitioners make sense of their responsibilities and priorities. “Cognitive learning theory suggests that each profession may attract a predominance of individuals with a particular set of cognitive learning skills and styles” (Hall, 2005, p. 190). Thus, differences between professions may not only be a result of social learning, but also of individuals’ process of selecting professions, which can reinforce distinctions between professional cultures. Those distinct professional cultures encompass such aspects as core values, customs, dress, and understandings of what constitutes success (Pecukonis et al., 2008). For example, as noted by Hall (2005):

The main outcome valued by physicians is to save a patient’s life, not a patient’s quality of life…Nurses and social workers…may value the patients’ story and will not rely on objective data as heavily as do physicians…Each of these professional values can create communication barriers between the professions. Since values are internalized and largely unspoken, they can create important obstacles that may actually be invisible to different team members struggling with a problem. For a solution to be reached, the professional values must be made apparent to all professionals involved. (Hall, 2005, p. 191)

In addition to reflecting differing professional values, divisions between various health professions may also reflect psychological factors. Humans seek to avoid uncertainty, and also crave a sense of belonging. Such psychological needs contribute to the formation of strong group identity. Just as this phenomenon is reflected in ethnocentrism on the level of social groups, this same phenomenon is manifested as profession-centrism among health professions. Profession-centrism is “a constructed and preferred view of the world held by a particular professional group developed and reinforced through training experiences” (Pecukonis et al., 2008, p. 420). Beyond preferring one’s own group, these psychological dynamics contribute to us versus them thinking. Strong group affiliation is positively
associated with negative attitudes towards outgroup members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Once the negative attitudes are developed regarding outgroup members, attribution theory suggests that people tend to blame the individuals in those other groups as being responsible for the negative traits due to character flaws.

Social scientists recognize that ethnocentrism can lead to stereotypes and prejudice between social groups. Similarly, profession-centrism and us versus them thinking among health professionals can lead to stereotypes and prejudice among professionals. “Often health professionals fail to recognize that they carry with them stereotypes or misconceptions of other health professionals that negatively impact opportunities to teach and/or practice collaboration” (D’Amour & Oandasan, 2005, p. 17). In fact, such professional stereotypes are so strongly associated with various health professions that even first-year medical, nursing, and dental students have been found to hold professional stereotypes (Reeves et al., 2010). While stereotypes can serve useful psychological functions in supporting positive social identity and uncertainty reduction, they negatively impact trusting professional relationships with other professionals. Not only professionals themselves, but also patients, are harmed by the lack of collaboration resulting from poor professional relationships among the members of the health care team.

Conflict resolution specialists can draw from theories and techniques associated with mediation to help these members of the health care team to minimize these professional stereotypes and build trusting relationships. This constructive step will contribute to more effective collaboration. Narrative mediation has demonstrated that people use stories to make sense of their lives and relationships (Winslade & Monk, 2000). Specifically, people “story” conflict in their own terms. Thus, conflict is produced within competing cultural norms. Facilitators of health professionals can learn from mediation and make a point of beginning interprofessional sessions by inviting the telling of the story—in other words, inviting a representative of each health profession to share how they see the patient’s case from their own professional lens and perspective.

Another way in which to address the issue of professional cultures and professional stereotypes is to ask participants in the session, “What is one thing you don’t like hearing people say about your profession or field? Why?” This allows all present to both identify professional stereotypes and to hear how they impact those about whom they are believed. A facilitator might invite participants to reflect and ask themselves, “Do I have prejudices towards other professions and types of work? Where did they come from? Have they
impacted my interactions with other professionals? What was the outcome?” Just as professionals need to develop cultural competence in working with clients, they need to develop interprofessional cultural competence to work with their colleagues. Managing different professional values is one of the interprofessional competencies health professionals can develop. “Part of being interprofessional is learning to acknowledge different professional frameworks and being prepared to negotiate across the boundaries” (Hammick, Freeth, Copperman, & Goodsman, 2009, p. 20)

One of the most important reasons for the need to acknowledge and respect different professional values and cultures is that a lack of respect can contribute to disregarding critical information. “Even timely, accurate information may not be heard or acted upon if the recipient does not respect the source” (Interprofessional Education Collaborative Expert Panel, 2011, p. 18). Facilitators can help health professionals to focus on the shared purpose and value of all members of the health care team to create safer, more efficient, and more effective organizations and processes. In addition, facilitators can support health professionals in recognizing that while the client or patient is the focus of their work, collaborative practice is also about caring for each other in the workplace. This includes valuing what you know, valuing what others know, and recognizing when it is in the client’s interest to share or seek knowledge from another professional. This leads to the second core competency domain, roles and responsibilities.

**Core Competency Domain 2: Roles/Responsibilities**

Interprofessional collaboration not only requires mutual respect and recognition of differing professional cultures and values, it also requires an understanding of the various roles and responsibilities of the members of the health care team. Professionals need to understand the scope of practice of other professionals to be able to interact effectively. The 2000 IOM report linked the ability to identify and prevent error with the ability of health care team members to know their own responsibilities, as well as those of their team members. Not only does this understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each member of the health care team reduce errors, it also enhances communication with patients, family members, and caregivers. “To interact meaningfully with each other and with the patient and/or family, team members must be familiar with the expertise and functions of the others’ roles” (Hall, 2005, p. 192). The key goals of this core competency domain include:

- Be able to clearly articulate your own role
- Learn from others: what they do and why they do things as they do
Consider how what they do applies to your own practice

Recognize the limits of your own professional expertise

Those trained in conflict resolution offer special knowledge and skills that can support health care professionals in achieving the goals associated with gaining competencies related to roles and responsibilities on the health care team. Conflict resolution specialists can draw upon relevant theories to help health care professionals understand some of the dynamics at work that affect the collaboration of health professionals. For example, Identity Theory highlights the importance of roles in individuals’ constructions of their sense of identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Given how important roles are to one’s sense of self and sense of worth, it is understandable that health care professionals would defend their right to maintain those roles. If they see interprofessional collaboration as a threat to their professional roles, they will be less likely to engage in that collaboration.

In the effort to foster collaboration, conflict resolution specialists can draw from mediation in taking steps to address the core competency domain of roles and responsibilities. For example, one might hold a facilitated training session for individuals from multiple health professions designed to enhance the group’s mutual understanding of the roles and perspectives of their colleagues from other health professions. At the start of such a session, the facilitator might make an opening statement:

We will be reading a case scenario, followed by discussion questions based on the four core competency domains of Interprofessional Practice. Near the end of the session, you will be completing a Role Profile form as a group, summarizing the role that each profession represented here might play in this case. As you discuss the case, keep in mind that the focus of the activity today is not on the clinical aspects of the case; it’s not about the diagnosis you might make. The focus of the exercise today is on the larger objectives of interprofessional practice—working in teams and communicating across professions in order to contribute to patient safety, improved health outcomes, and a better patient experience.

