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## Peace and Conflict Studies

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# **An Anatomy of Conflict Resolution in Africa's Civil Conflicts**

**George Klay Kieh, Jr.**

## **Abstract**

*The crises of the post-colonial state in Africa have led to civil wars in various African states. In several of these war affected countries, the state has disintegrated and occasioned myriad adverse consequences, including deaths, injuries, the mass displacement of people, and the collapse of the systems of governance. Against this background, this article examines the methods that have been used to terminate civil wars in Africa, and to set into motion the processes of peacebuilding. The article argues that in order to build durable peace in Africa's post-conflict societies, the post-colonial state needs to be democratically reconstituted.*

## **Introduction**

The euphoria that greeted the dawn of independence in Africa was quickly turned into nightmare in various states, as the contradictions and crises generated by the neo-colonial state plunged these states into civil wars. As the post-independence era unfolded, more African states became engulfed in civil wars. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the continent had experienced 27 civil wars and their associated negative effects, including the death of thousands of innocent civilians, mass displacements both in terms of the refugee crisis and the internal displacement conundrum, the breakdown of political governance, and serious social and economic costs (Nyanduga 2004; Bariagaber 2006; Arnold 2007).

Although most of the civil wars that engulfed various states across the continent have ended, the one in Somalia, which began in 1988, continues to rage. Also, the high hopes for peace that greeted the Nairobi Peace Accord that ended the Sudanese civil war, the longest in Africa, in 2005, were dampened by the eruption of a genocidal civil war in the country's Darfur region (de Waal 2006; Natsios 2008). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, despite the end of the country's third civil war since independence in 1960, post-conflict peacebuilding efforts are experiencing serious stress as, for example, the eastern portion of the country remains under the control of various warlordist militias (Thom 1999; Paddon 2010).

What methods have been, and are being used to help resolve Africa's civil wars, and what have been the attendant outcomes? What steps have been, and are being pursued to resolve the underlying conflicts and to build durable peace in post-conflict states? And how can durable peace be established in Africa? This article seeks to address these three interrelated questions.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The study employs two major terms—*conflict resolution* and its attendant derivative *peace*—as the centerpieces of its conceptual framework. By conflict resolution, I am referring to the use of a broad array of “problem solving” approaches that seeks to identify the causal factors behind a conflict, and then search for ways of dealing with them. It entails addressing such issues as the institutional structure of society; the making of significant socioeconomic, political and other changes that would restructure society in a more just and inclusive way (Spangler 2005, 1).

Drawing from the works of Cortright (2008, 6-7) and Howard (1971, 225), peace is conceptualized as “the desirable end product of the conflict resolution process that attempts to establish and maintain an orderly and just society protective against violence, and the

exploitation of less powerful groups by more powerful ones, and seeks to transcend the conditions that limit human potential.” In essence, “peace is more than the absence of war” (Cortright, 6).

## **Resolving Africa’s Civil Wars**

### **Background**

Conflict resolution involves two major stages: war termination (Licklider 1993; Hegre 2004) and peacebuilding (Call and Cook 2003; Francis 2010). The former is designed to end violent conflict, while the latter is intended to address the causes of the underlying conflict that gave rise to the armed violence (Boutros-Ghali 1995). As twin processes, each is dependent upon the other. For example, peace cannot be established without the cessation of war; and the establishment of durable peace is the *sine qua non* for preventing the recurrence of war or armed violence.

Against this background, this section of the article will examine the general modalities that have been used to terminate civil wars on the continent, assess their efficacy, and decipher the efforts that have been, and are being made to build durable peace in the continent’s post-conflict states. Clearly, the quality of the war termination efforts is a critical determinant of the texture of the post-conflict environment in which the construction of peace takes place. That is, if the post-conflict environment that is created by the termination of the war is not conducive, then it would in turn adversely affect the peacebuilding project.

## **War Termination**

Generally, the template for the termination of civil wars in Africa has consisted of three interlocking elements: peace-making, peacekeeping (in the majority of the cases), and peace settlement.

### ***Peace-making***

Peace-making consists of a broad array of methods that are designed to end the war (Assefa 1996; Darby and MacGinty 2008). The two most widely used in Africa's civil wars have been mediation and negotiation. In mediation, a third party "guides the [conflicting parties] through a non-adversarial discussion process that has as its goal the settling of the [war]" (Isenhardt and Spangle 2000, 72). Operationally, the mediation process in the various civil wars in Africa has entailed the intervention of the Organization of African Unity/African Union (AU), a sub-regional organization such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the United Nations. In some cases, these international organizations have acted either singularly or in concert. For example, during the first Chadian civil war (1979-1982), the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was the primary mediator (Kieh 1993; May and Massey 1998). During the initial stages of the first Liberian civil war (1989-1997), ECOWAS was the sole mediator (Sessay 1996; Adebajo 2002). However, since the emergent post-Cold War global order, the practice has pointed toward a collaborative mediatory role involving a regional organization, the AU and the United Nations (Boulden 2003). For instance, ECOWAS, the AU and the United Nations served as joint mediators in the Ivorian civil war (2002-2008). In other cases, the ambit of mediation has been extended to include some of the major global powers such as the United States, Britain and France. During the second Liberian civil war (1999-2003),

ECOWAS, the AU, the UN and the United States served as joint mediators, although ECOWAS played the leading role.

As a practical matter, mediation has always been coupled with negotiation. This is because no peace-making effort can succeed without the willingness of the belligerents to end the conflict. Thus, negotiation provides the conflicting parties the opportunity to interact directly, especially to articulate their respective positions. Depending on the circumstances, as the various civil wars in Africa have demonstrated, negotiation may “create and fuel collaboration” (Isenhardt and Spangle 2000, 45). However, such an outcome has been, and is dependent upon what Keltner (1987, 68) calls the “good faith and flexibility” of the conflicting parties.

### ***Peacekeeping***

Peacekeeping has been used as an instrument for helping to create a conducive environment for peace-making in the majority of the civil wars in Africa. Two major genres of peacekeeping operations have been used: peace observation (Kieh 2009) and the military interposition force (Malan 1998; Bellamy et al. 2004). Peace observation has involved either a regional organization, the Organization of African Unity/African Union or the United Nations intervening in a civil war with a team of military and civilian personnel. The intervention has been premised on the existence of a ceasefire agreement between or among the warring factions. The peace observers’ major task has been to monitor compliance by all of the conflicting parties with the terms of the ceasefire. The observers were prohibited from using military force. This model was used by the United Nations during the first Liberian civil war, and during the initial stage of the Sierra Leonean civil war.

Two major models of the military interposition force have been employed in some of the civil wars in Africa: the traditional model (Mays 2002; Weiss et al. 2007; Bellamy et al. 2010;

Guldimann 2010) and the “new or robust” model (Ramsbotham et al. 2005; Curran and Woodhouse 2007; Lipson 2007; Nsia-Pepira 2009). The traditional model has been anchored on several elements: 1) either a regional organization or the Organization of African Unity intervened in various civil wars with a military force. The intervention required the consent of one or more of the parties involved in the conflict; 2) the existence of a ceasefire between or among the warring parties was a major precondition for the intervention; 3) the interventionist force served as a buffer between the belligerents; 4) the interventionist force created a security corridor for the transport and distribution of humanitarian assistance; 5) the force was required to be neutral by not aligning with any of the conflicting parties; and 6) the force was prohibited from using military force offensively. Instead, it could only use force in self-defense.

Since the emergence of the post-Cold War era, a “new or robust model” has been developed. This was occasioned by the changing dynamics of civil wars on the continent, including the limitations of the traditional model. The “new or robust model” is based on several tenets. First, the intervention is undertaken by either a regional organization, the African Union or the United Nations or jointly—a regional organization and the African Union; a regional organization and the UN; and the AU and the UN (African Recovery, 1998). Second, the consent of either one or all of the belligerents is not required for the intervention to take place. Third, a ceasefire does not need to exist prior to the intervention. If one exists, it is then enforced by the military force. Alternatively, if there is no ceasefire, then the force imposes and enforces one. For example, during the first Liberian civil war, ECOMOG, the ECOWAS peacekeeping force, established and enforced a ceasefire. Given the nature of the civil war, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), the major warlordist militia led by Charles Taylor, rejected the ceasefire and proceeded to attack the peacekeeping force. Fourth, the peacekeeping force serves

as a buffer between the warring factions, and creates a security zone for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians. Fifth, the peacekeeping force can use military force offensively in peace enforcement operations. ECOMOG's peace enforcement operations during the first Liberian civil war and the Sierra Leonean civil war are good examples. However, the danger is that peace enforcement can undermine the peacekeeping force's neutrality by drawing it into the conflict. Sixth, the peacekeeping force may participate in what is generically referred to as "nation-building activities." These include a range of activities from helping to restructure and retrain the police to the primary assumption of security functions for the affected country during the transitional period.

### ***Peace Settlement***

When the belligerents agree to terminate the war, a peace settlement is then crafted (Walter 2001; Stedman et al. 2002). Its terms are embodied in a peace accord or agreement, which the belligerents sign. Drawing from the lessons of the various civil wars in Africa, peace agreements usually have three major components: the procedural, substantive and the organizational. The procedural component generally consists of the processes for the establishment and maintenance of peace such as the establishment and monitoring of the ceasefire. On the other hand, the substantive component embodies what Yawanajah and Quellet (2003, 1) characterize as the "political, economic, and social structural changes that are needed to remedy past grievances and provide for a more fair and equitable future." The organizational dimension encompasses the institutions and mechanisms that are required to implement the terms of the settlement. The Comprehensive Agreement that ended the Sudanese civil war in 2005 is a good example of a peace settlement.

It is important to note that a peace settlement may not end a civil war. This is because since it is a process that spans an appreciable period of time, a peace settlement is vulnerable to being violated either at the onset or at some point in the process. Characteristically, either scenario usually causes the reversion to war. Two common trajectories from some of Africa's civil wars are instructive. Even after the terms of the settlement are formulated and enveloped in a peace agreement or accord, and signed by the warring factions, one or more parties may decide to violate a term or terms of the settlement at the onset without the "ink even having dried on the agreement." In turn, this then reignites the war. For example, during the first Chadian civil war, the various peace settlements collapsed moments after they were signed. Similarly, during the first Liberian civil war, the Taylor-led National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) recurrently violated a stipulation or stipulations of the various peace accords immediately after the signing ceremonies. The NPFL did this recurrently with sixteen peace accords.

Another trajectory is that one or more of the belligerents uncommitted to ending the war may initially agree to the peace settlement as a strategic move designed to "buy time"—the acquisition of weapons and materiel, the repositioning of forces, etc. Once the strategic objective is achieved, the "spoiler" (Newman and Richmond 2006; Stedman 2000) may then decide to violate a term or terms of the peace settlement at a juncture in the settlement process.

What have been the outcomes of the various efforts that have been designed to terminate civil wars in Africa both in the past and present? Generally, there have been three outcomes: successful war termination (Walter 2001; Lyons 2002; Hegre 2004), failed war termination (Walter 1999; Stedman et al. 2002; Binningsbo and Dupuy 2009), and mixed (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003; Kreutz 2010). Successful war termination has been characterized by the full compliance of the warring factions with the terms of the peace settlement. The most important

aspect is that there is no re-eruption of war. This then has created the environment for setting into motion the “Herculean” task of post-conflict peacebuilding (the building of durable peace). Several cases are instructive: The Mozambican peace settlement of 1992; the Angolan peace settlement of 2002; the Sierra Leonean peace settlement of 2002; and the Liberian peace settlement of 2003.

In contradistinction, failed war termination has been evidenced by the collapse of the peace settlement either at the onset or at some point in the settlement process. The resultant effects have been the reversion to war; and the impossibility of transitioning from war termination to peacebuilding. Several cases provide instructive lessons. As has been mentioned, the first Chadian civil war was the prototype of failed war termination on the continent. Another case was the Rwandan civil war. After the successful conclusion of a peace settlement embodied in the Arusha Peace Accord of 1993, the Rwandan military played the role of the “spoiler” by violating the terms of the accord. The consequence was renewed violence, and significantly, the commission of genocide by the military and its paramilitary collaborators.

Mixed success in war termination is captured by the “tugs and pulls” associated with the implementation of a peace settlement. That is, the war termination efforts tend to oscillate between failure and success—the eruption of a cycle of successful war termination–failed war termination. In short, a peace settlement may either collapse at the onset or at some point in the process; then a new peace settlement is formulated; again, it either collapses at the onset or succeeds for some time, and then collapses again. The first Liberian civil war is the archetype of this genre of war termination efforts in Africa. Beginning with the Banjul Peace Accord, the Taylor-led NPFL violated every subsequent peace agreement at the onset over a six-year period. Interestingly, each violation was followed by the formulation of a new peace settlement

ostensibly designed to placate Taylor and his militia. Like failed war termination, the mixed variety can lead to the prolongation of a civil war, and therefore make the prospects for peacebuilding quite remote. This is because, as I have suggested, successful war termination is the essential pre-condition for setting into motion the process of building durable peace.

## **Building Peace in Africa's Post-Conflict Societies: A General Assessment**

### **The Peacebuilding Efforts**

With the end of civil wars in several African states, these countries have undertaken the long and arduous task of building durable peace. The vortex of the effort revolves around the trilogy of capacity building, reconciliation and societal transformation (Boutros-Ghali 1995). The liberal peacebuilding model has become the hegemonic framework for reconstituting Africa's post-conflict societies. The model was imposed on these post-conflict states by the United Nations and the dominant metropolitan powers led by the United States.

The model is hoisted on three pivotal pillars of the establishment of political democratization, the re-establishment of peripheral capitalism under neo-liberal orthodoxy, and reconciliation (Barnett 2006; Kurtenbach 2007; Sriram 2007). The political democratization dimension consists of the promotion of individual civil liberties and political rights, such as the freedoms of assembly, association and speech, and the right to vote; the establishment of the tradition of holding regular elections within a multiparty framework; the establishment of a systems of "checks and balances" within the government; the establishment of the sanctity of the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary; the promotion of accountability and transparency in the conduct of public affairs; and the establishment of a vibrant civil society that can serve as an autonomous sphere for checking on the powers of the government. The advocates

of the model posit that the success of its principles is contingent upon the undertaking of comprehensive institutional reforms within the public sector of these post-conflict African states. The generic reforms include: judicial reforms, political reforms, and security sector reforms. In other words, the contours of the liberal model are powered by an institutional tapestry.

On the economic front, post-conflict African states are instructed by the dominant metropolitan powers to either abandon their socialist economic system (Angola and Mozambique) or adopt the peripheral capitalist mode of production or reform their existing peripheral capitalist political economies under the ideological guidance of neo-liberalism. The basic neo-liberal prescriptions include: the removal of all trade barriers; the removal of all obstacles to foreign investment; the dismantling of existing “social safety nets;” the devaluation of currencies; the reduction of the labor force in the public sector; the freezing of employment and salaries in the public sector; and the increase of interest rates. The neo-liberal rationale is that the implementation of these policies would spur private investment, increase exports and save money for the state.

Reconciliation in post-conflict societies in Africa has been based on two major pathways: the restorative and the retributive. The former is based on the efforts to establish interrelationships between and among the offenders, the victims and the extant communities by restoring the harm that has been caused; the rights of the victims and the communities; and the responsibilities of the offenders. Bishop Desmond Tutu, who chaired the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, provides an excellent summation of the restorative justice model thus:

The central concern is not retribution or punishment but, in the spirit of Ubuntu, the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken

relationships. This kind of justice seeks to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he or she injured by his or her offense (Bell 2002, 90).

In short, the centerpiece of the restorative pathway is the search for “truth and reconciliation.” One way in which this is done is through the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission. Generally, the major functions of the truth and reconciliation commission are to recreate memory about the war; and to encourage those with knowledge about the war, including warlords and their militia men and women, to provide narratives about the war, especially their roles. In keeping with the overarching framework, the commission’s terms of reference do not include the issuance of indictments, the holding of trials and the bringing to justice of those who have committed war crimes and crimes against societies. Instead, the focus is on restorative justice. Since the establishment of the truth and reconciliation commission after the end of the South African civil war in 1994, the example has been followed in other African states, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Liberia.

On the other hand, the retributive model’s central premise is that “justice requires punishment” (Fisher 2007, 16). That is, more often than not, for victims and bystanders alike to feel that justice has been achieved, some form of punishment has to befall the offender. Significantly, punishment is necessary because it serves as retribution, deterrence, some form of moral education, incapacitation, society’s expression of condemnation (Fisher).

In some of Africa’s post-conflict societies, three major retributive mechanisms have been used: war crime tribunal, special court, and the International Criminal Court (ICC). In the case of the war crime tribunal, one was established for Rwanda in 1994 (United Nations Security Council Resolution 955 1994, 1). Under the resolution, the International Criminal Court for

Rwanda (ICTR) is to “contribute to the process of national reconciliation in Rwanda and to the maintenance of peace in the region” (United Nations Security Council Resolution 955, 1). Since it commenced the trials, the tribunal has handed down 50 judgments (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda 2008, 1). In Sierra Leone, a special court was established through an agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations in 2002. The court is mandated to try those who bear the greatest responsibility for the commission of serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law (The Special Court for Sierra Leone 2008, 1). Since the establishment of the court, 13 people have been indicted, including Charles Taylor, the former President of Liberia. Eight of the indicted persons have been convicted and sentenced (Special Court for Sierra Leone).