Following the reading of a case scenario, a representative from each health profession can be invited to make an “opening statement” in which they are asked to address the following questions:

- From the perspective of your profession, what are the goals or priorities you have for your interaction with this patient?
Peace and Conflict Studies

- What kinds of questions might you ask this person?
- With whom would you share the information you gather from the patient?
- What might be the process you would use to share that information?
- What interventions might you use?

Such a facilitated session can be useful in helping health professionals to recognize areas of “role blurring” or overlapping roles, which can raise awareness of the need to avoid confusion or conflict in those areas. Another beneficial outcome of such a session is that hearing how their colleagues from other professions view and intervene in a case can heighten the salience of all participants’ superordinate identity beyond their individual professional identity to their identity as members of the health care team.

Core Competency Domain 3: Interprofessional Communication

Whether it is to share information about professional values, or professional roles and responsibilities, communication across professions is essential for successful collaboration among members of the health care team. As a clear indication of this, interprofessional communication is one of the four core competency domains of collaborative practice designated by the Interprofessional Education Collaborative (2011). In a manner similar to that pertaining to culture, communication skills that are taught to professionals usually focus on interactions with clients and customers, not on communication across professions. Yet members of the health care team depend upon successful communication in order to collaborate effectively for the benefit of patients and professionals alike.

There are a variety of challenges related to communication that can negatively impact interprofessional communication. For example, each profession tends to develop its own jargon and use terms that are unfamiliar even to other health professionals, or attribute unique meanings to words that hold other connotations in everyday parlance. A phrase as simple as “on the floor” may be understood quite differently by a patient, a nurse, or a pharmacist. The use of acronyms that are not common across health professions is another barrier to interprofessional communication. A more subtle but very important factor that plays a role in interprofessional communication is that of power and status differences among the different professions represented on the health care team. The medical culture has traditionally been one in which the voice of physicians is privileged over the voice of other roles, such as nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists and others who may have more direct contact with patients.
Professional hierarchies created by demographic and professional differences are common but create dysfunctional communication patterns working against effective interprofessional teamwork…. Literature related to safe [practice] now focuses on overcoming such communication patterns by placing responsibility on all team members to speak up in a firm but respectful way when they have concerns about…quality or safety. (Interprofessional Education Collaborative Expert Panel, 2011, p. 22)

In any workplace context, too much information may distract from key points, and too little information may lead to bad decisions or delays. In health care, the ramifications of poor communication can impact people’s welfare and even their lives. Some best practices of communication can alleviate some of the challenges of interprofessional communication. For example, team members can consider what information other professionals need to do their work successfully, and convey that information in jargon-free and acronym-free language. For those on the receiving end of information, it is important to be an active listener—to encourage the other person to explain fully what they mean. It is a good idea for everyone to be mindful of their non-verbal communication, to be aware of showing respect to all members of the health care team through facial expressions and body language. In addition, all team members, including those who traditionally have held less power or prestige in the health care arena, need to take responsibility for speaking up if they are aware of important points that are not being raised by others on the team.

A facilitator of an interprofessional team session might raise awareness about these communication issues by asking some simple questions for reflection and discussion, such as:

- What are some examples of the jargon used in your profession/field?
- Have you experienced confusion in a meeting due to not understanding terminology?
- Has your participation in an interprofessional context been impacted positively by non-verbal communication of others? What did they do? What was the outcome?

Conflict resolution specialists can foster more effective interprofessional communication by teaching members of the health care team some simple communication skills frequently employed in the context of mediation. For example, the use of paraphrasing, summarizing, and probing questions to be sure you understood correctly (Moore, 2003).

If conflict arises, the facilitator can apply the techniques of developing an externalizing conversation and naming the problem, essential steps within narrative mediation; and in a team where sufficient trust has been established, the facilitator might
encourage members of different health professions to experience internalized other questioning in order to better understand the perspective of other team members regarding a case or workplace situation (Winslade & Monk, 2000). Finally, though it can be uncomfortable for the group, a skilled facilitator can follow the guidance of Schwarz (2002) and discuss the “undiscussable” topics that may be the elephants in the room that team members are hesitant to address openly but which it is important to discuss for effective collaboration.

Core Competency Domain 4: Teams/Teamwork

It is evident that interprofessional collaboration and effective teamwork go hand in hand. “In collaborative practice, individual team members assume profession-specific roles, but as a team, they identify and analyze problems, define goals and assume joint responsibility for actions and interventions to accomplish the goals” (Hall, 2005, p. 192).

The dimensions of interprofessional teamwork include: clear team goals, a shared team identity, shared team commitment, role clarity, interdependence, and integration between team members (Reeves et al., 2010).

In an effort to foster these dimensions, one can lead a facilitated discussion following each profession’s presentation of their perspective of the case in a session such as described above. Such a facilitated discussion might include questions such as:

- What similarities or differences did you notice regarding assessment processes?
- What did you learn about another profession?
- What did you find surprising about what someone from another profession said?
- What is something that you appreciate about the role or perspective of another profession?
- Did talking about the case from an interprofessional perspective make you realize anything new or different about your own role and profession?

In addition to discussing the different roles and perspectives represented in the group, another useful technique drawn from facilitation that can foster teamwork is to give the group a motivating group task (Schwarz, 2002). An exercise applicable to an interprofessional team session is to have the group members complete a Role Profile Form. In the facilitator’s opening remarks, he or she can indicate that the participants will be doing this task (see example of facilitator’s opening statement above), so the group members are motivated to pay close attention to the descriptions of each profession’s role in the case. At the end of the discussion, the participants can then complete the Role Profile Form collectively. One good
rule is to state that individuals cannot provide the information for their own profession. This task not only motivates the group members to learn about each other’s roles but also is a mean of providing recognition to the value of each profession. This aspect of the exercise fulfills the recognition dimension of Transformative Mediation (Bush & Folger, 2005).

An important dimension of successful team functioning is the ability to make decisions and to understand how decisions are made on the team. One model is that of a wheel with the most appropriate person or human services agency leading at any given stage during the service user’s journey. This has the benefit of again recognizing the importance of each profession engaged in care. A challenge of this approach, however, is the need for very clear communication about these changes regarding decision-making. “If leadership and coordination…are to pass from person to person or agency to agency, then ‘handing over the baton’…needs to be explicit so that everyone notices this has occurred” (Hammick et al., 2009, p. 71). Even if a team member is not officially the team leader, all team members need to practice leadership—even if for a short time for a specific reason. In light of this fact, it is important for those seeking to foster collaboration among health professionals to emphasize that leaders have important responsibilities, which include encouraging others to follow their lead, nurturing team members, supporting relationships in the team, seeing the work of the team as a whole, and planning for the future (Hammick et al.).

**Closing Reflections**

In spite of the advantages of collaboration, there are notable challenges associated with seeking to incorporate more collaboration into the health care team. These challenges include conflicts related to personality differences, changes in team membership, and varying levels of competency as well as varying levels of receptivity to learning from one another. Some of the best practices of facilitation can assist in dealing with these challenges. For example, it is useful to reinforce the superordinate identity of team members by staying focused on shared goals (D’Amour & Oandasan, 2005). The facilitator can also promote interprofessional values by dealing with conflict openly and constructively, acknowledging the work and value of all professions, and drawing out the contributions of all team members. In addition, managing emotions plays an important role in the success of such initiatives. A facilitator can encourage health professionals to use emotional intelligence for self-awareness and self-management; as they learn what triggers their anxiety or anger, they will be better able to prepare for such emotional responses and manage them. All members of the health care team can also be encouraged to both tune in to others’ emotions and empathize, as well
as to show respect and use communication skills to keep focus on common purpose of the team. In all of these ways, the principles and practices of mediation and facilitation can foster collaboration among health care professionals, benefiting them, their organizations, and, most importantly, their patients.

References


Relational Identities: Reclaiming Ourselves through Recreating Each Other in Collaborative Conversations in Group Therapy Work*

Celia Quintas and Christopher F. Burnett

Abstract

This project took place at an outpatient mental health setting, and offers new understandings in our pursuit for communal well-being. It documents the unique participation of group members in the co-creation of new knowledge and better understanding of human relationships using a participatory action research methodology. The article explores how improvements can take place in the lives of people diagnosed as chronically mentally ill. It demonstrates how a postmodern, collaborative approach to group therapy impacted the ways in which persons diagnosed with serious and chronic mental illness recreated their identities, thereby affecting their ways of relating to others and to themselves. It examines the social and communal components of understanding human behavior, moving away from an intrapsychic and individualistic framework. Doing so allows us to expand our awareness and utilize our humanity in the treatment of people who have been diagnosed with mental illnesses. The role and power of collaboration are illustrated by considering the unique ways group members presented their ideas and behaved with one another. Possibilities for more sustainable ways of living together and sharing meaningful moments are considered. This article can serve as an invitation for how mental health professionals can also contribute to a culture of peace.

*This paper was first presented at the Taos Institute Conference entitled “Exploring Relational Practices in Peacebuilding, Mediation and Conflict Transformation: From the Intimate to the International” held in November 2012 in San Diego, California. Peace and Conflict Studies was a co-sponsor of the conference.

Introduction

There has been a long tradition and history of discontentment with traditional approaches to mental health treatments (Melucci, 1994; Orford, 2008; Revenson & Seidman, 2004; Szasz, 1974). The medical model, under the influence of psychiatry and pharmaceutical companies, has dominated the ways in which people’s emotional suffering and distress have been conceptualized. Consequently, the stigma, fear, and demoralization
associated with the diagnoses and treatment of mental illness have shaped the lens through which society sees, and therefore cares for people with psychiatric histories. People who have experienced emotional difficulties, such as loneliness or self-doubt, or who have lost the ability to make sense of shared, common habits of living, are often ostracized, medicated, and left with a severe sense of shame, failure, and guilt in addition to the side effects of the medications prescribed to them.

However, there is an alternative way to conceptualize the idea of mental illness, an approach that attempts to reshape the relationships between mental health professionals and people diagnosed with severe mental illnesses. It does so by shifting the focus away from diagnosing and treating individual, intrapsychic symptoms. Instead, this alternative moves toward seeking to create meaning out of people’s experiences, amplifying their knowledge by identifying social, political, and cultural influences in their behavior. This unique approach to conceptualizing mental illness can help individuals reclaim their personhood and restore dignity for the people who have been considered mentally ill.

This research project describes my experience working at a small, private psychiatric hospital in an intensive outpatient program, where I facilitated group psychotherapy for people diagnosed with severe mental illnesses. Some of the group members actively experienced psychosis despite taking many medications that were dispensed daily at the assisted living facilities where they resided. Members attended the program three to four days a week to join conversations that were social invitations to gain more understanding about what was going on in their lives. The group attended to Medicare/Medicaid patients who lived off monthly disability incomes collected by the ALFs where they lived in the local community. The patients attending had been diagnosed with chronic mental illnesses through a psychosocial assessment and psychiatric evaluation taking place prior to being placed in the group. Most had been hospitalized numerous times, for long periods, in psychiatric institutions before coming to the facility, and they had all faced serious socioeconomic constraints on top of their emotional losses. They had also been prescribed multiple psychotropic medications, which at times contributed to their inability to participate in the group conversations. These medications, however, also allowed patients to live in our communities rather than be jailed in psychiatric wards.

As a therapist at this facility, the “Ohana project” was my initiative to provide group members with a sense of belonging in a safe, communal environment—a place for them to come, feel accepted and believe that their contribution in the construction of a culture of
peace will benefit all. All this became a negotiation taking place routinely from the moment they were picked up by vans at their assisted living facilities. In a previous job, I witnessed how mental health services can perpetuate feelings of inadequacy and amplify deficiency in the lives of people diagnosed with chronic mental illnesses. When I first met some of the people who later became members of the Ohana group, I witnessed their experience of feeling misplaced, and it mimicked what I had previously seen. They arrived with a diagnosis of chronic mental illness and were still sent home for not meeting the criteria for the programs in place at that time. However this time I felt able to make a change. I quickly went to the director of the program, and shared with her some of the ideas I had in order to include them in our community. Two weeks later they started attending group meetings at the outpatient program and joining the efforts of the Ohana project in our community.

I served as the facilitator of the group conversations and proposed activities for an average of 12 patients. The group was formally named Reconnections, but its participating members knew it as Ohana. Ohana means family in Hawaiian. Every time we had to introduce ourselves to a new group member, Eve, one of the group members, liked to add, “In Ohana, no one is forgotten and no one is left behind.” Once this posture was manifested, it continued every time we initiated a group meeting, even at times when someone was missing. Our work derived from everybody’s participation. It also relates to how one’s participation was elevated. Ideas and feelings were invited, not discounted or left behind. Each one’s contribution had the potential to bring awareness, knowledge and more understanding.

One member of the group named Eve, or the “little prince”, was elected the spokesperson of our group, despite his speech impediment. He was perceived as the one who participated most in the group conversations. He always had ideas to share and opinions to give. His odd physical features, like his deformed hands, with fingers webbed together, and a cleft palate, gave added poignancy to the beauty of his person and the creative richness of his mind. He commanded attention and his challenges sparked vivid discussions and learning moments. Rather than isolating himself because of a mental diagnosis, like he had in the past, he found space and offered stimulating starting points for many of our explorations. With us, his ideas were not confirmations of his oddness and mental illness diagnosis. Eve’s presence gave voice to many of our questions within our group. We collaborated in creating answers that were meaningful and novel. We learned to explore what led us to formulate questions, and to appreciate the notion that someone benefits not only from our answers but also our questions.
Eve initiated the way we, in the group, introduced our work together to new members and modeled the preferred language and behavior we used to talk and interact among ourselves. Because group members were highly attuned to the ways we talked and related to each other, we created an environment in which we did not reenact, through our interactions, the neglect and disrespect learned and perpetuated through past experiences. My presence in the group purposefully illustrated an active role, as I participated, facilitated, shared, interpreted, and learned like any other group member. I often reminded the group members of their expertise in life; my own expertise, combined with my clinical experience, created tasteful ingredients for the soup of knowledge we created through our conversations. The soup of knowledge was the idea that I invited them to attend to. As we conversed in group, I reminded them about their roles in our performances and actions together as we dialogued. I used to say that there was a caldron in the center of our circle that we stirred with our ideas, feelings, words, and actions, and that we were all nourished by it.