Also, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is playing a pivotal role in bringing to justice those accused of violating various aspects of international humanitarian law in some of Africa’s civil wars. For example, the ICC has indicted four Congolese for the commission of various violations of international humanitarian law during the “second civil war” in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) from 1998-2003 (Human Rights Watch 2008, 1). Three of these defendants are already in ICC custody (Human Rights Watch). In the case of the Central African Republic’s civil war (2003-2006), the ICC has indicted Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, the former Vice President of the transitional government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2003-2006), and runner-up in the DRC’s presidential election in 2006, for atrocities committed by his militia during that country’s civil war in 2002 (Human Rights Watch). As for the Ugandan civil war, the ICC indicted and subsequently issued arrest warrants against Joseph Kony, the leader of the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), and four of his commanders for the commission of sundry crimes in contravention of international humanitarian law (McGreal,

2008, p.1). Interestingly, however, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, who requested the ICC's intervention, has refused to effect the court's arrest warrants. This is because President Museveni used the court as leverage in dragooning the LRA leader into signing a peace agreement to end the country's 22-year-old civil war (McGreal).

### **A “Balance Sheet” on the Peacebuilding Efforts**

Are Africa's post-conflict states on the path to building durable peace? On the positive side, the termination of most of the continent's civil wars is a major step forward in creating a conducive environment for ultimately addressing and resolving the underlying conflict that is at the root of these various wars. Based on this, some progress has been made in liberalizing the political space in these various states, including improvements in the areas of political rights and civil liberties and the establishment of political institutions, rules and processes.

Despite the progress that has been made in the political sector, the various peacebuilding projects on the continent are generally plagued by several major problems. First, the liberal model, which provides the compass for navigating the terrain of peacebuilding, is not the best framework for addressing the taproots of civil conflicts in Africa for several reasons. The framework's democratization plank is quite limited to the political domain. That is, it is exclusively concerned with the promotion of individual political rights and civil liberties and overall political procedures. While these are important, they only address one aspect of the puzzle; hence, they are not sufficient to address the undercurrents of civil conflicts on the continent. In other words, they lack the expansiveness that is exigent to address the multidimensional crises, the bedrocks of civil conflicts, which have been generated by the neo-colonial African state. This is the case because liberal democratization is not comprehensive. As well, liberal democratization does not seek to fundamentally alter the portrait of the neo-colonial

African state—nature, character, mission, values and policies—and its resultant political economy. Hence, for example, pivotal issues such as socio-economic inequities and disparities in power relations between and among classes and social justice are not addressed. In short, the democratization dimension of the liberal peacebuilding model is primarily concerned with the establishment of political procedures, and accords virtually no attention to the material well-being of the continent's subaltern classes.

Similarly, capitalism whether developed or peripheral is intrinsically an undemocratic economic system. This is because it is anchored on inequality and exploitation. Thus, it privileges the ruling class at the expense of the subaltern ones. Such an economic system cannot address the serious human needs deficit that is confronting the continent's post-conflict societies. Instead, capitalism in its peripheral form in Africa's post-conflict states is exacerbating the socio-economic problems that contributed to the various civil conflicts in the first place. For example, the privatization project is simply transferring wealth from the state to private capitalists principally from various metropolitan states such as the United States, without improving the material conditions of the subalterns.

As for the reconciliation efforts, they are driven by Western approaches that fail to accord the requisite attention to the specific cultural context of the various post-conflict societies on the continent. As Kotzo (2002, 73) appropriately warns, "Conflict resolution efforts must take cognizance of the cultural context."

Second and related, although traditional African methods are now being used in some cases, much still needs to be done. One helpful step could be to take cognizance of the historical and contemporary realities in a conflict-affected African state, prior to making the determination about the appropriate method or methods that could be helpful in resolving the conflict.

Accordingly, in those cases in which the use of traditional African methods is still deeply rooted in the society, it would then be useful to use those methods. However, this should not preclude the use of Western or other methods as supplements, if they have utility under the circumstances.

Third, the peacebuilding projects on the continent are driven and dominated by external actors, some of whom contributed to planting the seeds of civil conflict in the continent's various post-conflict societies. For example, the United States played a pivotal role in the germination of the civil conflict in Liberia that occasioned two civil wars. Specifically, the United States was a major participant in the creation of the peripheral capitalist Liberian state, and provided the economic, political and military support that Liberia's ruling class used to suppress, repress and exploit the subaltern classes. Similarly, Britain was the chief architect of the neo-colonial Sierra Leonean state, and thus contributed to the multidimensional crises that were germinated over time. Clearly, based on the history of the involvement of these external actors in these post-conflict societies in Africa and their broader imperialist agendas, there is no doubt that these metropolitan powers are not interested in peacebuilding projects that would fundamentally alter these societies, including the transformation of power relationships. Accordingly, as Gounden (2002, 3) observes, "[The imperialist powers'] cardinal goal is to attempt to influence the process of resolution to their interests sidelining and or worse ignoring local ideals." This is done through withholding support for initiatives that may result in undesired outcomes but that are supported by a majority of the polity in question.

Fourth, the various peacebuilding projects in progress on the continent have generally ignored the role of the Bretton Woods institutions—International Monetary Fund and World Bank—and the totality of the global capitalist system in planting and nurturing the seeds of civil conflict on the continent. For example, the Bretton Woods institutions' "structural adjustment

programs” have played pivotal roles in the facilitation of the continual plundering and pillaging of the resources of these post-conflict states by metropolitan-based multinational corporations, and the decimation of the “social safety nets” that have provided a modicum of the basic human needs of the members of the various subaltern classes. Broadly, the required attention has not been paid to the inequities inherent in the nature and dynamics of the global capitalist system. For example, the “international division of labor” still requires that these post-conflict states remain producers of raw materials and the consumers of comparatively expensive manufactured goods from the metropolitan states. The “system of unequal exchange” remains intact. Under this arrangement, the post-conflict states will continue to be paid less for their raw materials, while being required to pay more for the manufactured goods from the United States, Europe and Japan. The point is that the global capitalist system will continue to remain hostile to development of these post-conflict states; hence, these societies will not be able to generate the resources that are required for them to address the problems of inequities in wealth and income, mass and abject poverty, social malaise and the strangulating effects of the overall precariously low standards of living.

### **Rethinking Conflict Resolution in Africa: Some Suggestions**

There is the need to rethink conflict resolution in Africa. This is because, as has been argued, the various conflict resolution projects on the continent are fraught with major problems that would undermine the abilities of Africa’s post-conflict states to build durable peace. One of the major lacunas with the war termination efforts is the pervasive practice of rewarding warlordism. This is especially done by allotting various positions in the transitional administration to the various warlordist factions. A major resultant effect is that such a practice

has encouraged rather than deterred warlordism. This is because warlords are cognizant of the fact that if their respective militias do not win outright military victories, they will be rewarded with various positions in an interim administration. In turn, these positions are used to foster the practice of the accumulation of capital by the warlords and their coteries of top advisors.

Alternatively, while it is important for the various warlordist militias to be involved in the peace process, they should not be rewarded with positions in the interim regime. Instead, the office holders in the interim regime should be people with the requisite skills, who are not affiliated with the warlordist militias. This approach will help to deter warlordism, because potential war-makers would be aware that they would not be rewarded with positions in the state bureaucracy simply because they establish militias and participate in raining violence and mayhem on innocent civilians.

Another problem is that the larger society is often marginalized in the war termination efforts. Instead, the focus is on the various warlordist militias and the government. Thus, the larger society, which represents the majority of the citizens, does not participate in the fashioning of the peace settlement, but is required to live and abide by the terms. Moreover, since it is usually a spectator in the peace process, the larger society has no basis for holding the interim regime, including the various office holders from the warlordist militias, accountable.

Consequently, as has been demonstrated in post-conflict societies like Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the larger society is forced to suffer the consequences of the incompetence and poor policies of the interim administration without recourse. Clearly, this approach needs to be changed and replaced with one that emphasizes the inclusion of various citizen-based organizations representing various segments of the affected countries in the war termination efforts. Moreover, it should be clearly stipulated in the peace accord that the

transitional regime would be accountable to the people. In order to practicalize such a provision, the major citizen groups should have representation in the transitional legislature. The transitional legislature should have oversight responsibilities over the transitional regime, including the power to remove the officers in the transitional executive branch.

In the area of peacebuilding, Lederach's (1995, 65) "elicitive approach" would be a useful pathway for several reasons. It places a premium on the cultural context and the associated knowledge and views of the citizens of the society in conflict as the foundation of peacebuilding. Also, it values the indigenous participants in the peacebuilding process as resources rather than recipients of conflict resolution knowledge, especially from "external experts." In this regards, the methods for the establishment of a peaceful society based on constructive change—"the flow of human interaction in social conflict from cycles of destructive relational patterns toward cycles of relational dignity and respectful engagement" (Lederach 2005, 181)—are collectively established through the critical reflection.

Building on the aforementioned approach, the liberal peacebuilding model that has been imposed by the powerful forces in the international system as the template for post-conflict African societies needs to be transcended. The alternative model should be framed around changing the portrait of the neo-colonial African state, and addressing the deeper issues of class inequities and the associated asymmetries in power in various relationships, human well-being and social justice. In terms of the transformation of the African state, this is the paramount task, because the neo-colonial African state is the generator of the contradictions and crises that lead to civil conflict and war. Specifically, the nature of the African state needs to reflect the historical-cultural realities of each African state rather than external ones (the nature of the neo-

colonial African state is a continuation from the colonial era). This would enable the citizens to take ownership of the state.

The character of the state needs to be changed from being criminalized, exploitative, negligent, prebendal, and repressive to productive, protective, meritorious, supportive and responsive to the needs and aspirations of its citizens. This would have profound positive ramifications for improving state-society relations. Ultimately, the citizens would accept the state as their own, rather than as a construct that visits hardship on them.

Another important element of the state that requires transformation is the mission. In its current formulation, the central mission of the neo-colonial African state is to create propitious conditions for the owners of metropolitan-based multinational corporations and other businesses, and the members of the local ruling classes and their relations to accumulate wealth, to the detriment of the majority of the citizens. Alternatively, the new primary mission of the state should be attending to the welfare of the citizens—employment, education, health care, housing, food security, etc.

Moreover, the perennial problem of class inequities needs to be addressed. Two steps are instructive. Measures need to be taken to prevent the members of the local ruling class and their relations from illegally acquiring wealth through various corrupt means. This could be done through the establishment of an effective anti-corruption regime. As well, the transformed state would then formulate and implement various policies that are designed to address the issue of inequities in income and wealth.

Addressing the vexing problem of asymmetries in power in various relationships is another major dimension of deep peacebuilding. This would cover the cultural, economic, gender, political and social spheres. For example, steps would need to be taken to curtail the

expansion of presidential powers and its resultant “hegemonic presidency.” Such a step would be important for ensuring a “balance of power” between and among the various branches of government.

Central to the establishment of a new “culture of social justice” is the imperative of empowering people at the grassroots level, especially economically and politically. The rationale is that empowered citizens can serve as effective bulwarks against injustice. This is because the citizens would be able to hold public officials and others accountable for their actions. Ultimately, this would serve as an effective deterrent against actions such as the abuse of power, a major source of injustice on the African continent.

Importantly, the success of this alternative peacebuilding trajectory would be dependent upon the participation of a conscious and engaged citizenry and a visionary national leadership in a post-conflict African state. An important initial step would be to hold national conferences as an integral part of the peacebuilding process. That is, the peacebuilding in a post-conflict African society should be preceded by the holding of a national conference involving the representatives of all of the major stakeholders in the society. The major purpose would be to re-design the state and society through the peacebuilding process.

Within the framework of a democratically reconstituted state, traditional African approaches to conflict resolution should be valued. This is because as Zartman (1999, 3) suggests, “Traditional societies in Africa...are reputed to hold secrets of peacemaking locked in their ways, formed from centuries of custom before the disruption of colonization.” For example, lessons can be drawn from the various traditional African approaches to conflict resolution such as the Mato Oput Justice clan-based model (Bangura 2008, 2). In turn, these lessons can be appropriately applied to various conflicts across the continent. On the other hand,

lessons from the conflict resolution approaches of other societies and cultures, including Western ones, can be applied to conflicts in various African states when the determination is made that they are relevant. This would represent a fundamental change from the current practice under which Western approaches are superimposed on African civil conflicts, without taking into consideration their cultural relevance and suitability to helping to resolve these conflicts.

Yet, another major consideration in rethinking conflict resolution in Africa's post-conflict states needs to be the formulation of strategies for addressing the conflict-inducing dynamics of the global capitalist system. That is, post-conflict states, other African states and Third World states would need to organize a united front and work collaboratively in struggling to make changes in the international capitalist system. For example, the "international division of labor" that requires African and other Third World states to be the producers of cheap raw materials needs to be changed so that these developing countries can develop industrial and technological bases. As well, the "system of unequal exchange" under which the dominant powers have determined that the raw materials from Africa and the rest of the Third World are sold at prices cheaper than the manufactured goods mainly from the industrialized capitalist states needs to be changed. This is because by accruing less for their primary products and paying more for manufactured goods, African states do not generate enough foreign exchange earnings to be able to address the multitude of domestic economic and social challenges such as education, health care, housing, and transportation. The resultant adverse impact on the well-being of the members of the subaltern classes has been a major contributor to planting the seeds of civil conflict in Africa.

## **Conclusion**

The article has attempted to address three major interrelated issues relating to the resolution of civil conflicts in Africa. First, the article tackled the war termination conundrum by examining the various methods—peace-making, peacekeeping and peace settlement—that have been used to terminate civil wars in Africa. The results indicate that these efforts have produced three general outcomes: success, failure and mixed. Successful war termination is characterized by the complete cessation of armed violence. On the other hand, failed war termination is distinguishable by the reversion to war either at the onset of the peace settlement process or at a subsequent juncture. The mixed war termination genre is hoisted on a series of cycles of successes and failures.

Second, the issue of war termination was then linked to peacebuilding. Against this background, the article deciphered the nature and dynamics of the liberal peacebuilding model, the hegemonic pathway for reconstituting Africa's post-conflict states, and ultimately "building durable peace" in them. Specifically, the central tenets—political democratization, capitalist economy and national reconciliation—and their dynamics were examined within the context of the continent's post-civil conflict states. The central finding is that liberal peacebuilding, with its focus on political rights and freedoms, is inadequate for addressing the general undercurrents of civil conflict in the continent's various post-conflict societies.

Finally, the *sine qua non* for the building and maintenance of permanent peace in Africa's post-conflict states and its other polities is the establishment of substantive or deep democracy on the continent beyond the limits of political liberalization and its pathological fixation with procedures. In other words, Africa—both its post-conflict states and others—needs a new kind of state that is anchored on holistic democracy and its tenets of, among others, mass

empowerment, equality and social justice—what Ake (1996, 124) correctly refers to as “real democracy.” Correspondingly, the new democratic African states would need to establish a united front among themselves, as well as with other democratic polities in the Third World to struggle for the fundamental restructuring of the structure and dynamics of the global capitalist system. One of the major outcomes of the restructuring must be what Muiu (2007, 55) calls “Africa’s control over its own economic resources.” That is, African and Third World states both post-conflict and otherwise must control their resources, if they are to build and maintain peaceful societies.

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**Who is More Humane? An Ethnographic Account of Power Struggles  
in Jewish-Palestinian Dialogue Encounters**

**Nava Sonnenschein and Zvi Bekerman**

**Abstract**

*This study addresses the question of majority-minority relations in situations of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal 2000). The study focuses on processes involved in the majority Jewish group's construction of images of the Palestinian minority group, all citizens of Israel, while participating in a structured dialogue encounter conducted at Tel Aviv University in Israel. In this dialogue, it was observed that negative inhumane images that the Jews have of the Palestinians were notably expressed by the Jewish group in three situations: to cope with distress when their morality was challenged by the Palestinian group; to preserve the Jewish group's superiority and hegemony in Israel; and to preserve or restore the Jewish group's power. The study also examines the gradual processes of change that the Jewish group experienced while becoming aware that dehumanization strategies are practices that preserve dominance. This study contributes to a better understanding of the importance of addressing the iconic representations and images that majority groups hold of minority groups, and suggests the need to challenge the practice of power through the use of these representations and images when facilitating group encounters.*

## **Introduction**

This study addresses the question of majority-minority relations in situations of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal 2000). The study focuses on processes involved in the majority Jewish group's construction of images of the Palestinian minority group, all citizens of Israel, while participating in a structured dialogue encounter conducted at Tel Aviv University. In this dialogue, it was observed that negative inhumane images that the Jews have of the Palestinians were notably expressed by the Jewish group in three situations: to cope with distress when their morality was challenged by the Palestinian group; to preserve the Jewish group's ideology regarding the superiority and hegemonic power of Jews in Israel; and to preserve or restore the Jewish group's power. It shows how group interactions involving stereotypical representations of the other can be addressed and even transformed through processes encompassing discussion and mediation.

Under conditions of severe and sustained conflict as in the Jewish-Palestinian case, there is extremely negative, overt categorization, known as delegitimization (Bar-Tal 1990; Bar-Tal and Teichman 2005). This type of categorization based on extreme negative characterization serves to exclude the outgroup from the human family, hence justifying violence directed toward that group.

In the last decade, dialogical encounters have become a common and preferred means of addressing conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, serving as a way to modify hostile stereotypes between national and ethnic groups in conflict (Bar-On and Kassem 2004; Bar-Tal 2002; Salomon 2002). Studies done since the 1990s on encounters between Jews and Palestinians in Israel strove to examine the process itself rather than merely its outcomes. This

### *Who is More Humane?*

research also took into account the social-political context in which it was conducted (e.g., Maoz 2000; Bar, Bargal and Asaqla 1995; Katz and Kahanov 1990). These studies helped develop a new approach to the study of dialogue, attempting to describe and analyze what happens in intergroup dialogue and encompassing an awareness of power relations in Jewish-Palestinian encounters (Abu-Nimer 1999; Maoz 2000; Rouhana and Kroper 1997).