Szasz (1974) emphasized that people diagnosed with problematic behaviors do not necessarily need to present any physical pathology in order to be considered medically ill. However, they may violate social, moral, ethical, or legal norms dictated by social expectations and stipulated by dominant norms created for social conformity. In such cases, the apparent mental illness is not an illness but actually a social status. “In actual contemporary social usage, the finding of a mental illness is made by establishing a deviance in behavior from certain psychosocial, ethical, or legal norms” (Szasz, 1960, p. 115). Moreover, according to Levine, Perkins, and Perkins (2005), some forms of mental health treatment place problems exclusively within the boundaries of the individual, emphasizing blame and isolation and dismissing the social and political components of the concept of mental illness. Furthermore, Levine et al. call attention to the consequences of restricting our understanding to individualistic explanations of people’s problems. They emphasized:

Mental health professions in general and psychiatry in particular, contributed to the incidence of mental health problems by confirming and helping to enforce existing social norms. By defining mental illness in isolation from social conditions the profession distracted attention from social issues that were at the root from abnormal behavior in the first place. (Levine et al., 2005, p. 63)

The Ohana program invited people diagnosed with chronic mental illness to become more responsible, by generating an environment that allowed for the re- and co-creation of people’s
social identities. We elevated our sense of community with the purpose of bringing forth our social responsibility, emphasizing the importance of perceiving and speaking about our experiences in a relational manner, and encouraging a sense of interconnectedness among everyone. The process that takes place in the lives of people diagnosed with a severe mental illness diminishes their capacity to perceive their influence on the lives of others. If people are considered ill, their disability can invalidate them socially. They are not usually expected to experience feelings, share emotions, or manifest affection like most other people do.

In our group meetings, we made explicit the social difficulties faced by members of the group outside the group setting. We created alliances across different environmental issues affecting the lives of group members, such as housing, issues with roommates, medical visits, transportation, community resources, employment, hobbies, and others. Many of the mental health services currently offered to the community are housed in institutions or settings guided by the dominant view of psychiatry and its diagnostic and individualistic conceptualization of human behavior. According to Scheff (1966):

One frequently noted deficiency in psychiatric formulations of the problem is the failure to incorporate social processes into the dynamics of mental disorder. Although the importance of these processes is increasingly recognized by psychiatrists, the conceptual models used in formulating research questions are basically concerned with individual rather than social systems. Genetic, biochemical, and psychological investigations seek different causal agents, but utilize similar models: dynamic systems that are located within the individual. In these investigations, social processes tend to be relegated to a subsidiary role, because the model focuses attention on individual differences rather than on the social system in which the individual is involved. (p. 9)

Disease prevention efforts in our modern health system strongly rely on individual efforts for success. Revenson and Schiaffino (2000) illustrated how assumptions and causes of illnesses in our existing society focus on individuals’ faults. Consequently, interventions for better health and lifestyle are based on campaigns that still target individuals rather than attending to the environmental contributions that lead to constructions of such misbehaviors; “then health interventions will be limited to persuading individuals to discontinue these behaviors, either through health education, fear appeals, or negative reinforcement” (Revenson & Schiaffino, 2000, p. 473). Revenson and Schiaffino (2000) made reference to medical
conditions such as heart disease, cancer, and stroke, for which medicine has achieved progress in treatments. Although society has not made the same progress in understanding so-called mental illnesses that has been made with other medical conditions, the same medical model continues to dominate the ways in which mental health providers address the concept of mental illness and provide services to the community. Dalton, Elias, and Wandersman (2001) emphasized,

Instead of preserving rigid lines of expertise between mental health professionals and their patients, it involves finding ways that persons with disorders may help each other, or ways that persons with disorders may be enabled to assume greater autonomy in managing their lives. (p. 9)

As a result, a change in a system entails reviewing the assumptions of the people involved, impacting social constructions, and creating changes beyond the individual.

Anderson (1997) described how the postmodern movement in the social sciences illustrates the way we are moving from a stagnant, detached, hierarchical, unidirectional, linear stance to one that is lateral, embraces togetherness, attends to the contexts of systems and multiple perspectives, promotes dialogue, and exposes our need for one another. The language of traditional and mainstream treatment neither permeated nor expressed the preferences of those with mental diagnoses for trusting relationships, respect, and their desires to share ideas, show affection and speak their minds. It mostly served to maintain what had been subtly told to them: “I see you and hear you as a mentally sick.”

We cared for the ways we listened to each person’s stories and interpretations, attempting not to instill shame or fear when someone’s ideas and hopes were being expressed in the group. Some members of the group had difficulty putting together their thoughts and we gradually learned to wait in silence as if we could almost see the creation of a thought in someone’s mind. We elevated the notion that one’s contribution and participation mattered to the group. In the process, we found healing in a few minutes of silence and patience.

When I was curious about a particular topic, and I was the one inviting the group to a particular area of exploration or group dynamic, I asked them to reflect on what they thought had inspired me to make such an invitation. There was a continuous effort to make visible the knowledge we carried and the new understandings we created together. Anderson (1997) elaborated on knowledge, the individual, language, and therapy from a modern perspective, and how these forces interplay and can be interpreted differently through a postmodern view of human behavior. In the modern tradition, “knowledge is representative of an objective
world, existing independently of the mind and feelings . . . and is universal and cumulative” (Anderson, 1997, p. 30), and language is only a representation. The metaphor of the human mind as a computer-like machine (Anderson, 1997) confined within an autonomous individual and the view of the human being as an independent observer of reality richly depict us as being self-sufficient. Our role of powerful and distant authority is manifested in the way we interact with our environment, believing it to be constantly available for us to exploit, use, and dispose of. From the modernist view, relationships based on hierarchical dynamics are created and maintained to support status. Some dictate norms and right ways of being in the world, possessing social, educational, economic, and political privileges; others are subjugated and placed in a submissive position, passive followers, observers of their realities, and recipients of knowledge.

Anderson (1997) alerted us that a mental health professional, “as representative of a dominant social and cultural discourse, is the knower of the human story and what that story should be” (p. 31). The therapy process, according to Anderson, can perpetuate silence and oppression by placing the therapist in the role of superior expert of clients’ lives, assessing and pointing to their limitations and disconformities and rendering them mere actors of a diagnostic script. According to Anderson, “Professional and cultural labels classify and place people; they do not tell about them” (p. 33). On the other hand, the postmodernism movement offers different focuses and possibilities. As a critique, postmodernism opens space for questioning the modernist view of the world with its emphasis on universal truths. It challenges:

The scientific criterion of knowledge as objective and fixed . . . rejects the foundational dualism of modernism, an outer real world and a mental inner world, and is characterized by uncertainty, unpredictability, and the unknown. Change is a given and is embraced. (Anderson, 1997, p. 36)

Andersen (1992) elaborated on the notion that knowledge was considered by Plato and his followers to be a source for explaining and predicting; creating rights, wrongs, and truths; and using either-or lenses to interpret human behavior. He proposed:

The discussion that has been introduced by postmodern philosophy . . . yields other concepts in addition to those which have dominated thought for a long while, including mythos in addition to truth, metaphor in addition to concept, figurative in addition to literal, imagination in addition to reason, rhetoric in
addition to logic, and narrative in addition to argument. (Andersen, 1992, p. 61)

McNamee (1992) elaborated on the modernist and postmodernist orientation to therapy and differentiated the unique focus of each of these traditions. In the modernist view, therapy is an opportunity for rational problem talk through various models and methods, with the intent to uncover an individual’s essence—through systematic observations and comparisons—and form conclusions. “Although these therapeutic approaches vary, they all share in the focus on individual rationality, techniques of observation, and belief in progress” (McNamee, 1992, p. 191). Postmodernism, on the other hand, is marked by a focus on language and on how people interact in the process of constructing their realities. Moreover, it invites openness in the rescue of a plurality of perspectives—some which were previously silenced or ignored. This shift in traditions represents progression from the individual as the sole generator of events to a communal and relational starting point in the search for understanding of any situation, in our ways of speaking, of asking questions, of positioning ourselves before one another. Consequently an opening of a multiplicity of propositions for possible answers can become available for us as endless points of explorations. “How do particular interactive contexts privilege one form of discourse while other contexts provide opportunities for vastly different discourses? This is the postmodern question” (McNamee, 1992, p. 191).

Shotter (1993) explored four main points that illustrate the changes taking place in the humanities from a postmodern perspective and the implications those changes have for the social sciences. The author noted differences in how researchers position and present themselves and then participate within the investigatory arena. Shotter explained, “There is a movement, first from the standpoint of the detached, theory-testing onlooker, to the interested, interpretative, procedure-testing participant observer” (p. 19). The researcher attends not only to what he is able to observe and reflect on, but also to the influence of his observing process. There is “a shift from a way of knowing by ‘looking at’ to a way of knowing by being ‘in contact, or in touch with’” (p. 20). A new set of research topics is attending more to what happens between people as the focus of investigation. The study of human behavior is entering a parade of changes, “giving rise to a non-cognitive, non-systematic, rhetorical, critical, social constructionist approach to psychology” (p. 19).

The Ohana project was an illustration of how collaborative practices and the joint efforts of a group of people provide a sense of belonging and togetherness. These practices, in turn, can be quite influential in the promotion of well-being and the offering of hope for better ways of understanding the complexity of life. Moreover, the Ohana project provided evidence of improvement in the welfare of individuals who had been diagnosed with severe mental illnesses and struggled in carrying the labels and stigma associated with such diagnoses. Our conversations created an environment where symptoms and their manifestations were placed in the background of our daily routines. Group therapy sessions focused on life scenarios which became invitations to assume preferred identities in the permanent process of construction through which we interacted and contributed to each other’s lives. “There is no hidden self to be interpreted. We ‘reveal’ ourselves in every moment of interaction through the on-going narrative that we maintain with others” (Lax, 1992, p. 71). Our conversations in the group sessions were generated by events taking place in the group or in the local community, and they were brought to the group’s attention by group members. Our experiences of these events were storied in our group meetings.

According to Cecchin (1992):

The expression of our experience through these stories shapes or makes up our lives and our relationships . . . through the very process of the interpretation within the context of the stories that we enter into and that we are entered into by others. (p. 98)

The topics for our conversations in the group varied from relationships to social/self-awareness; family dynamics; feelings; social systems; social-esteem; past experiences, both good and bad; abuse; trauma; and successful stories. Any topic was welcomed. This practice, based on constructionist ideas (Anderson, 1997; Gergen, 2001, 2006; Gergen & Gergen, 2008), freed us to use group time as an endless landscape of possibilities for conversations. As we spoke together, we attended to the ways we articulated our ideas, as the “words we use—just like the names we give to each other—are used to carry out relationships. They are not pictures of the world, but practical actions in the world” (Gergen & Gergen, 2008, p. 15).

Additionally, I used to place the notes I would write down during our conversations on the center of the table inside our circle, to give the patients the opportunity to review our conversations, learn more through the comments I had written about our process in group, and verify the accuracy of their quotes in the progress notes that I would later document in
their medical charts. I also liked to read back to the group some parts of what they shared. This was another way to invite awareness by noticing group members’ contributions through the hearings of their own ideas through the sounds of my voice. I often asked them to share why though I did that and what they thought was informing my action, as a way to invite more reflections, emphasize their contributions to my ways of thinking, facilitate dialogue, and invite them to interpret our conversations. We practiced transparency in our *with-nessing* of each other’s contributions in group. This concept of *with-nessing* manifested itself in our experience of being with each other and, in being together; we witnessed in each moment each other’s life performance and our own.

In his work on the process of constructing therapeutic possibilities, Cecchin (1992) acknowledged the contribution of therapists’ hypotheses, claiming that they serve as bridges which not only inform the beginning of a conversation but also establish a connection between the realities and all the elements of the scenario that patients come from. He also referred to the importance of language and how “humans use words to caress each other” (p. 90). In this way, words and hypotheses—in spite of their content—allow people to get in touch with each other.

**Patients’ Voices and Language as Actions**

Gergen and Gergen (2008) remind us that language exposes our performance as people in relationship with one another, reconstructing ourselves each time we meet. “In a broader sense, we may say that as we communicate with each other we construct the world in which we live” (Gergen & Gergen, 2008, p. 11). Language can create new realities and maintain old traditions. The ways in which human experiences are languaged illustrate and sustain relations of power and privilege, fashioning professions such as psychiatry and psychology, promoting certain values, favoring dominant ideologies, and guiding ways of being with each other in the world (Gergen, Hoffman, & Anderson 1996). According to Smith (2007):

> Psychiatry did not rise up one day and slay the ancient voice like a mythical dragon. Rationality did not up and murder irrationality. But somewhere around the eighteenth century, the culture’s way of thinking and talking about unusual experiences alters markedly. What was once revelation and inspiration becomes symptom and pathology. What was piety and poetry becomes science and sanity. In public discourse, voice-hearing becomes a force of harm and an experience to eradicate. (p. 13)
In Ohana, we were carefully vigilant of the language we used to speak with each other. Patients were invited to reflect on what practices we were promoting as we spoke and paid attention to whether our ways of relating through language were coherent with the kind of people we were continuously choosing to become.