Halabi, Sonnenschein and Friedman (2004) examined a Palestinian-Jewish group process and pointed to the five developmental phases that emerged in the group process including: the initial exploration and declaration of intent; the strengthening of the Palestinian group; resumption of power by the Jewish group; impasse when the dialogue mired down and the reigning atmosphere in the group is one of exhaustion on both sides; and a different more egalitarian dialogue with mutual respect.

Maoz, Bar-On, Bekerman and Jaber-Massarwa (2004) revealed the strategies used by Jewish partners in a dialogue to preserve their dominance and prevent attempts to unfetter the dialogue. Among those strategies, they cite claims of moral superiority via delegitimization of what the other side is saying. Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On and Fakhereldeen (2002), while analyzing a structured encounter between Jewish and Palestinian university students, pointed to the paradoxical notion of achieving empathy through confrontation. Although they focused their analysis on two participants, they recommended developing and applying similar procedures in additional studies that would enable a more comprehensive understanding of the complex processes involved in the dialogue on the level of the entire group.

Bekerman (2002) analyzed the discourse that emerged between the majority and minority in a students' dialogue group, discourses that shaped the national rhetoric of majority and

minority in the context of a nation state. He showed how this rhetoric directs and shapes the dialogue, through a reshaping of the ethnic, cultural and national identities of the participants. Helman (2002) also analyzed the discourse of a Jewish-Arab dialogue group. She found that when the Jews feel that the values they regard as crucial to their culture and identity—like liberalism, democracy, and humaneness—are under attack, they turn to their reified perspectives to justify structural inequalities between the two groups.

The present study attempts to investigate when the majority group utilizes inhumane images of the minority group, and examines how these images are tied to the power relations between the groups, while describing in detail the processes which encourage the adoption of these images and the potential openings for change in their implementation. First we will describe the participants, the course and the social political context in which it was conducted. Later on the method used is described, followed by the findings and discussion.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The study focuses on a group participating in an elective course entitled “The Jewish-Arab Conflict as Reflected in Theory and Practice,” offered jointly by the School for Peace and Tel Aviv University, in 2000-2001. Nine Jewish graduate students in social psychology and social work participated; among them, two men and seven women ranging in age from 23 to 36. The Palestinian group was composed of students from various fields in the social sciences and law, either in MA programs or in their final year of BA programs, including five men and four women ranging in age from 22 to 30. We do not think the difference in education levels had an

impact on the group process. The data were collected in accordance with the guidelines of the American Anthropological Association (1998). Participants were guaranteed anonymity in any published results of the study, and permission to record the meeting, transcribe it and publish the results was obtained from every participant in the days preceding the first encounter meeting. Confidentiality has been further guaranteed by substituting the real names of the people with pseudonyms or random initials.

In view of the fact that, for over thirty years, feminist language researchers and more traditional analysts have demonstrated the pervasiveness of gender in discourse and interaction as well as the ubiquity of gender in daily life (Stokoe 2004), a warning regarding expected gender differences is warranted. Though always important, the influence of gender on discourse has been shown to be relevant only when participants in the interactional event are demonstrably oriented towards it (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1997). While the excerpts considered in this paper would allow for an analysis in line with those which take into account gender differences, we do not think it can be demonstrated that participants in the intergroup encounter were demonstrably oriented towards gender categories. Thus, gender analysis of the data is not included in this study.

### **The Course and the Method of the Group Facilitation**

The standard paradigm developed by the School for Peace for courses like the one discussed here is as follows: The goal of the course is to learn about groups in conflict through the Jewish-Arab conflict. There is experiential learning and every fourth session is devoted to a theoretical lecture concerning identity and conflict. Two facilitators (a Jew and a Palestinian) moderate the activity. Participants are asked to discuss any subject of interest to them relating to

the Jewish-Arab conflict. Most of the discussion takes place in a binational forum, with uni-national meetings every third session. The encounter is treated as an intergroup—rather than interpersonal—encounter; the intervention method addresses the asymmetry in existing power relations and links processes occurring in the group to phenomena on the macro level in Israeli society (for details, see Halabi and Sonnenschein 2004). In the course herein, there were 17 meetings of three hours each. Additionally, the students participated in a two-day workshop halfway through the process, where they met with students from a similar course given at another university, and engaged in dialogue together.

### **The Social and Political Context in which the Course was Conducted**

The course was opened right after the outbreak of the October 2000 Intifada. A general strike by Palestinian citizens of Israel (in identification with the Palestinians in the occupied territories) was declared and was followed by demonstrations. The Israeli police responded with unprecedented force and authorized the use of live ammunition against demonstrators—resulting in the deaths of 12 Palestinian citizens of Israel, with about 700 wounded and hundreds arrested. This was perhaps the most severe crisis in recent years in the relations between Jews and Palestinian citizens of the state (Report of the Or Commission 2003; Reinhart 2005; Yeshouvi 2001).

### **Procedure**

A qualitative interpretive research approach was adopted to study the dynamics of intergroup processes dealing with identity, images and conflict (Charmaz 1995); this method emphasizes the detailed description of interactional processes while attempting to capture the participants' own perspectives on the events described (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994; Maykut

and Morehouse 1999). Our analytical process drew heavily on the procedures and techniques of Grounded Theory Analysis (Corbin and Strauss 2008). We began coding (assigning conceptual categories to) emerging phenomena, noting the properties of each new instance of coded data and comparing them to previous instances. We then determined *inclusion rules* for each code and established the properties that each new piece of data should possess to be included in each existing category thus establishing the borders of emerging phenomena. We later tested relationships between phenomena to create *emerging conclusions* while refining our categories with the help of concepts from relevant literature. Lastly, when disproving instances were found, our conclusions were either refined to include them or scrapped. The process was repeated several times, producing a set of phenomena whose presence in the dataset can be supported by an extensive and varied body of evidence. Those phenomena are presented below. Drawing from a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) we used a constant comparative method for we wished to stresses the importance of discovering theories, concepts, hypotheses, and propositions directly from the data rather than from a priori assumptions of an existing theoretical framework.

The data gathered consists of 65 hours of videotaped activity, all student papers and journals, and semi-structured interviews conducted before the course and three months after its completion. All materials were coded via an open inductive coding scheme (Bogdan and Biklen 1992). This approach was similar to the approach developed by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) for analyzing life stories and addressing psychological and social dimensions. The present study did not use life stories of individuals but rather the story of a Jewish-Palestinian encounter group. The main tool we used in our thematic content and dynamic qualitative

analysis was abduction. Unlike deductive or inductive methods, abduction starts by identifying themes that reappear in the narrative (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On and Fakhereldeen 2002). These themes led us to hypothesis construction and testing. Since this study is dealing with a group process as a whole, group theory concepts are integrated in the analyses of the texts in this study.

The most relevant concept adopted from group process theory is the notion of the social unconscious first propounded by Fromm (1962). The term refers to the areas of repression shared by most members of a society. Generally, these repressed elements involve certain contents, of which a given society—if it wishes to function successfully—cannot allow its members to be aware. Likewise Foulkes (1973) attributed great importance to the recognition of social forces and their analysis in group processes and argued that one cannot distinguish between inner reality and external reality. His main innovation was in arguing that the group is not an amalgamation of the unconscious processes of its individual members, but rather has a shared system of unconscious meanings constructed through communications, to which each individual makes a unique contribution. According to Hopper (2001), the term “social unconscious” relates to the existence of constraints, of social and communicational-related agreements of which people are unaware. In the following section we will present the findings regarding the three situations in which the extremist image of the Palestinians was expressed and the processes of change during the evolution of the group process.

### **Findings**

Since some of the findings we will report in the following may also apply to the Palestinian participants we want to remind the reader that for the purposes of this study, we are exploring the attitudes of the Jewish participants in the group.

## *Who is More Humane?*

The Jewish group came to the process with an image of the Palestinian as an extremist. Eight of the nine Jewish participants, in pre-course interviews, said that the Palestinians wanted to kill the Jews, and some noted that “wanting to kill” is an integral part of Palestinian culture, whereas Jews perceived themselves as seeking peace. This self-definition was constructed in opposition to the other:

*Ofra (a Jewish participant-J): We were educated from the perspective of trying to reach peace and understanding...but most of the Palestinians are educated in a context of hate, to hate Jews, the biggest enemy, and (are educated) to murder.*

The extremist image of Arabs and Palestinians was attributed to the Palestinian group very early in the process:

*Ido (J): From the start, really from the first meeting, they said “we are Palestinians” and to me it felt subversive...I said how could [you] be Palestinian. Palestinians are at war with us... When they said “Palestinian,” I heard “terrorist.”*

When the Arabs defined themselves as Palestinians, the Jewish students’ image associated with “Palestinian” was, for the most part, that of a terrorist, an enemy.

**The Jewish group used the extremist image when it felt distressed in the battle over who is more humane.**

At the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting the Jewish group is talking about the feeling of distress and threat during the last discussion.

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*Ido: Last time I came out feeling distressed and threatened in the group itself especially when you said how do you feel about terrorist attacks on Jewish citizens and I had the feeling you are not objecting that.*

*Maram: That we are part of it (cynically)*

*Ibtisam: Each side uses its own means, you have been also in the army and fought, I do not know if you killed people but you were part of it.*

*Ahmad: I do not support terrorist attacks on civilians but I do support the struggle against the occupation.*

*Ido: I ask myself if I do sit here with extremists that would have been willing to participate in terrorist attacks.*

Dealing with the moral implications of participating in the occupying army is very difficult for the Jewish group and a way out of this moral distress is to blame the Palestinians for supporting terrorism and ignoring the complex point of view that they have just presented.

At the six first meetings of the process, as the Palestinian group repeatedly raised the subject of the injustices that the State is perpetrating on Palestinians, the Jewish group reported feeling embattled on the moral plane:

*Dalia (J): First of all, it's very disturbing in the sense that you know there's discrimination, but when you know someone personally and he tells you that he can't rent an apartment because he's an Arab...I mean, you don't really want to think that this is your country that you're living in, but that's the situation...that makes [me] feel bad, feel in despair, feel, uh...helpless against the system. Okay,*

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*they are discriminated against; what can I do? Nothing... And guilty of course, that things like that happen.*

The distress was evident in expressing despair, guilt and helplessness.

In discussions during the first part of the course, the Jewish group paid attention only to the assertive or more militant voice of Adnan, a Palestinian participant who was confrontational, while neglecting other, more moderate Palestinian voices:

*Ido (J): We are constantly hearing the dominant and aggressive voice and we aren't hearing the other voices and we have reinforced this. We got hung up on this dominant aggressive voice and we responded and created this, and that's what is happening now, we the Israelis listen only to the aggressive voice out there, to the terrorists.*

The Jewish group wanted to empower this militant voice and thereby to construct it, perhaps to avoid dealing with its own immorality as reflected in descriptions of the injustices of the occupation. This voice seemed like the authentic voice of the Palestinian group. The process of focusing on the more militant voice is mutual; the Palestinians, too, focused on the nationalist or militant voices in the Jewish group.

One way for the Palestinian group to regain a humane image was via a vision or fantasy offered by them with the following scenario: if the roles were reversed and the Palestinians were to become the dominant majority and rule Palestine, they would behave more humanely toward the Jews than the Jews have behaved toward them.

*Adnan ( a Palestinian participant-P): The bottom line is that we don't reject Jewish existence, I mean if, after this war we have described now, a Palestinian*

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*state were to arise, there would be no talk of transfer of the Jews; maybe, or so I believe, they would also give the Jews the option of either leaving this country or actually remaining and being citizens of the Palestinian state.*

*Ronen (J): Adnan, but you are prettifying things, you in other words want to say no, they can't exist.*

*Ayelet (J): What is all this about our having power? This is really about how they hate us.*

We see here a breakdown in communications into two parallel discourses with no point of intersection between them. Entertaining the fantasy of the situations' being reversed, with the Palestinians as the ruling majority, evoked for the Jews the specter of nullifying their national existence. The possibility that the Palestinians, having become strong (the way the Jews experienced them as strong in the group process), would behave humanely toward the Jews, was not perceived as a possible scenario at this stage, perhaps because it contradicted the Jews' inhumane image of the Palestinians.

Palestinian attempts to rehabilitate the Jews' image of them, restoring their (Palestinian) humanity, even via fantasy, was mirrored back to the Palestinians as inhumanity by the Jewish group. The imagery was more powerful than stated intentions or circumstances, hence the Palestinians' hypothetical statements were perceived by the Jewish group as a real Palestinian wish, a declaration of war.

*Ido (J): If the vision is that the State of Israel turns into Palestine – that's war. We can stop this whole discussion right here.*

We found an example of a similar response in the 8th meeting:

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*Noor: Maybe the power of the Arab group here, the Palestinian group, [is] to bring things, like, to the same level, and you feel that there's a group here that has rights... Maybe you have that sense of a threat.*

*Ayelet: But on the outside, I want very much to give rights to the Arab group. But I feel that you (the Palestinians) don't give me rights; let's say I feel that, if it were the other way around and you were the ones ruling, you would kill us, like.*

*Walid: Why do you think you're more human? Do you feel you are more human?*

*Ayelet: I don't feel you are acting humanely toward me.*

*Noor: I think that if you were on the outside, in the same circumstances, the same situation...[where] we have power and we are expressing our wishes and battling for our rights, you would behave the same way there too.*

This dialogue illuminates the connection between the threat, the dehumanization, and the power relationships. The association that came to mind for Ayelet was that, were the Palestinians in reality strong like the Palestinians in this group, they would kill the Jews or kick them out of the country. A strong, assertive Palestinian group evoked images of massacre. The Palestinians' strength, manifested in assertive speech, the expression of anger, and equality in the process from the standpoint of the power relationship in the room, connected with the existential threat and made the Jews feel weak. Via the inhuman images of Arabs harbored by the Jews, the threat was associated with killing and annihilation.

When the struggle over “who is more humane” was at its height, processes of mutual delegitimization occurred. Each group proffered examples of the inhumanity of the other group, and the dialogue escalated in intensity. Usually the process of dehumanization was not mutual

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and was expressed mainly by the Jewish group toward the Palestinian group, but in this specific phase of the process it was mutual therefore we mention it. The Palestinian group confronted the Jewish group mainly with their military service and accused them of being murderers.

*Adnan (P): How many Arabs did you murder during your army service, Ido? And you, Sigal, how many Arabs did you murder?*

The Palestinians did not let up, and they compared the Jews to Nazis with regard to the injustices of the occupation – a comparison that the Jews took very hard. In this tough battle over who is more humane, the Jewish group proffered images of the Palestinians as murderers and terrorists.

*Ido (J): I think that you wouldn't mind being a part of this, that you don't just take sides but would also plan terrorist missions...Am I really sitting here with people who could plan suicide bombings?*

At the height of this struggle over who is more humane, the processes of delegitimization were reciprocal.

The differentiation between understanding terror and justifying terror was important for the Palestinian group:

*Hatem (P): I don't justify it but I understand the feelings of someone whose house was razed; he spent quite a few years of his life in prison and was tortured by those criminals in the Border Police.*

*Sigal (J): In spite of all that, it isn't justified.*

*Smadar (J): He is and he isn't*

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*Hatem: I'm not justifying it, but I understand it. I understand what brought him to do something like that, and besides, he has no past, and he has no future, so he has nothing to fear.*

*Sigal: So why aren't you justifying this? I don't understand why you-all aren't justifying it? If he has no past and he has no future, why don't you justify it?*

Hatem was giving Sigal a hard time. He refused to concede the distinction between justification and understanding, perhaps because relinquishing this nuance would have taken him to an inhumane place where he didn't want to go. Sigal was in distress; evidently it would have been easier for her if they had admitted justifying terror. This admission would have reinforced the inhumane image she had of them, but she was thwarted. The mission of the Palestinian group to preserve its humane image throughout the dialogue proved to be a difficult one.

**The extremist image is voiced when the Palestinians demand a civil state.**

The second situation that evokes the inhumane image of the Palestinians happened when the Palestinian group at the 9<sup>th</sup> meeting tried to promote the solution calling for “a state of all its citizens.”

*Ido (J): If the Palestinian residents of Israel identify with the Palestinians in the occupied territories who are fighting us and there are suicide bombings that blow us up and hurt us, and opinions become more extreme...the ideas raised here are very, very radical, positions that barely accept our existence here, our right to exist here, so we have to take some kind of stand that defends us, and there isn't a lot of room there for integration, unfortunately. I wouldn't want this, it's not my ideal, but I'm responding to you.*

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*Ahmad (P): When people talk about a solution they are talking about a certain partnership between citizens, you were talking from hostility, like how can I let my enemy...*

*Sigal (J): What partnership are you talking about here? You are hurting us every day.*

Again we see parallel discourses that do not meet. Ahmad tried to promote the solution of a civil state, from a desire to be a part of that state. When this happened, Ido mentioned the image of the enemy threatening its existence and said that therefore it could not accept the civil state as a solution. Ido was aware that justification of continued control over Palestinians did not sound liberal but claimed that he is just responding to the extremist positions that the Palestinians expressed in the group. Later in the group process we have another excerpt on this issue:

*Ido: Extrimism we heard here a lot. We have heard that actually we (the Jews) do not have the right to exist in this place, maybe in another place but not here.*

*Adnan: You didn't hear that from us.*

*Nur: We didn't say that.*

*Sigal: You said so (to Ahmad) all the time you speak about bi-national state.*

**The extremist image served as a tool to restore the power of the Jewish group.**

One incident in the life of the group illustrates particularly well how images of Palestinians as extremist, vitriolic, and uncivilized were imposed on the Palestinian group in the encounter – and how this worked to restore the power of the Jewish group and weakened the Palestinian group. The incident occurred during the inter-university weekend workshop, which brought together students from the course

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examined here (University A) and students in a similar course at another university (University B). The workshop took place toward the end of the first semester. At the workshop's opening session, Jews from University A were complaining to the group from University B that the Palestinians in their group were very extremist and were deficient in their ability to empathize, and that the discussion was uncivilized. They reported this in the getting-acquainted session at the start of the workshop and continued in the same vein in the various forums that followed.