During group conversations, I presented alternative stories as contributions to the equally valid stories the patients would tell; together, we co-created new ways of understanding and speaking about different topics. We had conversations as we increased our awareness and appreciation of each group member’s ideas and points of view. In this way, a multitude of possibilities became available. Consequently, the rapid speed of thoughts and ideas, the urge to stand up and circle nervously while searching for an idea or a word, or the spontaneous generation of a seemingly off-topic question were all embraced and considered valuable contributions and bridges of connection among group members. As a result of this accepting stance, no group member’s participation was lost, and any movement in the direction of expressing experience had the potential to become dialogue and an invitation for the creation of stories and learning opportunities. Group members’ initiatives towards elevating their presence in the group were neither minimized nor discounted exclusively as manifestations of psychiatric symptoms.

One’s words are a transparent means through which one can achieve a sensible contact with those around one. Only if we switch our metaphors, only if we begin to talk of knowledge “by being in touch” do we begin to raise the kinds of question that make contact with the issues here: to do with the rhetorical “shaping” and “moving” functions of language. (Shotter, 1993, p. 23)

The Ohana group faced difficult moments when some of the group members chose to participate and elaborate in ways that seemed senseless to the rest of the group. However, the group learned about respectful listening practices and understood the benefits of hearing one’s own voice, feeling heard by others, and experiencing respect. Andersen (1992) took this idea further by presenting the concept of “co-presence”, which refers to a person’s ability to sit still, remaining respectfully and silently accessible, fully present, and celebrating just being with the other. As Andersen proposed, “Might that be the most significant of our contributions: to listen to the quietness of the troubled one’s thinking?” (p. 63).

I often reminded the group about the importance of full acceptance; by doing so, I attempted to bring down any walls of shame, any possibilities of recursive behaviors for the perpetuation of previous experiences. I was alert not to feed further and maintain the...
Pervasiveness of past experiences serving solely as reminders of inadequacy and deficit, when their uniqueness and difficulties had been considered merely psychiatric symptoms. As Gergen (2001) articulated,

We may all agree that there is something unusual about an individual’s behavior, but why should we suppose that the community of clinicians and psychiatrists are correct in calling it a mental illness, and that DSM categories are maps of this world? (p. 12)

This idea was simply performed in group, with the assumption that there was always something to be learned from one another. We co-created ideas, performing the knowledge we continuously built during our group work.

There were times that members of the group engaged in conversations I found difficult to follow, and I openly expressed this, making public my difficulties and asking if what one member was saying made sense to some of the other members. This co-elaboration of our group work process often translated into an invitation for a group member to relate and then elaborate, rescuing his or her contribution from an echo of loneliness to a call for more dialogue. According to Becvar, Canfield, and Becvar (1997), “One does not know and cannot predict which story will be meaningful to which group member” (p. 116). My transparency also became an invitation to other group members to jump in, relating to the speaker or rescuing a thought, idea, or feeling that otherwise would have been lost, its fruitfulness wasted. This communal knowledge, which we continuously recreated, became like food for each one of us. We constantly added to our soup of knowledge, a nickname given by the group to our conversations, in which we stirred our ideas and feelings as we interacted and created knowledge with one another.

I tried to remind the group of our social responsibility as part of the group and our need to be responsible for the progress of the group’s conversations, work and growth. Social constructionists McNamee and Gergen (1999) proposed the idea of relational responsibility as a posture we take when speaking. The idea in our group was that we languaged our stories through relational lenses rather than in individual terms. By conversing relationally, we framed the ways we talked with each other, attending to the vivid relationships manifesting themselves among us as we interacted in conversation. Moreover, our group process became part of a gradual invitation to influential people, whom we had internalized and embodied through our life journeys, to take part in our dialogues. Our intention was to make present in our dialogues a multiplicity of intelligibilities that we
acknowledged as contributors to the persons we were becoming. Gergen (2009) claimed that “in the process of relational flow, we generate durable meaning together in our local conditions, but in doing so we continuously innovate in ways that are sensitive to the multiplicity of relationships in which we are engaged” (p. 46). We, in Ohana, distanced ourselves from the traditional discourse of personal blame, moving instead toward a discourse in which our voices came together in our search for better ways of acting, relating, and understanding our process of being, living, and growing.

Group members were encouraged to reflect on how the group benefited if one member chose to share a particular idea or event and excluded others, prioritizing the well-being of the group and how the group members benefited from it. Many times, I invited the patients to engage in asking one another questions. When someone was sharing an event, a memory, a dream, or a wish, I asked the group to ask questions, engaging the group members to not only be attentive to the conversation taking place but also to use their intelligence and heart. The act of asking questions became a point of connection for us all, as we engaged with and became prepared for one another, making ourselves accessible and available to the group. According to Becvar et al. (1997), “Questions are used both to deconstruct stories, and to create new stories” (p. 116). Being attentive to the close relationship between the influence of questions and the openings for more conversations and the understandings they may generate allowed us to be creative and curious. Gergen and Gergen (2008) reminded us of one of the main characteristics of social constructionism, as it continuously alerts us to maintain a posture of curiosity and respect for one another. We explored how and what each one of us decided to bring to the group, based not only on our version of events or past experiences but also our cultural traditions. “Something has happened for them, but to describe it will require that it be represented from a particular cultural standpoint–in a particular language” (Gergen & Gergen, 2008, p.11). Accordingly, I invited the patients to become inquisitive in their search for better understandings of group members’ points of view and to be sensitive to whose influence we were favoring as we were choosing certain topics instead of others, attending to particular ways of behaving over others, or prompting ourselves to be present and hear others’ sharing. Patients were reminded that they were constantly exercising their right to choose in every move they made in the group, including when there were none, as there were times that some patients were tired or overly dominated by medications and were, therefore, unable to participate fully. In general, the happenings and choices taking place in the group were done mindfully. We voted to decide whether we
would let a tired group member take a nap during group time, and the group talked about whether everyone found it acceptable for someone to decide not to participate in our conversations by just saying, “pass.” Whichever way a group member chose to be in the group created a pause for reflection for the rest of the group, including my invitation to take things to a vote or other group dynamic I presented. Gergen and Gergen (2008) proposed:

We thus become curious about whose traditions in particular are honored or unquestioned, and whose voices are silent or suppressed? . . . Do we necessarily want to embrace this way of constructing the world and the future it will create for us? (p. 26)

These were questions I posed directly at times and, at other times, in more subtle ways. My intention was to elevate our level of awareness and respect for one another and to attract us to meet again the next day. We provided each other with comfort and security, and were constantly reminded of our potential to be better people. In the group, we elaborated on our ways of being, and we asked ourselves if the way we were performing our moment with one another was consistent with the people we wanted to become, as we joined together in search of more understanding and a better life, both within our group meetings and in the community.

One of the main characteristics of our conversations in group was our emphasis on “undiagnosing” as we conversed. If what patients shared was only clinical material for the purpose of fulfilling labels’ expectations and assessments, we would have lost track of what brought us together in the first place, which was our search for dignity and respect, and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, this would have maintained what was already known.

I have witnessed how diagnostic discourses are embedded in our understandings of mental health and how they dominate the ways we speak about each other’s emotional experiences and difficulties. It may facilitate communication among treatment providers and provide some sense of tangibility for persons experiencing certain manifestations. However, this poses risks, for it can lead to the creation of a wall of words and ideas, limiting more understanding, preventing meaning making, and unquestionably isolating people. Life after a formal mental health diagnosis can be storied as a mixture of guilt, fear, mystery, shame, and resentment. Revolving hospital doors become stages for choreographed dances of repeated psychiatric admissions and outpatient treatments. The psychiatric diagnosis given earlier in participants’ lives had become who they were, and the only way they had available to speak about themselves. Through a language of deficit, expressing and defining deficiencies of the
self (Gergen, 2010; Gergen, Hoffman, & Anderson, 1996), labels of mental illnesses take over one’s identity and one is robbed by a system that from then on dictates who one is. This could be called a kind of identity theft. If labels of chronic mental illnesses can take away the potential of individuals to manifest and work on their beliefs, dreams, aspirations, and narrowing down life to a path of conformity to clusters of behaviors, in Ohana labels became then irrelevant, purposefully neglected, denounced, and demystified.

So we attempted to exclude practices that reduced to symptoms the richness of the diversity of the ways we manifested creativity, imagination, and the unique ways we spoke and communicated our ideas and expressed our feelings. Therefore one member’s disclosure of the experience of paranoia he had in the workplace when he took medications in front of others, or the fear another one felt as he walked the streets of an unsafe neighborhood and heard the feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and uncertainty were not simply manifestations of a symptom of schizophrenia due to one’s core deficit and merely challenged as a distortion of perception but explored, interpreted and deconstructed.

These manifestations became tools for more self and social understanding of one’s experience in life, due to a contextualized and meaningful group work translation of the performance of a community we are all part, a community that we contributed to create. We were attentive to denounce how language could perpetuate limits and silence through a discourse of deficit and normality, and doing it we were moving towards the co-creation of a culture of peace.

**Researching Knowledge and Generating Understandings**

The possibilities offered by participatory action research (PAR) methodology, including challenging the status quo on oppressive practices that keep marginalized groups under scrutiny and control (Chenail, St. George, & Wulff, 2007), appealed to me as a way to research this project. Moreover, its focus on attending to local knowledge, contextualizing and favoring the language and experiences of participants (Chenail, et al, 2007) met the criteria on which the Ohana project was developed. Action research methodology intensifies action and the generation of new knowledge in which the acts of performing knowledge, interacting, and participating together are indivisible in the research process (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Action research is “only possible with, for and by persons and community” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 2). Elden and Levin (1991) emphasized the importance of the role played by participants in the research process as active and interacting agents, promoting
changes within their social realities. They explored how they initially used the term collaborative action research to refer to such methodology.

This merged well with my belief in the Ohana group project because of its collaborative tone, which weaved our work together. The ongoing process of socialization during group meetings, such as social abilities (ways of greeting each other, social manners), ways of speaking, choices about asking questions or passing, and the topics proposed for conversations were all manifestations of our emphasis on the relationships we had with each other. Group members were invited to examine their knowledge (understandings, skills, and values) and interpretive categories (the way they interpret themselves and their action in the social and material world) . . . . It is also participatory in the sense that people can do action research only “on” themselves, individually or collectively. It is not research done “on” others (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003, p. 385).

Group members were invited to share how social, political, economic, and cultural circumstances in the larger community had affected them, and to learn with each other about their impact on people’s lives, how they had managed their lives, and possible ways of changing them. We promoted more understanding, the practice of solidarity, and the sense of social and communal responsibility. There were also old learned tendencies of isolation, fear, and shame that our work together called to change. We were encouraged to share with each other our most threatening moments, when secretive voices permeated our minds and threatening feelings became overwhelming. We were with each other and provided comfort and safety. These practices gave us emancipatory ways to relate to our memories and emotions and, therefore, to each other. The Ohana project can be an illustration of how theories of mental health can be applied and how they can challenge the dominant, traditional way in which mental health professionals have attempted to treat people diagnosed with severe mental illnesses.

This approach can offer an invitation to examine our practices and possible changes if we conduct these relationships to include working and understanding through being with each other. As articulated by Giddens (1979), “Every social actor knows a great deal about the conditions of reproduction of the society of which he or she is a member” (p. 5).

Participatory Action Research Methodology enabled me to use my own reflections as an active participant, facilitator, collaborator, and researcher of the Ohana group. In addition, it allowed me to provide the readers of my research with a better understanding of our experiences working together, the impact of Ohana on our established relationships, and the
Peace and Conflict Studies

new ways we learned to adapt in order to promote more relational possibilities and more respectful and sustainable ways of being. What would I do differently? I can say that every moment was different, and there was always something singular happening. I needed to be different and continuously rethink my choices and actions throughout this journey, finding ways to maintain that difference.

Finally, I looked at each one of the group members that participated in Ohana with the intention to learn and, ultimately, be inspired by them. Through Ohana I also recreated myself through the reclaiming of those involved in working together. I am taking these experiences with me and, moving on in life in the lessons ahead, I will recall Ohana, and the family we were in the shape of a group therapy work.

References


Book Review

**Occupying New Levels: A Comparative Review of *Occupy Nation* and *Networks of Outrage and Hope***

Kevin Revier

The word “global” has increasingly become a trendy term used by members of the public and academia alike. Generally this word has been used to indicate the continuing significance of global finance and trade. However, this term does not have to merely relate to capitalism’s ascendency. As capitalism extends its grasp around the globe, social movements have also united worldwide to fight for what the system has failed to offer – peace and democracy. In this sense we could use the term “global,” not merely to draw upon the exploitation and corruption occurring on a global scale induced by capitalist expansion, but to indicate the immense communication, solidarity, and peaceful protest that have emerged against it worldwide. In order to understand the significance and scale of these new movements, it is important to extend social movement analysis in a way that adequately depicts these movements' modes of organization on this global level – new forms of conflict produce new forms of resistance. This book review compares Todd Gitlin's (2012) *Occupy Nation* and Manuel Castells' (2012) *Networks of Outrage and Hope* to draw on particular techniques Gitlin and Castells use to analyze the Occupy Wall Street movement (OWS) and how these techniques can be employed to shape future work on contemporary social movements.