*Ido: I have a question to you. When someone was hurt did the other group the Arab group expressed empathy? Identification with that person since in our group it didn't happened the dialogue was uncivilized and the opinions were very extremist.*

*Ahmad: I disagree to this discourse of extremism because it isn't clear what is extremism. I clarified my opinions through the interaction with the other.*

The Jewish and Arab participants from University B argued that in their course, the discussions were not as stormy as at University A, but rather were quiet and cultured. The Palestinian participants from University A spoke out in their own defense and explained that the tumultuous dialogue reflected a hard reality rather than the absence of a culture of civilized dialogue. The Palestinian participants from University B responded that their more cultured tactics are more effective in conveying their message to the Jewish group, whereas the militant style was less effective in doing so.

For the Palestinians, influencing the Jews was very important. Ido was arguing that the assertive Arabs from his group had radicalized him. By contrast, the Arabs from University B

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had been able, in two hours, to influence him more than the Arabs in his own group had succeeded in doing over an entire semester. He was using this comparison to try to divide the two Palestinian groups and to win over the Palestinians from University B.

*Ido (J): I listened to people from University B, to Arabs mainly. I personally was very impressed, and I was more moved than by any other discussion I had or people had with me during the semester we have been together...In our group, we've only had this verbal sparring. My views became more radically right-wing since coming to the group.*

The Palestinian participants as well as Jews from University B explain that they indeed were more effective in changing the Jewish group through their gentle way.

*Palestinian participant from University B: We also talk about difficult things and sometimes shout but, in my opinion, there is much more of a desire to listen and much more sensitivity to the feelings of the other group.*

*(J) from University B: There is less anger that makes this possible. With you, it's still terrible, people really attack each other...*

*Ahmad (P) from University A: I feel strongly that the Arab group from University A is being pushed into a corner and blamed for not listening.*

The struggle here was about the question of who is better able to influence the Jewish group. This issue developed during the joint workshop and assumed the dimensions of a serious conflict between the two groups of Palestinians over the most effective tactic for the struggle – courteous vs. confrontational – and this came up in the plenary forum. The Palestinians from University A blamed the Palestinians from University B for lack of national feeling and for conducting

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“hummus and falafel” (polite and superficial) encounters – a telling insult in an Intifada year. The Jews from University B defended the Palestinians from their group and testified to major changes they themselves had undergone, but when the Palestinians (University A) appealed to the Jews in their own group to testify that the message had gotten across, the Jews were mostly silent, suggesting a failure to convey the political message. Ayelet (a Jewish student) confessed that the Jews at her university (A) were not all that cultured themselves, and voiced extremist positions too:

*The truth is that I really feel that the Arab group from my university has been put on trial here...And I feel that there's some kind of injustice, I mean, that we are remaining silent is because it is very convenient for us to keep quiet, because there is someone who is really doing the work for us, and yells at the Arabs from our group and tell you it's very hard with you, you're very aggressive and it's terrible...By the way, there's something twisted about this, because it's not that we're sitting here miserably while they shout at us; they are getting some very aggressive and extremist responses from us.*

Ayelet mentioned that the Jewish group, as the more powerful group, must bear responsibility for its actions. No longer could they hide behind weakness or victimhood, as we saw in the earlier phases of this workshop; instead, responsibility was taken for the majority group's belligerent attitude and behavior. Her words in fact sparked changes among other Jewish participants, who subsequently admitted to a process of accumulating power during the weekend and took ownership of their power.

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In the joint workshop, the facilitators and the lecturers of the two groups mentioned that the process in the two groups was quite similar, with only small variations in content and in the dynamics between the Jews and the Palestinians. Statements to this respect were made by the staff of the courses during a session following the plenary session mentioned above; this later session was conducted as a staff meeting that was open to the participants.

*The Lecturer of University B (P): It isn't true that the Arabs in University B were moderates, they raised very difficult issues, for example the right of return. I was surprised to see the compromise they got from the Jewish group.*

*The lecturer of University A (J): I do not think both groups have very different dynamics and I ask myself what was in the process today that caused both groups to polarize and both groups accepted this. I do not think that the Arab group as it was presented here characterized the group throughout the course. There were different stages in the group and I saw also here that with just a bit of difficult dynamics, the group from University B came apart. I think that the processes are very similar... For the Jews from University A this competition happened in a certain moment in their group in which there is a very strong conflict of two very strong forces in the room and it was convenient that somebody else is doing this fight (against the Palestinians from their group). I see here two very strong groups.*

*The Palestinian facilitator of University B: The processes are very similar in both groups. I remember the first two or three meetings in University B. They were*

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*unbearable. Later something else developed. The processes in both groups are similar.*

A week later Nur (P) also related to the processes taking place during the weekend that led to a dramatic change in the power relationship between the two groups; she noted that the Jews were empowered and the Arabs weakened.

*Nur (P): I feel that we have reached the point where the balance of power in the two groups has been reversed, as if throughout the semester it seemed outwardly that the Arab group was very powerful and that it was in control of the discussion and dialogue, but now suddenly as a result of some kind of shock, some type of encounter, this balance is reversed and the Jewish group regains its power and the Arab group gets to a situation where I have no power...and it started right after the weekend, I think.*

By means of dehumanization, the Jewish group from University A had been able to divide the two Palestinian groups, creating tremendous conflict between them and ending in mutual recriminations about allusions to extremist images in the presence of the Jewish participants. The internal conflict cost the Palestinian groups from both universities considerable power and they emerged from the process exhausted. Meanwhile, the Jewish participants from University A, after numerous sessions at which they felt that the Palestinians in their group were the stronger party, had now regained their power (when we use the term *power* here, we mean the group who set the agenda and speaks more than the other group in the dialogue).

## **Processes of Change**

The transition from a competitive struggle over who is more humane to a different kind of dialogue is a fascinating dialectical process. The seeds of such a change in the Jewish group first appear in the uni-national session which is mainly a reflective forum. Noa's suggestion was to stop generalizing. Here, the homogeneity of the out-group begins to break down.

*Noa (J): You say 'them.' I think this is a very dangerous word. Like, because this 'them' often includes 'he,' ...In my opinion, there is some kind of normal division here, they have to be given the space to express this. We don't look enough for this difference.*

Thus far, the Palestinian group had struggled valiantly to change the inhumane image forced on them, without success. In the seventh session, they took on a different tactic. The Palestinians offered examples from reality in which Jews were portrayed as humane, perhaps with the intention of making things easier for the Jews. Adnan (P) talked about the Bereaved Parents Circle, whose Israeli and Palestinian members demonstrate together against the occupation – something Adnan saw as a humane act.

*Ronen(J): Adnan, do you see this as something good, or bad?*

*Adnan (P): No, of course as something good.*

*Sigal (J): But it's hard for you to imagine this. So what does it make you feel?*

*Adnan (P): It was hard for me actually to imagine that someone might get this idea and especially in this period that they initiated this. Those 300 images that they put in Rabin Square, I just see people Palestinians and Jews, who are trying despite everything to live together and to do something, and they're simply*

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*creating a grounded place with ideas like these, which are very original in my opinion, and very moving, and I don't know what this is doing to me, Sigi [sic].*

What stands out here is the astonishment of the Jews at a new type of conciliatory dialogue, introduced by Adnan, whom the Jews had stubbornly nicknamed “the extremist.” The Jews were trying to take hold of this new dialogue to make sure it was really genuine. They embraced this moment of benevolence, because there is nothing stronger, in establishing their identity as humane, than to have the Palestinians acknowledge this humanity—and this, after sessions during which they experienced quite the opposite. The group was exhausted by these struggles and was looking for a way into a different kind of dialogue.

The Palestinians distinguished between their attitude toward the Zionist movement and their attitude toward the Jews as an additional way of changing the image forced on them. Nur distinguished between the two because she wanted very much to refute the extremist image and clarify that there was an ideological disagreement there and not hatred based on ethnic/national origin.

*Nur (P): I appreciate the contributions of the Jews, my problem isn't that someone is Jewish. My problem is with the Zionist movement, first of all. And I always hear, Nur, you are an extremist, and you always take the negative side and you always radicalize things, I've heard this. And I think that the Jewish side thinks that Nur hates the Jews because they are Jews. It's not true. I don't hate the Jews, because the bottom line is, we are human beings. But I have a problem with the Zionist movement which you represent and which you support.*

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The distinction between Jews and Zionists along with the Palestinian acknowledgment of the humane steps taken by the Jews came as a relief to the Jewish participants, who acknowledged the suffering of the Palestinians in the occupied territories in the group.

*Sigal (J): Yesterday on television they showed the father of Muhammad Dura [Palestinian boy whose father was unable to prevent his being shot] and showed Gaza, I felt, I really felt a kind of sadness. I had a hard time with it. On the other hand, if I hear about a soldier killed or I know a bereaved family, then it's awfully hard for me. That isn't detachment, it's just a kind of acceptance of, like, there are contradictions, and I accept them.*

Sigal wanted to emphasize that identification with Palestinian suffering did not mean non-identification with the Israeli side, and did not mean joining the Palestinian struggle. On the one hand, behind this statement may be a zero-sum view, the assumption that more identification with the Palestinians has to mean less identification with her own people. On the other hand, what was new in what Sigal was experiencing was the idea that it is possible to embrace both feelings simultaneously. The different kind of dialogue offered by the Palestinians also created a different dialogue from the Jewish side. Just as there was reciprocity in the escalation of the struggle over who is more humane, there was also reciprocity in the more placatory dialogue.

After the joint weekend workshop the Jewish participants acknowledged that they were the group with the power. Letting go of the role of perpetual victim and accepting ownership of the identity of the stronger side was one of the main components of the change undergone by the Jewish group:

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*Smadar (J): Suddenly they understood that they lost power. They were very, very weak... and they weren't crying out the way they had been, they were left with this minority-ness of theirs. I had the feeling that maybe it was a happy feeling and somehow comfortable for us, to go back to being the strong ones, but there was something sad about it.*

*Ido (J): The trouble is, we won't have a partner; we don't want them to fall apart. In facing off with them, we came together, and now they are falling apart on us... I have a kind of lonely feeling, not so comfortable, it's a lot more comfortable to shout.*

*Sigal (J): I really don't know how this happened. Maybe in the last meeting, suddenly I'm really looking at myself, I really see what shits we are...Really, in every area suddenly it did something to me, like, look at yourself for a second and see how you behave, how you and your people behave, and it was unbelievable.*

The Jewish group was having trouble because, again, they found it impossible to forge a clear identity (a positive sense of belonging to their national group) in contrast to the other group's identity while the Palestinians were falling apart. The Jewish group was challenged to define a national identity not shaped in opposition to the other and not via struggle, and it turned out that this was not such an easy thing. Admitting the ugliness of your own group power in oppressing the other is a painful process.

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In interviews after the end of the course, one of the most common changes reported by all the Jewish participants was that they did not see the Palestinians as extremists or as valuing human life less than do the Jews.

*Ofra (J): We are a lot like them. We are all hot-tempered to some extent and we shout a little. We're all Middle Eastern types...If we think we're better, that their values don't hold life as sacred as we do, I don't think so. We also had our suicide bombers once upon a time. From a more Israeli perspective, it would be easier for me to say that they don't care about their life because look, the mothers send their children to make war and people commit suicide and on our side no one would do that. We've done it, we've done everything, so we could joke and say that we had first claim there...like, been there, done that. We don't hold life to be any holier than they do.*

Ofra, who prior to the process spoke about how the Arabs educate their children to hate while Israelis educate for peace, evidently modified her position. The value of life was now held to be equal among both peoples, and she felt that the differences at that point came from the different reality in the lives of occupier and the occupied and not as moral and cultural inferiority in the Palestinian culture. These insights developed among the participants during the last third of the course and they were part of the process of taking responsibility for their power, as discussed here earlier.

Ayelet described the changes in the Jewish group's stance of cultural superiority.

*Ayelet (J): Now their culture does not seem as different from ours. I mean they are basically students like we are, and we all take exams. Before, I thought it was*

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*this culture like the Bedouin. What stands out more for me is the situation they are in as opposed to the situation we are in, and not the cultural markers, but that they are in a situation of the minority, of occupation, of a very hard daily reality...As if it were natural to say that we accord more value to human life, and these are things I grew up with, that they have this exalted goal, and martyrs, and we are willing to send back masses [of prisoners] for just one captive [of ours], as if the value of human life for us is very, very strong. But on the other hand, we also have this “to die for our country.” Before, I was less aware of their pain, the mothers’ pain for their children. Today, I don’t know, it’s hard for me to see it that way.*

Before the course began, there was a hierarchy of values in the way the Jewish students perceived the two cultures, and they felt more humane than the Palestinians. Gradually, all the interviewees developed an understanding of the context in which things were taking place; their inhumane images changed, and they accepted the idea that the Jewish-Israeli side has some responsibility for the situation.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

A group process by self-selected students over a series of workshops allowed us to capture the process by which people position themselves in opposition to one another and also let us see how, over the longer term, change might happen. The Jews’ extremist image of Palestinians existed prior to the process; these images are acquired via powerful socialization processes in Jewish Israeli society (Bar-Tal and Teichman 2005). The question that concerned us in this study was not whether the extremist image existed, but rather at what points did the

Jewish group choose to use it and for what purpose, and what processes occurred in the group through which this image was strengthened or weakened.

The rationale for Jews labeling the Palestinians in the group as ‘the enemy’ offered itself in the first meeting of this joint workshop, when Palestinians described themselves as Palestinians and not as Israeli Arabs. The image of the enemy ascribed to the Palestinians by the Jews protects their self-concept of being more moral than the Palestinians. Constructing identity through dialogue is an anticipated and natural development in encounter focusing on the inter-group dimension (Suleiman 1997). This process was perceived by the Palestinians in the group as a positive process of shaping their national identity, of empowerment, and as part of the struggle to change the situation. They emphasized their Palestinian identity also as a way of protesting Jewish hegemony in the State. The Jews designated this self-definition as subversion, thereby delegitimizing it. Evidently the life space permitted by the Jews to the Palestinians, within which they are allowed to express, develop, and strengthen their national identity and still remain human, is limited.

Oakes (2001) noted three crucial conditions for transforming a categorization into a bias:

- (a) Activating the category: In our case, the fact of the encounter with the assertive, strong Palestinian group that defined itself as Palestinian provided the catalyst to activate the category;
- (b) The entire concept is relative to the context: Here, the negative images arose in three situations in the majority group: to cope with distress, to preserve its superiority and hegemony, and to preserve or restore its power;
- (c) The process is circular and happens via social discrimination: In our case, the will to preserve the discrimination constituted a reason for raising the negative and inhumane images of Palestinians, and the inhumane images provide justification

for continuing the discrimination. Bar-Tal and Teichman (2005) also noted the circularity in processes of delegitimization of Palestinians in the Israeli reality.

The statements by Palestinian participants about the actions of the Israeli army in the occupied territories and about discrimination within Israel caused distress in the Jewish group. These statements represented a threat to their perceived moral values. Raising the image of extremist Palestinians lessened the difficulty while providing a justification for the situation (Sonnenschein, Bekerman and Horenczyk 2010).

The Jews found themselves torn inwardly between their values of equality and justice, and the tale told by the mirror held up by the Palestinian group, where the image of the society reflected is inconsistent with the Jews' own liberal values. Delegitimizing the Palestinians freed the Jewish group briefly from having to cope with this inner conflict.

Findings in the present study suggest that the resolution for this inner conflict in the Jewish group was a two-stage developmental process. First, exaggeration of the cultural differences emerged, ascribing inhumane images to the Palestinian group, along with a defense of the group's internal values – preserving the state as Jewish; we saw this in the first half of the course. When the Jews' liberalism was challenged, they turned to essentialist concepts linking nationality and culture (Helman 2002). Later in the process, when the Jewish participants acknowledged that they, the Jews, are the powerful group and when they were aware of racist elements within themselves, this pattern disappeared and was replaced by feelings of guilt and self-criticism, along the lines of the phenomena observed by Devine (1989).

The Jewish group also raised the extremist image when asked to agree to equal treatment for Palestinian citizens of Israel. A similar observation was made by Bekerman, Maoz and

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Sheftel (2006) among Jewish facilitators who conduct inter-group encounter. They claimed that even in the most ideological, emancipatory setting, the hegemonic forces hold sway. When the Palestinian group asserted its right to full civic participation, and the Jews were asked to relinquish their hegemony, they talked about the alleged “support for terror” by the Palestinians in the group. The discourse of national security breeds the perception of the stereotypical Arab as one whose first priority is to harm the Jews at all times, regardless of costs and benefits (Rabinowitz 1992).