Gitlin's (2012) *Occupy Nation* examines OWS in three sections. The first section reviews the origin and mobilization of the movement against Wall Street – he describes Wall Street and Washington as “the systole and diastole of America's (and therefore much of the world's) political economy” (p. 10). The second section examines techniques the movement has used to communicate during General Assemblies such as “twinkling” to express approval (p. 60), the “mic check” to enhance communication (p. 59), and the “stack” to organize speakers (p. 60). This section also focuses on difficulties OWS has faced such as maintaining autonomy without being “co-opted” (p. 140), demonstrating a nonviolent image when members have committed violent acts (p. 117), and incorporating diversity into the group (p. 93). The final section provides direction for OWS by offering advice such as bolstering public support by promoting victories the Occupy Our Home initiative has achieved (p. 175),
utilizing the strengths of “skilled operatives” that range from chefs to lawyers (p. 163), and possibly working with outer movements (p. 208).

Akin to _Occupy Nation_, _Networks of Outrage and Hope_ pinpoints aspects of OWS that draw on the movement's mobilization against corporate greed (p. 156), its expansion throughout the United States (pp. 164-165), and its creation of Working Groups, Caucuses, and Spokes to channel communication at General Assemblies (p. 183). Unlike _Occupy Nation_, it also conducts an extensive analysis of the influential revolutionary movements that emerged in 2010. Castells begins by documenting the Tunisian revolution against Ben Ali that was sparked by Mohamed Bouazizi’s “self-immolation by fire” in front of a government building in protest of the police confiscation “of his fruit and vegetable stand” (p. 22). He also examines the Icelandic protest against Geir Haarde (p. 35), the Egyptian revolution against Mubarak and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (p. 56), the Arab uprisings that spread to places such as Algeria, Yemen, Sudan, Jordan, and Libya (pp. 93-94), and the Spanish _Indignadas_’ call from Real Democracy Now! (p. 124).

When analyzing these movements, Castells continually draws on the importance modern technology has had in shaping how they communicate and organize worldwide (p. 221). This analysis relates to a history of research Castells has published on “the network society” (see Castells, 1996; 2002; 2002; 2007). Castells argues that modern technology has allowed social movements to mobilize in “the network society” (p. 4). In “the network society” social movements gain a whole new level of freedom to organize outside institutional networks. He states,

> Because mass media are largely controlled by governments and media corporations, in the network society communicative autonomy is primarily constructed in the Internet networks and in the platforms of wireless communications (pp. 9-10).

These new forms of communication permit social movements to organize through “multimodal” networks in both “cyberspace” and public space (p. 221). Cyberspace also offers a “global hypertext of information” and a “technological platform” which grants members more autonomy to express ideas and demands (p. 7). In regards to “the network society,” it is important to note that there has been criticism on the significance of internet technology and activism. For example, Smith and Fetner (2010) point out that “access to technology varies widely cross-nationally and within countries” (p. 36).

Castells (2012) provides many examples of how “communication technology in the
digital age” has influenced contemporary social movements' organization (p. 6). For example, to spark the Tunisian revolution Bouazizi's cousin, Ali, “recorded the protest and distributed the video over the internet” (p. 22). After the event, protesters continued to organize on Facebook and Twitter “to debate and communicate” (p. 28). To show the link between technology and protest potential, Castells states, “Tunisia has one of the highest rates of Internet and mobile phone penetration in the Arab world” (p. 28). Prior to demonstrations in Tahrir Square, activists in Egypt also organized on Facebook through the “We are all Khaled Said” Facebook group that honored Said's death by the hands of police after he circulated a video showing police corruption (pp. 53-54). The internet became so important for activists that the Egyptian government even shutdown access, which alternatively created a backlash from the global community (p. 62). Regarding OWS, activists used Twitter to transmit information and a blog site called Tumblr to “humanize” the movement with stories from various members (p. 173). Modern technology also allowed these movements to influence and connect with each other internationally. For example, in the call to occupy Wall Street, Adbusters stated, “Are you ready for a Tahrir moment?” (p. 159) and, since “movements are viral,” modern technology expedites and sustains worldwide resistance (p. 224).

When analyzing OWS, unlike Castells, Gitlin (2012) minimizes the importance that modern technology has had for the movement’s development. He does note that Adbusters launched the call to occupy on the internet (p. 15), that camera phones were utilized to send pictures of police brutality (p. 32), that the movement utilized live-streaming (p. 5), and he reports on how the Facebook page for Khaled Said influenced the call to gather in Tahrir Square “so that cyberspace touched down on earth” (p. 216). In this context, his analysis is very much like Castells. However, Gitlin eventually minimizes the impact that technology has had for contemporary social movements. Regarding technological advancement, he states,

The cascades of images, horizontal contacts, and related events have sped up enormously. But this most visible of differences from past revolts can be exaggerated. Before there were online videos, there were gossip networks, secret societies, broadsides, posters, [and] leaflets (p. 216). He continues to state, “There were no underground papers, no cable news, no blogs or smartphones...yet information spread and things got done” (Gitlin, 2012, p.217). He affirms his point by providing an experience he had during a protest led by Students for a Democratic Society. He states that in 1965 they organized a sit-in to protest Chase Manhattan Bank for
bailing out the apartheid regime in South Africa (p. 217). To organize, members sent out bulletins to activists and, to inform prospective sit-inners, Gitlin and “the later-to-be writer Mike Davis” used what he describes as “an ancient instrument called a pay phone” (p. 217). Accordingly, Gitlin’s overall analysis seems to be highly influenced by his writing on 1960’s movements (See Gitlin, 1993; 2003).

It is significant that social movements of all historical epochs have found ways to utilize their communication capacities to achieve their goals. However, by downplaying the importance that modern technology has had in shaping contemporary movements, Gitlin (2012) erroneously isolates OWS from these movements and overemphasizes its connection to the 1960's movements. This allows him to consistently draw comparisons between these movements as if OWS was another movement that he worked with (or against) in the 1960s. For example, he compares OWS's democratic values with Students for a Democratic Society's beliefs (p. 81), he contrasts their nonviolent ethos from the Weathermen's violent protests (p. 128), and he compares the public support between OWS and the 1960's antiwar movement (p. 35). It can be beneficial to draw on similarities and differences that have occurred between social movements throughout time – it can reveal many important organization and mobilization trends. However, an overemphasis on this lessens the scope of analysis and minimizes important qualities that OWS has shared with contemporary movements that relate to current technological, political, and economic conditions.

Contrarily, Castells (2012) recognizes these important similarities and conducts a more comprehensive analysis of OWS. Gitlin's analysis takes OWS and places it in the past; Castells’ analysis takes OWS and places it alongside contemporary movements that have influenced its organization and mobilization techniques.

We are increasingly entering into a “global” era. In this era there have been widespread injustices committed worldwide. However, these injustices have also stimulated the organization and mobilization of individuals around the globe who have united to fight for peace and democracy. These revolutionary forces not only inhabit space in the public sphere; they also connect in cyberspace – they communicate and organize on levels that have never been traversed before. While Occupy Nation provides a compelling comparative analysis between OWS and past social movements, Networks of Outrage and Hope realizes the significance of present technological, political, and economic factors that shape how contemporary movements organize and mobilize together on an international level. In this
regard, Castells provides an important contribution for future work on these global movements.

References