In fact, the Jews at that specific moment in the group process were unable to deal with the argument that nullifies full civic participation for Palestinians in a manner congruent with their own internal faith, liberal values and equality. This internal conflict was resolved by reference to the Palestinians’ demand to rescind the Zionist definition of the state and turn it into a state of all its citizens, which was portrayed as a demand to do away with the national existence of the Jews in Israel. The Palestinians in the group had not expressed this intention in the group. Palestinians reject the Zionist definition of the state as a Jewish national state because that definition excludes its Palestinian citizens (Rabinowitz, Yiftahel and Ghanem 2000). The Jews interpreted this non-acceptance as a negation of their existence. According to this perception, only a national Zionist Jewish state can enable their existence. Loss of Jewish hegemony in the state was perceived, apparently, as loss of Jewish existence within it. The overlap that the Jewish participants saw between the Zionist identity of the state and their national Jewish-Israeli identity, buttressed by the inhumane images of Palestinians, seemed to block constructive, positive dialogue (that could open up new options) about the character of the state. Essentializing discourses (those which assume that for any specific kind of entity there is a set of characteristics or properties all of

which any entity of that kind must possess) of culture and identity are geared towards the naturalization of inequality and domination and thereby disguise the context of their production and reproduction (Scott 1995).

The Jewish participants could not enjoy playing with the fantasy of reversed roles in the situation. The expression by the Arab group of a vision of a reversal in the situation prompted the Jews into a process of constructing the self which, in fact, is actually done by the other. There may be no recognition that can compare in power with the acknowledgment of our humanity by someone we are harming. This is why the Jews had such intense need for recognition of their humanity by the Palestinians, throughout the encounter process. The Palestinians also exerted themselves to receive acknowledgment of their humanity by the Jews, but as a minority group, they were unable to get this acknowledgment from the other. As a minority group, they suffered from the reverse situation, wherein they got caught in the fixed images of inhumanity attributed to them by the majority group.

Bhabha (1994) has recommended that we no longer look at images, positive or negative, but instead begin looking at the process of surrender that becomes possible in a stereotypical dialogue. To understand the productivity of colonial power, one must understand how its truth is constructed by loci of power, opposition, control and dependency that shape the relations between rulers and ruled. The process that began over the joint weekend workshop was an example of this surrender process. We saw how the Jewish group's perseverance in clinging to negative images of Palestinians gradually subdued the assertive Palestinian group, but not entirely. The Palestinian group was hurt by the images that portrayed it as uncultured, uncivilized and extremist. The Jewish group, perhaps unconsciously, exploited this injured place and

encouraged a split between the two Palestinian groups; this contributed further to the Jewish group's power and to the Palestinian group's weakness.

The question of reciprocity in images is a fascinating one. Oren and Bar-Tal (2004) argue that generally, the delegitimization processes in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are mutual. We believe, however, that one may not generalize from those situations regarding the overall situation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority in Israel. In the present study a different pattern emerged: In a situation of escalation of the conflict in the group, there was reciprocity in negative images but when the discussion was more relaxed, and the power relations less equal, the negative cultural images were one-way. The Jews labeled the Palestinians as uncultured, uncivilized and extremist, while the Palestinians did not attribute such qualities to the Jews. This pattern is probably connected with the asymmetrical power relationships obtaining in the country.

Unlike similar encounter groups observed by Bekerman (2002), Helman (2002), and Bekerman, Maoz and Sheftel (2006), wherein the researchers observed a vicious circle—with no way out, with the stereotypes unbroken, and with participants engaged in discourses that help maintain existing ideological patterns of power—the groups analyzed in the present study found their way out of the cycle. Each in its own way, the two groups managed to escape the cycle and develop a critical and dialectic discourse with the other group. This is fully documented on 65 hours of video showing a process that was not restricted to a given time frame and enabled a dynamic of change to develop.

The Palestinian group in the present study finally changed the inhumane image imposed on it, mainly by persevering in the struggle to show the Jewish group the inhumanity of the

occupation and its apparatus of control. Generally, the Palestinians' efforts to demonstrate their humanity nearly always end in failure. The Palestinian group in this case was more successful when it persevered in confronting the Jewish group on the plane of its own morality and was able, as we have seen, to crack the Jews' notion of their own moral superiority. The Palestinians also tried to pull apart what Jews posit as an inherent link between Judaism and Zionism. In the wake of these steps, the Jews' negative image of the Palestinians began to break down.

The change that the Jewish group experienced was a gradual process. At first it was covert, and we saw attempts to break down the homogeneity of the Palestinian group. Gradually the group looked inward and talked about the difficulty of internalizing the accusations made by the Palestinian group. Only when the Jewish group acknowledged its own power, did it permit itself to be moved to change. The Jewish group finally stopped mentioning the extremist image of the Palestinians and admitted to itself, and to the Palestinians, the truth about its own power and about immoral acts and injustices perpetrated by the Jewish majority against the Palestinian minority. The Jewish group also acknowledged phenomena of aggression and condescension that occurred during the course itself.

The Jewish group moved to confront the challenge of defining its national identity, not in opposition to the other, not through a struggle, and not from a posture of superiority—and this turned out to be a substantial challenge indeed. The intergroup conflict serves to reinforce the Jewish Israelis' national identity. When the conflict was less present, there was a vacuum to be filled with new content not based on superiority over, or control of, the other.

The paradoxical notion of achieving empathy or change in deep images through confrontation (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On and Fakhreldeen 2002) is becoming clearer in this type

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of research. Here, we observed a dialectic process. The Palestinians' insistence on challenging the Jewish group about its morality was influential. Meanwhile, the Palestinian group proffered a few examples in which Jews were portrayed as humane, and the Palestinians drew distinctions between their attitude toward the Zionist movement and their attitude toward the Jews. The Palestinian group may have done that with the intention of making things easier for the Jews. Further research may examine the connection between the strategies chosen by the Palestinians in the Jewish –Palestinian dialogue and the change in the inhumane images the Jews have of the Palestinians.

We believe this study contributes to a theoretical understanding of intergroup conflicts and to an understanding of this type of struggle over who is more humane as it takes place between groups with unequal power both on the global and the local level. The research points to the importance of addressing the cultural dimension and the deeply-held images that the majority group has of the minority group, and of challenging the practice of power by using these images in facilitating groups in conflict. Our hope is that this study will also contribute knowledge useful to those working in facilitating groups in conflict both elsewhere and in Israel, regarding their understanding and interpretation of the processes that take place in encounters of this type, thereby enhancing the professional quality of intergroup encounter facilitation.

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## **The "Public" in "Public Peace Process" and in "Mini-Publics:"**

### **A Dialogue between Democratic Theory and Peace Studies**

**Amit Ron**

#### **Abstract**

*The recent attention of peace studies scholars to the role of the "public" parallels an increased interest of democratic theorists in the legitimacy of "mini-publics:" initiatives that bring small groups of citizens together to discuss policy issues. In fact, democratic activists and peace activists who seek to engage the public face similar theoretical and practical challenges. The purpose of this article is to contribute to an emerging dialogue between the disciplines of democratic theory and peace studies. Such a dialogue can be beneficial in at least two ways: it allows an exploration of the role of legitimacy in public peace processes and the burdens that legitimacy put on the institutional design of such processes, and it allows an exploration of more ambitious models of public participation in the peace process.*

#### **Introduction**

Traditionally, peace studies understood peacemaking as the realm of diplomats. This is no longer the case. Many scholars of peace studies believe that peace must be made by publics, not politicians. Sustainable peace requires a "public peace process:" "sustained action by citizens outside governments to change the fundamental relationship between groups in conflict" (Chufrin and Saunders 1993, 155-6). Indeed, Gawerc (2006, 440) notes that in recent years peace studies scholarship "have given voice to the critical role that private citizens, local

initiatives, and people-to-people activities have in building peace, as well as in maintaining conflict.”

Practically, peace scholars and activists who embrace the notion of a “public peace process” focus on grassroots initiatives that try to create ongoing productive dialogue among groups of citizens within and across the belligerent sides. These initiatives operate at two levels. At one level, they seek to modify the views of the participants themselves. At the same time, the hope and expectation is that this change of minds will trickle wide and up, so to speak, and lead to a similar change of minds in the public at large and among policy makers.

The recent theoretical and practical interest of peace studies scholars in the role of the public parallels similar trends in democratic theory. Scholars and practitioners of participatory and deliberative democracy are exploring the idea of "mini-publics:" initiatives that bring small groups of citizens together to discuss policy issues (Fung 2003; Goodin and Dryzek 2006). There are obvious similarities between initiatives of "public peace process" and "mini-publics." Both try to generate a small-scale model, a microcosm, of a process that has to take place in society at large. The underlying belief of both is that citizens can change their minds when they encounter different perspectives, and that they need to have the opportunity to do so for the desired social change to be possible. Furthermore, both kinds of initiatives also face similar difficulties. They are mostly local initiatives and typically with limited budgets (Ross and Rothman, 1999, 9, describe them as “bootstrap operations;” see also Dajani and Baskin, 2006, 75, 107-8). They often take place in hostile environments which question the very legitimacy of the initiative, and the attention that these initiatives receive from politicians and the media is mostly scarce and fickle.

Given these theoretical and practical similarities, it is surprising that there is very little dialogue between democratic theory and peace studies.<sup>1</sup> One reason for the lack of dialogue is probably the different orientations of the two fields: the theoretical orientation of democratic theory vs. the practical orientation of peace studies. Yet, these orientations too are changing. Democratic theorists are increasingly interested in on-the-ground experiments in democracy, and peace studies scholars are engaging in theoretically sophisticated reflections about their practices. Within this fertile ground, a dialogue between peace studies and democratic theory begins to emerge, and the purpose of this paper is to contribute to this dialogue by examining the relevance of works done in democratic theory to the theory underlying public peace process initiatives.<sup>2</sup>

I argue that a conversation between the two research-action areas can be beneficial in at least two ways. First, generally speaking, peace studies understand the role of public participation in conflict resolution through the framework of social-psychology (for example Azar and Burton 1986; Kelman 1997). Public participation is a way to shift the discussion from the political dimension to the level of inter-personal relationships (Kelman 1999). In contrast, within democratic theory public participation is understood as a pre-condition for achieving legitimacy. Even if officials can reach a stable agreement, the only way to know whether this agreement is legitimate is through a process of reflective scrutiny by those who will be affected by the terms of the agreement. A dialogue between democratic theory and peace studies allows an exploration of the role of legitimacy in public peace process. This is not merely a theoretical or philosophical question. The claim for legitimacy depends on aspects of institutional design of the public peace process. To be sure, practitioners in both camps generally engage in an uphill

battle in which institutional design is dictated more by the limited perseverance of funding agencies and participants than by what is required for gaining legitimacy. Nevertheless, democratic theorists take more liberty to imagine ideal conditions of more control over design and therefore engage in a comparative analysis of the legitimacy of different models of institutional design. Their conclusions speak directly to similar issues in public peace processes.

The second benefit of such a conversation is that it allows an exploration of more ambitious models of public participation in the peace process. In particular, I refer to the model of Citizens' Assemblies on Electoral Reform that took place in British Columbia (2004) and Ontario (2008). In these cases, the provincial government assembled a group of citizens who were selected randomly and asked them to study electoral systems and recommend electoral reforms to the province if they find that reforms are needed. What was unique in these cases was not just that the government invested comparatively vast resources in the process, and the length and depth of the deliberative process itself, but also the fact that the government committed itself to submit the recommendations of the assembly to a referendum (Lang 2007; Warren and Pearse 2008). Thus, the government took itself outside of the process of decision-making and allowed a deliberative body of a small group of citizens to make recommendations to the public at large. I believe that this model serves as a precedent for citizens' involvement in policy making that should excite the imagination of scholars of peace studies (the limited success of the assemblies in the referenda and then many differences between electoral reforms and peace agreements notwithstanding). Peace scholars can and should build upon this precedent and study the viability of more ambitious models of public involvement in the peace process.<sup>3</sup>

The scope of the discussion is therefore limited to the questions that emerge from a dialogue between these two kinds of practical initiatives and the academic scholarship about them. It does not purport to offer a comprehensive survey of the relationship between democracy and peace-making. Furthermore, my focus here is on the question of legitimacy. While I believe that both mini-publics and public peace processes are promising and important kinds of social activism, I am in no position to assess within the scope of this article the likely effectiveness of such initiatives in any particular setting.

### **Background**

The last two decades witnessed a dramatic change in the terrain of democratic theory. While previous generations of democratic theorists understood democracy to be a mechanism for fair aggregation of preferences via the mechanism of voting, the "deliberative turn" in democratic theory shifted the scholarly attention to the important role of reasonable debate in democracy. In this latter view, the mere fact that a majority of the citizens favors a policy or a candidate provides only weak grounds for claiming legitimacy for this decision. Democracy can and should make a stronger claim for legitimacy, which is that democratic institutions provide a site for exchange of reasons. Democratic decisions are legitimate not only because they won a plurality or majority of votes but because they are an outcome of public debate. Strong democracy, then, requires a viable public sphere where citizens can freely exchange opinions and debate policies. Furthermore, the strength of democracy depends on the quality of the discussion in the public sphere. Even a viable public sphere would not be legitimate if arguments of certain participants are systematically silenced or marginalized. The public, in this view, is not simply

an aggregate of individual opinions but a social sphere where different players demand and give justifications for public policies.

However, when viewed through the lenses of deliberative democracy, many established democracies face a deficit, if not a crisis, of democratic legitimacy. Most citizens choose to remain generally passive in their political participation, limiting themselves at best to voting every four years. Furthermore, it seems that there are very limited sites of genuine public discussion while the public sphere is dominated by corporate media and the political establishment.

Although some argue that these features are endemic to modern mass-democracies, many of those who are interested in promoting democracy look for alternative ways to revive a public sphere of discussion and debate. In particular, the last decade witnessed the rise of initiatives that try to create what Robert Dahl (1989) called "mini-publics." These are small groups of representative sample of citizens who come together to discuss – by exchanging reasons, not simply by bargaining – policy-issues. These initiatives include Citizen Assemblies, Deliberative Polls, Consensus Conferences, Citizens' Juries, Planning Cells, and a host of other initiatives (Goodin and Dryzek 2006, 220).

For obvious reasons, democratic theorists became interested in these real-life experiments. The question that they ask is how, and under what conditions, these local initiatives can be understood as an integral part of democratic decision-making. Put differently, the question that they ask is under what conditions the deliberations and decision-makings which take place in mini-publics can claim to be considered legitimate by the public at large.

In this context, it is important not to overlook significant changes in the recent mini-publics are understood by democratic theorists. Earlier generations of deliberative democrats understood mini-publics as an approximation of some ideal speech situation in which the power of the better argument can prevail. In this earlier understanding, the burden of legitimacy of these initiatives fell on their ability to approximate the ideal condition of free and open communication. More recent theories understand the legitimacy of mini-publics as dependent on the interaction between the quality of the inner deliberations and the corresponding deliberations in the public sphere at large (Habermas 1996; Bohman 1998; Chambers 2009). In this view, the mini-publics generate a needed space for exchange of ideas, but it is not only impossible but also unnecessary to expect the decisions made in mini-public to be legitimate *tout court*. Democratic theorists who advocate mini-publics see them as one – albeit central and indispensable – tool for policy-making within a complex “ecology” of institutions that are needed for establishing democratic legitimacy (Warren 2008, 67-8). In a similar way, the discussion in the following sections will not treat public peace processes as the only or the right way to bring about sustainable and just peace but will examine the place of such initiatives within a complex “ecology” of peace making.

### **Peace Processes and the Democratic Legitimacy**

But why should decision-makers seek to get the public involved in the peace process? What is the advantage of “citizens’ diplomacy” (Davies and Kaufman 2002) over a process that takes place solely by professional diplomats? A dialogue between democratic theory and peace studies can bring forth a distinction between two possible purposes of the public peace process:

the instrumental role and the legitimacy role. While the two purposes are often combined in practice, it is important to separate them analytically since they pose different burdens on the design of the public peace process.

The first answer to the above questions is that having the public involved in the peace process helps "building a peace constituency" and thus increasing the likelihood of achieving a sustained agreement that is stable and just (Lederach 1995, 211). This is a vast oversimplification of a complex argument, but for our purpose we can focus on two characteristics of this answer. First, the demand for public participation is instrumental: the public is expected to help bring about a "desired result" – namely, peace – that has already been set. The question is will these efforts "add to our overall practical capacity in making and building peace?" (Saunders 2000, 265). Second, within this framework, the question of whether public participation is conducive to peace is essentially an empirical question (albeit, again, a very complex one). In some situations, it might be the case that public participation would distract the cause of peace.

According to the second answer to this question, the role of the public is normative and epistemic: it is only the public that can make decisions about which terms of negotiation and agreement are legitimate. Diplomats can generate an agreement, but without some form of public involvement, it is not possible to know whether the agreement is legitimate. To explain this contention, we need to look more closely at the idea of a procedural conception of legitimacy.

Moral philosophers distinguish between two routes to understand the very concept of legitimacy. One route we can follow in answering this question is identifying some general

criteria by which to engage in normative judgment. For example, if we want to evaluate the fairness of a peace agreement, we can follow various criteria. We can ask whether the agreement is stable, whether both sides are treated as equal, whether the cost and benefits of the peace are distributed fairly across different groups in society, whether the agreement balances “peace versus justice” (Zartman and Kremenjuk 2005; see also Albin 1993), and so on. What all these criteria share is the implicit assumption that the legitimacy of an agreement can be established – at least principally – independently of the view of those who are subject to the agreement.

The procedural, or deliberative, turn in moral and political philosophy suggests a different route, according to which the validity of any social norm or institutional arrangement is based on the question of whether it can be agreed upon under some ideal conditions by those who are subject to it. The basic idea behind this view, as Seyla Benhabib explains, is that “only those norms (i.e., general rules of action and institutional arrangements) can be said to be valid (i.e., morally binding), which would be agreed to by all those affected by their consequences, if such agreement were reached as a consequence ...” of open deliberation among equals (Benhabib 1996, 70; I omit the specific conditions). Put differently, the only way in which the normative validity of mutual agreements can be justified is by articulating how it can become the object of “reasoned agreement” (Cohen 1997, 73; other notable discussions of democratic legitimacy include Habermas 1996; Dryzek 2002; Bohman and Rehg 1997; Bohman 2000; Chambers 2003). The second answer for why to get the public involved in the peace process, then, is that it is a necessary condition for reaching a legitimate agreement.

Now, it is important to notice that this is a philosophical definition of legitimacy and not yet an account of an actual procedure for how to reach legitimate decisions. It should not be

understood as a procedure that one can follow in order to put a stamp of normative approval on any decision or a decision-making process. Furthermore, most of the political decisions are not the product of real or ideal deliberations that involve all those who are affected. While a good argument can be made for why actual wide public deliberation is necessary for establishing legitimacy, there are still ways to evaluate the legitimacy of decisions that were reached with a procedure that fails to meet a deliberative ideal. We cannot know for sure what would be the outcome of an ideal deliberation, but we can still try to evaluate and argue about whether a decision can make a plausible claim to be the subject of a reasoned agreement.

The understanding of the procedural conception of legitimacy as a general framework would allow us to address the questions of what counts as the relevant public. To begin with, at its core, beyond the general reference to all those who are affected the conception of the public refers to the ability to present arguments regarding the desired terms of social cooperation and to assess the validity of arguments made by others. Technically, the public sphere does not have to include all the people but must include all the relevant arguments or viewpoints. Individuals or groups can be represented by others who argue in their behalf. However, the process of deliberation allows participants to better understand their own interests. Democratic representation without deliberation creates a conflict of accountability. If people elect representatives based on their pre-deliberative views, and if the representatives (and only them) modify their views in the process of deliberation, then the people who elected them are no longer in a position to hold them accountable. If we allow an elected group of people to deliberate and arrive at a reflective decision, we have to find mechanisms for this reflection to trickle down to those who elected them.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the procedural understanding of legitimacy, the question is not only of who should participate but also of the quality of the exchange of reasons. In some settings, the mere presence of people who hold certain arguments does not guarantee that these arguments will be heard and considered. Some debates take place in a political environment where members of certain groups are afraid or do not feel comfortable to express their views. In addition, arguments can be heard but ignored or be marginalized by those who set the tone for the debate. As we shall see, all of these questions are important for the evaluation of the claims for legitimacy of different institutional settings for peace making. I therefore want to leave aside further discussion of philosophical questions about the procedural understanding of legitimacy and to look at the legitimacy of the institutional settings in which peace processes take place.

### **Public Peace Process and the Challenge of Legitimacy**

To what extent can the process of traditional peacemaking at the level of diplomats claim to reach what would be the reasoned agreement for all those who are affected? The first and most immediate reason why such a process can have a hard time to claim deliberative legitimacy is that diplomatic negotiations typically involve exchange of threats and not only exchange of reasons. It is not the case that traditional diplomacy is entirely devoid of exchange of reasons. Diplomats and politicians are often required to give an account of the agreement they reached to several constituents: their public, third party mediators, the international community, and so on. Nevertheless, at least for some of these constituencies (and often the weak ones), there is no procedure by which they can ask for reasons and challenge the validity of these reasons.

It is possible to argue, however, that in democratic societies diplomats and politicians are accountable to the citizens and must provide reasons that they can accept. Thus, while traditional peace agreements are based on exchange of threats between the two communities, politicians in democratic societies are accountable to their constituencies and are required to justify the terms of the agreement to their public. However, as I discussed above, such a claim has significant shortcomings. To begin with, even though in democratic societies there are lines of authorization and accountability that connect citizens and diplomats, these lines are often-times broken and it becomes hard to claim that diplomats actually stand-in for the interests of the citizens (Francis 2004, chapter 2). More importantly, even if diplomats are representing the interests of the citizens, they are representing their raw, pre-reflective, interests. Had the citizens had the opportunity to deliberate about their own interests, they might have realized that they misjudged their perception of their interests. Thus, even if citizens agree to the peace deal that was reached by diplomats, their agreement does not necessarily count as a reasoned agreement. Indeed, diplomats often present a hard-line claiming, not incorrectly, to represent the view of their constituencies. However, the often unstated belief underlying much of the peace scholarship is that collective reflection can lead citizens to realize that they have a long-term interest in reaching peace (this belief is articulated most clearly by critics, see Carr 1946, chapter 3; Waltz 1959, chapter 3). Active warfare or the threat of it makes conversation about long-term interests more difficult and gives structural discursive advantage to hardliners (Dallmayr 2004).

I now turn to examine the way in which public peace processes can claim to address the "deficits" that are inherent in traditional peace-making. The challenges for peace activists is that a protracted conflict creates both political institutions and a public sphere that are not hospitable

for reasoned debate, especially when such a debate requires re-thinking the relationship with the other side. Public peace processes try to generate an institutional space where members of the public can exchange arguments about the terms of the desired peace agreement. Now, these processes do not understand themselves as being stand alone processes, but as processes that interact with the public at large and with the political system. Unlike peace education initiatives (Harris and Morrison 2003, 81, 84; Wallach 2000, chapter 8), they typically do not intend to change only the hearts and minds of the participants, but to make broader change. Therefore, to evaluate their claim for legitimacy, we need to discuss both the quality of the space that is created and the channels by which the local deliberations are communicated to the public at large.

Scholars of public peace process make a distinction between "internal and external effectiveness" of the process (Gawerc 2006, 451; Ross and Rothman 1999). Internal effectiveness refers to the impact of the process on the participants' perceptions and external effectiveness refers to its impact on the conflict itself. We can now add a parallel distinction between the internal legitimacy and the external legitimacy of the process. A process is internally legitimate to the extent that participants had the ability to openly express their positions, to reflect on them, and to modify them. It is externally legitimate when the public at large come to see process and its outcome as legitimate. Again, internal and external claims for legitimacy are philosophical constructs. They refer to acceptance of the legitimacy of the deliberation for the right reasons, not simply to the view of the majority of the people. It is possible that a group of people will view a process of deliberation in which they participated as fair and legitimate but would not be aware that the moderator provided them with biased

information. Similarly, it is possible that the public at large would not accept the legitimacy of a decision reached by an internally legitimate process because the media misrepresented the nature of the process.

To illustrate, let us examine a hypothetical case of a public peace process that consisted of peace activists from both sides. They conducted several meetings in which they got to know each other and learn the issues in depth. Throughout the process, they confronted their own biases in a honest and productive way and were able to reach agreement on wide variety of issues. Furthermore, favorable media coverage led to some positive public reactions. However, critics of this initiative pointed out that the participants hardly represent the views of the public at large since the participants were pro-peace from the get-go. This process turned out to be effective both in terms of its internal effectiveness and in terms of its external effectiveness. However, there is a challenge to the forum's claim of legitimacy since it cannot claim to represent the likely outcome of deliberations had all views been involved.

In what follows, I am drawing on works in democratic theory to examine the way three aspects of the design of public peace processes can affect their claim for legitimacy: the purposed influence of the forum, the choice of its topic, and the choice of the participants.

### **The "Macro Political Uptake"**

To assess which institutional designs work, we first need to discuss what work they are expected to do. Goodin and Dryzek identify different "possible pathways" through which mini-publics can have a "macro political uptake:" actually making policies, recommending policies, informing public debates, "market testing" of policies, legitimating policies, confidence or

constituency building, as a way to exert popular oversight over public officials, and as a way to resist co-option (2006, 225; for a comparable list of public peace processes, see Rouhana 2000, 312-318 and Dajani and Baskin 2006, 91). For our purposes, we can focus on a more basic distinction that underlies these different "pathways."

There are two kinds of relationship between the forum and the public at large. The forum could be understood as inward oriented. In this understanding, the purpose of this forum is the change that occurs among the participants themselves, either in reaching outcome or the changes in dispositions. The main burden of legitimacy is expected to fall on the internal working of the forum. The public at large is expected to endorse the outcome of the forum in virtue of the process itself. Alternatively, the forum can be understood as providing a public display of reasons. In this understanding, the role of the forum is to play out different possible reasons for the public at large to see. The ultimate burden of decision is on the public at large and the main challenge is to ensure that the public gaze focuses on what takes place in the forum. While in the former understanding, the members of the forum are accountable for the decision that they make, in the latter understanding they are accountable in the sense of providing an account of the possible reasons (Brown 2006, 211-212).

These understandings are not mutually exclusive. The Citizens' Assemblies on Electoral Reforms that took place in BC and Ontario were expected to provide both a decision and a public display of reasons. Citizens were invited to engage actively with the deliberations of the assembly by observing the meetings of the assembly, interacting with its members in public meetings, reading its educational material and its reports. However, it was argued that citizens who were not willing or unable to inform themselves have a reason to vote for the proposal of

the assembly to the extent that they trust the deliberative process (Ferejohn 2008). In fact, the failure of the assemblies to get sufficient voters' support for their proposals is not a significant concern if they are understood as a public display of reasons: their value is that they allowed voters who want to make an informed choice to familiarize themselves with the relevant considerations in favor of or against each option.

The intended "macro-political uptake" of the forum is important for the first aspect of the design: whether the deliberations of the forum are to be public or private. The advantage of a forum that takes place in secret, or at least away from the media, is that it potentially allows for higher quality discussion. The danger of open and public discussion is of what Simone Chambers (2005, 260) calls "plebiscitory reason: [s]peakers ... appeal to what they think are common or public values but with a twist. Under the 'glare' of publicity these arguments may become shallow, poorly reasoned, pandering, or appeal to the worst that we have in common." However, as Chambers observes, the lack of publicity creates two opposing challenges. First, it opens the door to the possibility of manipulation and to the promotion of private interests. Secrecy increases the capacity of organizers, moderators, and participants from powerful groups to manipulate the agenda and the decision-making process. Second, the seclusion of the forum can be self-defeating because it creates a deep gap between the deliberative forum and the non-deliberative public at large. Since the public did not have a chance to go through the process of deliberation in the forum, the conclusions of the forum would be unpalatable and would be endorsed or rejected not for the right reasons. The problem is that the more the participants change their views in the process of deliberation, the less likely it is that ordinary citizens will see them as their representatives. In peace studies, this same problem is called the problem of

“re-entry:” “what happens to those who participate when they re-enter their society” (Gawerc 2006, 449). Chambers argues that the answer to the threat of plebiscitory speech is “to look at ways of minimizing the plebiscitory effect in public,” and “not a *carte blanche* to go behind closed doors” (2005, 263).

Public peace initiatives focus almost exclusively on the inward oriented approach to the forum. They do not see the forum as a public display of reasoning but as a consensus-forming mechanism. The general recommendation in the scholarship is that the meetings will take place away from public gaze, preferably in secrecy (Chigas 2005, 132). For example, Harold Saunders underscores the need to generate a “safe space,” one that would allow the participants to have the freedom to change their views (Saunders 1999, 14, 61, 105). Obviously, in cases where meeting with the enemy can put participants in danger, secrecy is unavoidable. But peace studies scholars appear to argue that seclusion is a virtue in itself since it provides the setting for much-needed changes of mind.

The focus of peace studies scholarship on inward oriented initiatives led the field to some extensive exploration of the problem of how to “transfer” the outcome of the initiatives (Gawerc 2006, 449). However, the main focus of peace studies is in transferring the outcome along the channel that goes from the forum to the decision-makers. The expectation and hope is that the innovation and transformation that takes place within the “safety” of the forum will expand decision-makers’ horizons of what is possible (Saunders 1999, 136; for a similar argument, see O’Flynn 2007, 743-746).

Some initiatives tackle the challenge of transfer by recruiting lower-key players in the hope that they will implement the change of minds in the policy circles where they work (Davies

and Kaufman 2002, 6). Herbert Kelman (1995, 21) argues that the problem-solving workshops between Israelis and Palestinians that he organized over the years developed “*cadres* prepared to carry out productive negotiations.” He describes how these cadres, who were “pre-influential” at the time of the workshops, “moved into positions of leadership and influence.” Nevertheless, this sleeper-cells solution to the problem of transfer is a dangerous move from the point of view of legitimacy.<sup>4</sup> To the extent that Kelman’s description is accurate, it strengthens the view of those in the Israeli right who see the Oslo Accord as a hostile take-over by this cadre.

What is neglected in Kelman’s answer to the “transfer” problem is a discussion about the transfer in the channel that goes from the forum to the public at large – even if the cadre reached internally legitimate agreement, and even if it is successful in implementing it, how can the public go through the change of minds that took place in the forum? Here, I believe there is a need to think of public peace processes that follow a “non-sequential model” in which there are built in sites for quality deliberations but at the same time allow for interactive exchange of reasons with the public at large (Chambers 2005, 263).

### **The Topic**

Democratic theorists distinguish “cold” topics from “hot” ones, where participants feel passionate about the topics and are emotionally invested in the decision (Fung 2003, 345; Dryzek 2005, 229). As Dryzek (2005, 229) rightly observes, “[d]eliberation tied to sovereign authority in divided societies is about as ‘hot’ a setting as one can imagine.” Since, as he goes on, “most conceptions of deliberative democracy require reflection and the possibility that minds can be changed in the forum itself,” this is unlikely to happen in any deliberative forum. Dryzek argues

that in divided societies the locus of dialogue should be in the public sphere at large, where changes of opinions are gradual and slow, and not in the intense exchange of reasons that takes place in a mini-public.

Dryzek's conclusions should be qualified. To begin with, as we know from our experience in the classroom, hot topics make for more dynamic, engaged, and possibly meaningful discussion (Fung 2003, 345). More importantly, failure to reach agreement is not necessarily a failure of legitimacy. Deliberative forums are not intended as a panacea, a sure way to reach legitimate conclusions. A failed well-designed "hot" forum can be instructive for the public sphere at large precisely because of the quality deliberations that took place in it. Indeed, public peace processes often see themselves as one catalyst in the slow process of changing public view.

A second question regarding the topic is to what extent organizers should leave the topic itself open. Should participants be provided with a narrow question that they can hope to tackle or should they be left free to frame their own discussion? Each alternative has its own bearing on legitimacy. The dilemma, as James Bohman (1998, 404) observed, is that "[d]eliberative democracy could become a very robust method for deciding very little. Or, it could also easily become a very weak procedure for deciding too much." If the setting remains vague and open, the discussion can wander around without getting to any concrete outcome. Furthermore, concrete questions allow organizers and participants to try and agree on some basic historical and empirical "facts of the matter" and to sort out the relevant from the irrelevant. Information provided by experts can have more bearing on the discussion when the question is narrow. If the topic itself is ever changing, important factual claims can get lost in the discussion.

On the other hand, the setting of the question and the setting of boundaries on the content of the discussion are in fact an imposition by powers from outside the discussion. The legitimacy of pre-deliberative decisions is not subject to the procedural standards of legitimacy. The more one limits the boundaries of the discussion, the more the deliberations themselves become empty. Furthermore, one of the central arguments for the need for citizens and not experts to deliberate is that experts can provide answers to a given question but they cannot use their expertise to tell us which questions are the right ones. The public, and the public sphere, are the sites where citizens can transcend instrumental reasons and engage the substantive topics that they face.

### **The Participants**

From the perspective of procedural legitimacy, no other obstacle is more difficult than the choice of participants. The procedural conception of legitimacy requires an agreement to be the product of deliberations among all those who are affected. The forums that this paper discusses – mini-publics and public peace processes – try to engage a microcosm of all those who are affected. We have seen that there are different ways to conceptualize the notion of “microcosm,” namely to understand the way the forum stand in for the public at large. Nevertheless, regardless of the understanding of representation, the ability of the microcosm to stand in for the public at large depends on the ability to recruit the right participants. There are numerous challenges here. Not least in the case of peace processes is the possibility of physical or social harm to the participants. Another challenge that is more significant in public peace process initiatives is the relative ease of recruiting those who are already committed to the cause of peace and thus ending

up "preaching to the choir" (Abu-Nimer 2001, 250). Almost exclusively, public peace processes rely on recruiting partisans, people who already have some professional or personal investment in the conflict (Kaufman 2002, 188-190). Forums that bring in laypersons commonly understand themselves as peace education and are targeted to students.

From the perspective of the internal legitimacy of the forum, choosing participants who present partisan views is an obstacle for legitimacy. As Hendriks et al. (2007, 362) claim, "[t]heir zeal sits uncomfortably with the deliberative ideal that collective political judgment should be a matter of public reasoning." Thus, a forum that includes partisans is more likely to replicate the vicious dynamics that take place in the political sphere at large rather than generate the virtuous dynamics of sincere deliberation. If partisans are locked in their own familiar positions, both the internal effectiveness and the internal legitimacy can be damaged. On the other hand, there are reasons for why partisans could bolster the dynamics of the deliberations of the forum and thus bolster their claim for legitimacy. Partisans are more invested in the issue and they are more willing to engage (Fung 2003, 345). They discuss issues that they care about and therefore any change of minds, if it occurs, will be more authentic and more significant. In a sense, their passion can be more representative of the depth of the issues at stake than non-partisans. One challenge to forums that rely on partisans is that some groups might choose not to cooperate with the project thus making any outcome of the microcosm less legitimate vis-à-vis the public at large. On the other hand, the forum itself is more likely to have a macro-political impact if participants are more publicly visible to begin with and when they have the skills that are needed to make the forum itself more visible.

The design and the dynamics of forums that rely on non-partisans are different from those that involve partisans. More of the burden of legitimacy falls on the moderators, the education program, and the experts who provide the background information for the participants. When participants do not have solid independent knowledge, there is a higher risk that any forum will be a disguise for an indoctrination camp. Designs that are closed to outside information, short in time, and allow interaction with only in-house experts are most susceptible to manipulation by the organizers. Designs that allow outsiders to monitor the process and allow participants to interact with their communities and with alternative sources of information are far less vulnerable to takeovers. On the other hand, the more the process is open and under the public's purview, the more the participants themselves become vulnerable to outside unwanted influences (those that pursue means other than persuasion) by their communities or groups within their communities.

Random selection of participants has two functions in establishing legitimacy. First, random selection is the best way to ensure statistical representation – that the range of positions that exist in the public would be reflected in the forum (Fishkin 1995). In this understanding, the claim that a forum is a microcosm of the public at large is based on the statistical representation of participants.

The second – and I believe stronger – argument for random selection is political: it is a way to break powerful monopolies over the representation of the interests of each of the communities. In some conflict situations, extremist groups have advantageous position in their ability to shape public opinion. Extremist views typically receive disproportional media coverage. Furthermore, in some cases extremist positions appeal to pre-reflective positions of

the public. War, or even the threat of it, forces the public to focus on the short-term and to emphasize security over other concerns. When the process of deliberation unfolds, participants can put the put the view of extremists in perspective.

### **Conclusions**

As I emphasized throughout the discussion, mini-publics and public peace processes should not be seen as a way to replace other channels of making decisions but as a way to supplement them. Nevertheless, wide public participation is an essential component of legitimacy, and the lack of it is the main source of the democratic deficit that exists in advanced democracies.

The argument that I present here builds upon and shares the intuitions of public peace process scholars who believe that a similar case can be made for many of the peace processes of the recent decades. Elites and diplomats can reach agreements, but these agreements are not necessarily in the interest of their citizens. In some cases, elites might be more inclined to reach peace and are more effective in doing it. But, by the same token, in other circumstances elites might be more inclined to pursue war and equally effective in pursuing it. I believe that public peace processes are a viable tool of peace making precisely because it allows participants to explore grounds for peace that are mutually acceptable to the citizens.

So far, however, we have assumed that the main interest of those who organize and design the public peace process is to achieve *genuine* democratic legitimacy. When politicians and organized interests engage in deliberative processes, what they often seek is the *appearance* of legitimacy and a de-facto control of the outcome (Hendriks 2006; Dryzek et al. 2009; Kadlec

2008). In most likelihood, any large-scale visible public peace process would be initiated under the auspices of a state or with heavy involvement of major political organizations in the process. A state can choose to organize a public peace process as a way to buy more time or to use the decisions made by a participatory forum as a way to constrain itself from making concessions. If states would be pressured to organize public forums by a third party, they are most likely to insist on strict conditions on the selection of participants, the information that would be presented, the character of the deliberative process, the control over the media coverage of the process, and so forth. In all of these cases, the dialogue between democratic theory and peace studies may be useful as a tool for social criticism: to understand how powerful players can abuse claims for democratic legitimacy to derail rather than promote the cause of peace.

Generally speaking, current models of public peace process are semi-secretive, inward oriented, and (at least some) seek to influence decision-makers directly. Such models work best when the stakes of the process are low; when key figures from both sides are brought together by peace activists to try to examine possibilities for mutual understandings. However, the more public peace processes become central and visible players in peace making, the more current models become dangerous. Closed, secret meetings where broad representation is not guaranteed are easier to manipulate so that they reach some pre-determined outcomes under the guise of democratic legitimacy. Peace studies scholars should examine models of public peace process that are more visible and in which legitimacy emerges not only from the inner working of the small group but mainly from its interaction with the public at large.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The instances of the dialogue between the two fields are yet spotted and preliminary. Saunders (1999: chapter three) refers to the deliberative aspect of democracy as “the missing thread in democratic thought” (55) and as a model for the public peace process. A workshop that took place at MIT in the summer of 2005 explored the relationship between on deliberative democracy and dispute resolution (but not in the context of peace studies), <http://ocw.mit.edu/OcwWeb/Urban-Studies-and-Planning/11-969Summer-2005/CourseHome/>. Vivienne Jabri (1996; 2007) and Daniel Wehrenfenning (2008) draw on Habermas for exploring the communicative dimensions of peace process. See also, O’Flynn, 2007; Richmond, 2008; and Caspary, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> To maintain terminological consistency, I will use the term ‘public peace process’ for forums that deal with peace process, the term ‘mini-publics’ for forums that address other policy issues, and the term ‘forum’ when I refer to both kinds of forums.

<sup>3</sup> The deliberative poll that was conducted by Stanford’s Center for Deliberative Democracy in Northern Ireland is an example of such initiative. However, the topic for the discussion was aspects of the education system, which is related only indirectly to the core issues discussed in peace negotiations. See Fishkin et al., 2009.

<sup>4</sup> I do not suggest that Kelman advocates a “sleeper-cell” approach. In fact, he advocates recruiting “individuals who are politically influential but not directly involved in the foreign-policy decision-making process. The important consideration is that they be active and credible contributors to the political debate within their own communities and thus can play a role in changing the political environment” (Kelman, 2002: 179).

## **On the Cusp of Water War:**

### **A Diagnostic Account of the Volatile Geopolitics of the Middle East**

**Ahmed Abukhater**

#### **Abstract**

*This paper provides a diagnostic account of the nature and severity of the trans-boundary water resources conflict in the Middle East and how it is intertwined with issues of high politics. The concepts and analytical framework provided in this paper represent universal principles that, while applying to the Middle East water conflict, are also reflective of and applicable to many other disputes over natural resources around the world. This aspect about the research is particularly of great interest to the quest and scope of many other researches, considering the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is regarded as the sine qua non from which many troubling aspects emanate in different part of the Middle East and beyond. By outlining the problem and the root causes and nature of the water crisis in arid regions, this paper seeks to provide evidence of lack of equitable water sharing in the status quo water allocation and ample justification for the need to apply equitable principles to promote cooperation and peace. More precisely, this research will reflect on the way in which conflicting representations of hydrological resources have created tension, conflict, and injustice in general, with particular emphasis on the Middle East water conflict issues of the occupied territories, namely the Palestinian territories and the Golan Heights.*

*“Till taught by pain, men know not waters’ worth” - Byron*

### **Introduction**

Water scarcity is a real problem in the Middle East. In such a semi-arid region, the scarcity of water affects the Middle Eastern political arena as much as it affects the lives of its inhabitants. The relationship between the hydrological resource use and geopolitical representations has always been intimately linked whenever these resources are potentially available from either side of a political border. Working in unison together, water use and geopolitical representations provide us with diagnostic tools that help trace the roots of one of the most pervasive conflicts involving water – the Arab-Israeli dispute, namely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the issue of the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria.

Reflecting the growing competition for water in terms of quality and quantity, the issue of water shortage (as a key driving force of international disputes) has become the focus of many conflicts around the world in general, and more specifically in the context of arid regions. The concept of “water wars,” as suggested by Starr (1991), has increasingly become an important element of the political rhetoric, and can best be supported in light of the Israeli-Palestinian case, where disproportional allocation of water has emerged as an obstacle to peace and prosperity. Under this argument, lack of water and the need to secure adequate water supply can become a matter of national security and prioritized political and military objectives (Mirumachi 2007). In 1967 and prior to the Six-Day War between Israel and other Arab countries, the Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol stated that “water is a question of survival for Israel,” and that “Israel will use all means necessary to secure that the water continues to flow” (Biliouri 1997). Commenting on the same event of the 1967 Six-Day War, the Crown Prince of Jordan stated that the war of 1967 “was brought on very

largely over water related matters” and predicted that without an international water agreement in the Middle East by 2000 “countries in the region will be forced into conflict” (Irani 1991). These statements and others are frequently referenced in support of the “water wars” rhetoric. Because of dramatic population growth and the staggering technological advancement of the 20th century that made great volumes of water extraction possible (Grover 2007), many scholars have gone even further to suggest that the next war will be fought over water. Gleik (1993) for example explains that water in these arid contexts can become an instrument for war and can easily escalate to a contentious issue. To that end, Dr. Ismail Serageldin, former vice president of the World Bank remarked in 1995 that “the wars of the next century will be about water” (New York Times, August 10, 1995). In such an arid region, water is an extremely confined and precious natural resource that, according to this paradigm, evidently triggered wars in the past and could possibly be the reason for peace in the future. In support of this argument that water, if not utilized as a catalyst for peace and stability, can potentially be a source of conflict and war, the former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan states that “fierce competition for fresh water may well become a source of conflict and wars in the future.” He later added, “But the water problems of our world need not be only a cause of tension; they can also be a catalyst for cooperation. If we work together, a secure and sustainable water future can be ours” (Annan 2001).

Contrary to the “water war” paradigm that views water as the source of past conflicts and future wars, this paper provides an alternative approach to conflict resolution that, by promoting a vision of peace through equitable allocation of disputed natural resources, views water as a

venue for future cooperation. In keeping with the argument that inequitable water allocation schemes undermine chances for peace, water is not the source of conflict but rather an obstacle to peace. With the same token, if water is in fact an obstacle to peace, resolving the water issue means removing a major obstacle to attaining peace. As such, water can be a catalyst for peace and the reason for the disputing nations to come together to the negotiation table. According to Dr. Haddadin (2002), former president of the Jordan Valley Authority who served as the senior water negotiator on behalf of the Jordanian side in the Israel-Jordan peace talks, “water, after all, is used to extinguish fires, not to ignite them.”

The water crisis of the Middle East has many geopolitical dimensions that tend to contribute to this dispute. On the whole, the water crisis is the result of the limited water resources, the exponential population growth and the consequent rise in water demand, coupled with the regional competition on trans-boundary water resources that is fueled by the overall conflict. In essence, four major dimensions are identified as the main characteristics of the volatile geopolitics of the Middle East. These dimensions include the political and hydro-diplomatic dimension, the hydro-hegemonic dimension, the environmental dimension, and the psychological environment and ideological dimension. While the hydro-hegemonic dimension is characterized by a power structure imbalance and Israel’s national security concerns, the environmental dimension pertains to the unequal water access and infrastructure mishaps, inequitable and significantly variable trends of water consumption, and the associated adverse environmental consequences; the psychological environment and ideological dimension includes the perception of the “other,” different interpretations of the notion of water use “efficiency,” perception of the land and the environment, and the dramatic variations of agricultural and landscape patterns; and the political and hydro-diplomatic dimension reflects the unstable

political atmosphere, discusses the inadequacy of the international law, the failure of previous water-related diplomatic attempts, and significant political implications. This paper presents a discussion of how these factors relate to each other and influence the overall hydrological stability creating tension, injustice, and severe conflict and in turn resulting in a state of “volatile geopolitics.”

### **The Political and Hydro-diplomatic Dimension**

#### **Origins of the Conflict**

The Arab-Israeli conflict dates back to the late nineteenth century and water (among other pressing issues) has always been considered key in its perpetuation. The Jewish immigration to Palestine, land ownership, and the later establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, triggered armed conflicts that lasted for decades (Shamir and Haddadin 2003). (This armed conflict was interrupted by the 1979 Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt and later the 1994 Peace Treaty between Israel and Jordan, both of which were bilateral agreements; Haddadin 2006.) With the increasingly rising idea of establishing a sovereign state in Palestine for Jewish settlers, Great Britain turned over the fate of Palestine to the United Nations, who in 1947, decided to partition Palestine into provisional states; one Jewish and one Arab (McKinney 2008). The UN Partition Plan allocated 44% of the land to the Arab state and 56% of the land to the Jewish state although the Palestinian Arabs constituted more than two thirds of the population and owned 93% of the land (Söderblom 2003). Because of its inequitable allocation, the Plan was rejected by the Arab states and triggered the 1948 Arab-Israeli War (Söderblom), which resulted in the establishment of Israel and the creation of the Rhodes Armistice Demarcation Line marking Israel’s borders, including historical Palestine, except for the West Bank and Gaza

Strip which were subsumed by Jordan and Egypt respectively (McKinney 2008). The June War of 1967, known as The Six Day War, was a decisive event that altered the nature of the conflict as much it altered the positioning of the co-riparians and the regional water allocation and utilization. For the Arab countries, the outcome of this war was deemed as a defeat, as they lost part of their territories and once again Israel reinforced its military superiority. The impact of this war was not confined to changing the international border; rather, it also changed the demographic characteristics and impacted the co-riparians' access to water as well as their relationships (Louka 2006; Elmusa 1995; Zawahri 2009).

In the wake of this war, the Armistice Line changed as Israel extended its boundaries and took over the Palestinian Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the Syrian Golan Heights, and the Egyptian Sinai desert (Lowi 1995; and McKinney 2008). As the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were transferred from Jordanian and Egyptian dominion respectively to Israel, thousands of Palestinian refugees were once again displaced into the neighboring Arab states (Lowi). Except for the Sinai, which was returned to Egypt through the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian Peace Agreement, the resultant international borders created in the wake of the 1967 War are largely maintained until today (McKinney 2008). This new border and territorial configuration also impacted access to water. Now the Upper Jordan River flows, almost entirely, in Israeli territory (Lowi). By controlling the Banyas River, Lake Tiberias, the Lower Jordan River, and expanding its access to the Yarmouk River, Israel was able to prevent the neighboring Arab countries from accessing the Upper Jordan River, block the River at its exit from Lake Tiberias, and exclusively use the latter for its own storage needs (Shamir and Haddadin 2003; and Zawahri, 2009). By doing so, the West Bank Palestinians and Lebanese were prevented from accessing River basin altogether (Elmusa 1995). With its occupation of the West Bank, Israel gained control over the Palestinian

groundwater resources, namely the Mountain Aquifer, which is proven significant to its water security (Louka 2006).

### **Previous Water-related Diplomatic Attempts**

Throughout history, several water schemes were prepared to utilize the regional water resources, including the Jordan River, starting as early as 1899 with the Zionist Organization and later under the Mandate (Naff and Watson 1984). In the post-1949 period, Israel and the neighboring Arab countries were unilaterally formulating and implanting national water development proposals to improve their economies and address the issue of water needs for immigration and Palestinian refugees in adjacent Arab countries after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 (Lowi 1995; and Shamir and Haddadin 2003). During these years of no direct communication, both Arabs and Israelis unilaterally proposed many conflicting plans to govern and manage the utilization of the shared water resources. The first multilateral cooperative venture was lead by the United States in 1953-55, known as the Shuttle Diplomacy which was conducted by the U.S special envoy to the Middle East, Ambassador Eric Johnston, which proposed the Unified (Johnston) Plan (Lowi; Shamir and Haddadin). Although the Plan was never ratified, it was accepted by all Arab states (Elmusa 1995), and became a customary law in the region as both sides have generally adhered to its technical details and water allocations as it constituted the basis for the Jordan River Valley development thereafter (Louka 2006; Shamir and Haddadin; Wolf and Newton 2008).

Despite the conscientious attempts to negotiate and cement an enduring settlement, this conflict has been particularly violent since 1967. As tension continued to mount, intermittent diplomatic attempts, which continued through the 1970s and 1980s, failed to reach a plausible resolution creating a situation of talk-fight (Priscoli and Wolf 2009; Gurr et al. 2001). It was not

until the Madrid Peace Process on October 31, 1991, that the PLO and the Arab states entered into direct peace negotiations with Israel in Madrid aimed at achieving “a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement” on the basis of the “land for peace formula” outlined by the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1995). No progress was made except through the channels of various secret negotiations that were started in December 1992 leading to the Oslo Accords or “Gaza-Jericho First” and the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) (Klieman 2000). In September 1994, the PLO leadership in exile returned to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Tamimi 2005). In the same year, Jordan and Israel signed a unilateral agreement that governed the water allocation and sharing of the Jordan River, the Yarmouk River, and the Araba/Arava groundwater, which excluded key regional players such as the Palestinians and Syria (Haddadin 2002). In April 2003, the “Road Map,” a peace plan for a two-state solution, was devised by the Quartet (US, UN, Russian Federation and the EU) (Reinhart, 2006).

The failure of previous diplomatic attempts to land sustainable and robust peace agreements is related in large part to the fact that all of these diplomatic attempts variously suffered from a number of deficiencies outlined below. First and foremost, in the practice of many of these international agreements appears a flaw that seems to have led to only fragile and unsustainable agreements at best. This major flaw is related to the fact that all of these previous negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis regarding water allocation were based on a position-based approach (Rouyer 2000). They attempt to address only the question of entitlement to land and water resources instead of addressing actual water needs (Rouyer). This problem seems to have its roots in the classic process of distributive bargaining, where one party’s gain, while viewed as winning, is considered the loss of the other party (Postel and Wolf 2001). This is

coupled with the fact that the zone of possible agreements, or ZOPA, between the two parties did not even exist in the previous stages of diplomatic efforts and negotiation, which have been focused on *dividing* the resources of the region, namely land and water, rather than *sharing* them (Scheumann 1998). Furthermore, resolutions over water were not part of these attempts, as water, Jerusalem and the right of return were the main three issues that were deferred to the final round of negotiations (Wolf 1995a).

Another fundamental flaw is concerned with the challenges in establishing and presenting accurate data for water needs, let alone agreed upon reflective consumption figures (Alatout 2006). Conventional approaches proposed to address the water crisis of the Middle East have been problematic as they often tend to establish needs that are either exaggerated or underestimated. This is because the production of scientific data and environmental narratives regarding the use of water and its environmental consequences is influenced by power imbalances as well as the hegemonic structure (Alatout). The accuracy of water data was in question as both sides often present different figures regarding water availability and current and future demand. Another major problem from which previous water allocation plans suffer lies in the evident disconnect between reaching an agreement and its implementation. Almost all of the previous negotiations suffered from the lack of implementation. It was not until the 1990s that conflict progressed from agreements to partial implementation (Shmueli 1999). However, this classical negotiation process that was once thought to be revolutionary is now yielding another surprise. The dispute reverted back to a stage of “talk-fight” and the negotiation between the Palestinians and Israelis have come to a screeching halt (Gurr, et al., 2001).

### **Inadequacy of International Law**

It is often the case that both the Palestinians and Israelis ground their arguments in the negotiation over water allocation on principles of international law. These include the Hague Regulations of 1907, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, the Helsinki Rules of 1966, and the 1997 UN Convention on the Non-navigational Uses of Watercourses (Wolf 1999). While it introduces elements of water needs, the international law is more concerned with issues of sovereignty over water resources. The Helsinki Rules of 1966, which put emphasis on the right to “beneficial use” rather than the right to water *per se* (Housen-Couriel 1994), provided eleven factors pertinent to hydrographic and socio-political criteria (Wolf). Similarly, the 1997 UN Convention on the Non-navigational Uses of Watercourses provided general guidelines for equitable water allocation. The two main principles introduced in the 1997 UN Convention are “equitable and reasonable utilization” and “no significant harm” to other watercourse states (Diabes-Murad 2004, 5). It further gives “special regards” to the “requirement of vital human needs” (Fathallah 1996, 144). Although the concept and guidelines for “reasonable and equitable” sharing of common waterways were introduced in the Helsinki Rules of 1966, as well as the 1997 UN Convention, no clear definition of this concept was provided (Caponera 1985).

In handling the conventional long-standing dispute between upstream and downstream riparians and existing and future uses, the international law provides more protection for the downstream users and existing uses (Wolf 1999). This practice is often conducted with little regard for environmental concerns. Although it laid some ground rules to manage the sharing of the disputed water resources, international law seems ambiguous and in many cases contradictory (Wolf 1996). In addition, the law does not provide a clear enforcement mechanism to ensure the applicability of its rules (Rouyer 2000).

International law is an area of great controversy, however (Wolf 1996; Wolf 1995b; Rouyer 2000). Although binding on all nations, the applicability of many elements of these laws to the Arab-Israeli dispute is denied by Israel based on claims of irrelevance (Rouyer). In reality, Israel continues to deny its obligations as a “belligerent occupier” and further enforces its unilateral control of the regional water resources (Rouyer). As such, the current utilization of trans-boundary water resources of the Middle East does not comply with the international law, namely the “equitable and reasonable utilization” and the “no harm” principles (Diabes-Murad 2004).

### **Hydropolitical Implications**

Water is one of the most critical issues that shape the geopolitical reality of the Middle East. Water constitutes a fundamental ingredient in the making of both the Middle East geopolitics and bleak realities. In such a semi-arid region, water is a precious natural resource that has always been a point of contention, severe political conflict and vicious disagreement. Given its political importance, water remains an unresolved challenge facing the entire region. It is one of the major issues, along with Jerusalem and the right of return that are deferred to final separate rounds of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians (Zeitoun 2008). This is due to a number of reasons. First, the extensive reliance of Israel on water resources originated in the Palestinian territories, namely the West Bank rain-fed Mountain Aquifer which is the main source of domestic water use for Israel, makes Israel hesitant to enter negotiation with the Palestinians over water resources that it currently uses. This is because any meaningful resolution will inevitably result into a transfer of this groundwater ownership and use to the Palestinian population of the West Bank, leaving Israel short of at least one third of its annual

water supply (Lonergan and Brooks 1993), which is already insufficient in the face of its growing population and water demand.

Second, the fact that both the Israeli and Palestinian populations depend on the same source of water, along with the current unprecedented degree of regional water stress, created a situation known as zero-sum game, where one riparian state's gain is perceived as another's loss (Postel and Wolf 2001). Third, because water is scarce, the Palestinians, and possibly Israel, will continue to experience severe water shortages unless a new radical, feasible, and large-scale (proportional to the magnitude of the water crisis) alternative source of water, whether on the demand or supply side, is to be employed. This alternative could be, as in demand side management (DSM), conserving water, or as in supply side management (SSM), finding new sources of water to augment water supply by utilizing alternative technologically-driven sources, such as desalination of brackish groundwater or seawater, wastewater reclamation, and trans-boundary water imports (Wolf 1992). Fourth, another major deterrent to formulating a plausible negotiation process is the fact that the practice of modern negotiation and conflict resolution is relatively new to the Middle East and viewed as a western panacea (Irani 2000). Akin to approaches that exhibit a gap between public needs and public policy, previous attempts at negotiation demonstrate inability to connect with the local culture and indigenous practice to gain general public acceptability (Abukhater 2009). This indigenous perception of modern resolution approaches, as a western panacea, prevents advancing negotiations towards more plausible agreements and robust implementation (Abukhater).

However, the difficulty in initiating and reaching agreements over water is not confined to only the above mentioned reasons, although relevant and tangible. This is because the importance of securing uninterrupted water access for Israel in reality is not a matter of

economic considerations or agricultural production. Rather, Israel's water policy is solely driven by political, religious, and ideological realities and motives. It would be more costly for Israel to continue monopolizing the Palestinian water resources, which might trigger confrontation with the Palestinians, where Israel would have to expropriate a great deal of its resources (Rouyer 2000). Conversely, it would be a more economically feasible option for Israel to engage the Palestinians in a bilateral negotiation process over water and reach a plausible agreement. However, Israel, unwilling to immediately tackle the impending water issue until its security is assured, seems to opt for the most costly option (Rouyer).

### **The Environmental Dimension**

#### **Water Access, Infrastructure, and Variable Trends of Water Consumption**

Water access is characterized by legal and technological imbalances. The problem partially lies with the exclusive Israeli control of over 85% of all available water resources in the region which leaves other riparian countries with less *per capita* water availability than that of Israel (Zeitoun 2005). Israel, upstream riparian, diverts 75% of the Jordan River's water before it reaches the Palestinian West Bank (PASSIA 2002). While Israel, Syria, and Jordan access the Jordan River, Palestinians are the only riparian with no access to the water of the river (Elmusa 1995). Although the Johnston Plan of 1959 clearly constitutes their share of the Jordan River water, approximately 200 MCM per year (Rouyer 2000), Palestinians are denied all access to the river to the east, in addition to most of the productive zones in the Western Aquifer Basin (Zeitoun 2005).

Technologically, Israel is far more superior to the other co-riparians. The use of more sophisticated technology in water installations makes it easy for the Israelis to dig deeper wells,

which increases the Israeli excavation capacity. This practice often causes the old and shallow Palestinian wells to dry up, which drastically affects the amounts and quality of water that the Palestinian communities can extract (Nasser 2003). This technological prism connotes unequal access to the same quality and quantity of water that Israelis and Palestinians extract (Zeitoun 2005).

Due in part to the above-mentioned challenges concerning the Palestinian water access and technological and infrastructure limitation, Palestinians do not receive anywhere near the amount of water they need. The *per capita* Israeli consumption of water is more than five times the *per capita* Palestinian use (Zeitoun 2005). Because of these dramatic differences, attributed in part to the lack of Palestinian access to water along with the intermittent water supply of that the Palestinian communities endure, water distribution between the Palestinians and Israelis reflects a situation of severe inequity.

### **Environmental Consequences**

In addition to the consumptive and exploitive water use imposed by the “tragedy of the commons” situation where each state competes to divert the greatest amount of water and prevent others from doing the same, this situation of inequity has a number of substantial environmental ramifications, including, but not limited to, the deterioration of the quantity and quality of water for the Palestinian communities, the salinity of the Jordan River and the declining trend of the Dead Sea water levels (Haddadin 2002; Rouyer 2000). More than 80 % of the Gaza Strip’s potential drinking water is not compatible with the standards of the World Health Organization (WHO) for potable water use due to this high level of contamination (Palestinian National Information Center 1999). The extensive consumption and extraction of the Jordan River water, which is the main source of the Dead Sea water supply, has caused the

disappearance of the Dead Sea at a staggering rate (Greenberg 2006). The decreased inflow of the River increased its salinity and resulted in the demise of the Dead Sea, causing its water level to drop about one meter per year (the equivalent of 3 feet) (IRIN 2006). It is expected that within a few decades the Dead Sea will completely vanish and live up to its own name.

### **Hydro-hegemonic Dimension**

#### **Power Structure Imbalance**

The shortage of adequate supplies of fresh water has emerged as one of the most severe and pernicious conundrums in the Middle East. In many cases, decisions regarding water allocation have become increasingly controversial as competition over shared water resources has increased (Syme, et al. 1999). As conflicts metastasize, the interplay between water acquisition and power structure imbalance becomes more evident.

In the Middle East, access to water is strongly linked to the degree of hydro-hegemony that each co-riparian state has achieved. Realizing the significance of hydro-hegemony as a dominant underlying factor in determining who gets access to water helps to understand how Israel receives the highest amount of water in the region (Zeitoun 2005). The interplay between water acquisition and hydro-hegemony, on one hand, and political decisions of either cooperation or altercation, on the other, is seemingly pronounced in Middle Eastern water management and policies in a number of ways. First, the riparian states' inability to facilitate stable cooperation has become an undisputable fact. While violence in the region gives rise to potential armed conflicts, the more powerful states tend to maximize their share of water and undermine that of others. For example, in the case of the Jordan River, many states, including Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, claim the right to share access to the river water.

However, due to the political instability of the region, the only state that disproportionately benefits from accessing the Jordan River is Israel, given its economic and military advantages. Conversely, there is strong evidence that the Palestinians, given their weak hydro-hegemonic position, are in a less favorable position, compared to other riparians, as far as access to clean and reliable water resources is concerned. As such, these results are reflective of the dynamics of regional power imbalance.

Second, the most powerful riparians are usually reluctant to enter into any cooperative agreements to regulate their use of transboundary water resources. This is because cooperation is perceived by powerful riparians as compromising their most favorable position (Lowi 1995). If cooperation is desired by powerful riparians, it is usually coercive, unsustainable, and sought to solidify the *status quo* (Abukhater 2009). With the same token, given the weak Palestinian political and military stance, most of the previous agreements achieved between the Palestinians and Israel fall into this category of coerced negotiation. Another prominent example emerges from the issue of the Golan Heights, which is disputed between Syria and Israel. Overlooking northern Israel and southern Syria, the Golan Heights is of strategic importance to Israel. Because of the Golan Heights' strategic importance, Israel, being the more powerful of the two states, denies Syria's access to its natural resources (Atwan 1999). In the wake of The Six Day War of 1967, Israel gained *de-facto* control of the Golan Heights to secure access to Lake Tiberias (also known as Lake Kinneret or Sea of Galilee) which provides over 30% of Israel's water supply (Golan 2007). During the 1973 Middle East War, Syria tried to reclaim the Golan Heights, but was unsuccessful because of Israel's strong hydro-hegemonic position. Syria was coerced into signing an armistice in 1974, based on which a UN observer force has been deployed to maintain this ceasefire (BBC News 2007). Taking advantage of its most powerful

hydro-hegemonic position, Israel unilaterally annexed the Golan Heights in 1981, applying its law and administration to, and intensifying its settlements in, the territory, which was not recognized by the international community (Encyclopedia of the Orient 2007).

Third, unequal access to water resources generates a state of resentment and lays the grounds for international disputes among different nations (Abukhater 2009). Resentment against the most powerful state because of its advantageous position as far as access to water is concerned generates more hostility that, reflecting the “water war” paradigm, can possibly build up to an all out war. As hostility grows and festers, various unrealistic and overestimated demand figures on water emerge, defying the notion of sustainable peace. Not only have levels of hydro-hostility grown more potent as time wears on, but the very nature of the discourse has as well (Klieman 2000). With severe resentment and hostility among competing riparian states, water (among other political factors) emerges as an essential venue in the geopolitical reality of the whole region that fuels the overall conflict. As the population of the region grows exponentially, the demand on water increases, while the region’s overall water reserve is fixed. This exacerbates the situation and evokes a state of sever hydro-hostility among the disputing nations. Thus, the compatibility of the hydro-hegemony and the distribution of water resources in shifting the regional balance and fueling the clash between the Arabs and the Israelis have become undeniably prominent (Zeitoun 2005; Lowi 1995).

### **Water and Israel’s National Security**

All nations require, and rationally vie for, their share of a continuous supply of food, water, fuel and other raw materials. The concept of ecological security is related to both national sovereignty and the need for a secured statehood access to these resources for economic development goals (Barney 2006). Securing this access means, and often necessitates, retaining

exclusive control of one's land and own natural resources (Westing 1988). The strongly interconnected nature of the relationship between national security and these factors implies, and creates, a complication that triggers conflict among different nations, all of which strive to rationally acquire water (Wolf 1992). This rationality in making decisions regarding water security constitutes a significant part of the problem.

By the same token, Israel's policy makers often link secure water access to Israel's own national security (Frisch 2000). In 1967 and prior to the Six-Day War between Israel and other Arab countries, the Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol stated that "water is a question of survival for Israel," and that "Israel will use all means necessary to secure that the water continues to flow" (Biliouri 1997). Moreover, Israel considers, and utilizes, water as a resource and effective weapon (Zawahri 2004) to reinforce its security, political stability, and strategic position, on one hand, and harness negotiations with other Arab states for its benefit, on the other (Lonergan and Brooks 1994). Because of its importance to Zionism, the topic of peace and security is given high priority and introduced in the first chapter of the Likud Party Platform. Drawn upon this belief system, Zionists assert that "the right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is an eternal right, not subject to dispute, and includes the right to security and peace" (Virtual Jewish Library 1996). Although they acknowledged and emphasized the need to enter into negotiated agreements with the Arabs to reach peace, they further qualified this peace with security as a first and foremost precondition stating that "security is the basis for durable peace in our region. Israel will make security a first condition in any peace agreement" (Virtual Jewish Library). Israel's foreign policy is also anchored around serving its national security concerns which are given particular emphasis in any diplomatic effort that Israel may undertake. To that end, the Likud Party Platform further holds that "it will recognize the facts created on the ground by the

various accords, and will act to reduce the dangers to the future and security of Israel resulting from these agreements” (Virtual Jewish Library).

Given Israel’s control of most of the Palestinian natural resources and the strategic locations of the Israeli settlements on the best catchment areas of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, about 70 percent of Israel’s consumption of groundwater, and more than 33 percent of its overall annual water budget, comes from the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Lonergan and Brooks 1993). This high dependency of Israel on Palestinian water resources is what motivated the former Israeli Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan to declare that relinquishing Israel’s control of the Palestinian water resources would be detrimental to its national security and would further “threaten the Jewish state” (Lonergan and Brooks).

The Israeli control of the Golan Heights, which represents a territorial and natural resources conflict, provides another example of how Israel’s national security concerns shapes its foreign policy. The value of the Golan Heights to Israel cannot be overstated and stems from the strategic importance of its location and natural resources. The strategic importance of the Golan Heights is due to a number of reasons. First, because of its central location between Israel and Syria and its significant elevation, the Golan Heights provides a natural buffer against any Syrian military invasion by land (BICOM 2007). Second, without its control of the Heights, northern Israel would be vulnerably located within the firing range of any artillery attack launched from the Golan Heights (Palestine Facts 2007). Third, because of its adjacent location east of Lake Tiberias, the Heights provide significant fresh water supply (about one third) and storage capacity for Israel (Golan 2007).

As such, the Golan Heights constitutes a stumbling block in the way of negotiation between Israel and Syria. In 2003, the Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, reflecting the overall

Syrian desire to secure access to the Golan Heights as part of any peace agreement, declared his country's intention to revive peace talks with Israel (BBC News 2007). During the 1999 talks, Syria demanded a full Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 border (Wihbey and Berman 2000). However, because of the fact that this Israeli withdrawal would give Syria control of the eastern half of the Jordan River headwaters and the eastern shore of Lake Tiberias, one of the main water resources and the main storage facility for Israel, Israel refuses this condition for negotiation. Israel's decision to relegate its sovereignty of the Golan Heights would undoubtedly shift the hydrological balance of power in the region in favor of Syria (Wihbey and Berman). To that end, because of the Israeli government's view of the Golan as an essential asset to Israel's security and water needs, retaining Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights is identified as a major prerequisite for any negotiation with Syria (Migdalovitz 2005). In addition, this negotiation may potentially yield a deal with Syria that compels Israel to dismantle its Jewish settlements in the region. A public opinion survey conducted in 2004 shows that the majority of Israelis oppose negotiations that involve returning the Golan Heights to Syria (BBC News). The intensive presence of the Israeli settlements in the Golan Heights, which is estimated to be 17,000 settlers (BBC News), and the dependence of the State of Israel on water originated in this territory is indicative of the Heights importance and suggests that Israel would continue to maintain control of the Golan Heights, which is deemed as a matter of national security.

Reflecting this land-water nexus imbedded in the Israeli ideological, political, and religious spheres, Haim Druckman, a well-known Israeli leader, asserts that "settlements are the essence of our existence and flesh of our flesh. We shall not accept the amputation of our living flesh" (Lustick 1994, 85). As such, Israel will be unwilling to negotiate any agreement with the Palestinians or Syrians that may lead to compromising its settlements in the Occupied Palestinian

Territories or the Golan Heights, which, given their hydro-political importance, appear to provide a safety net to Israel's national security. According to the 1996 Likud Party Platform, "Jewish settlement, security areas, water resources, state land and road intersections in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip shall remain under full Israeli control" (Virtual Jewish Library 1996). It also holds that "Israel will keep its vital water resources in Judea and Samaria. There shall be no infringement of Israel's use of its water resources." As a result, water seems as important as Israel's national security and almost a non-negotiable matter to the mainstream Israelis. The persistence on the deliberate biblical use of "Judea and Samaria" to refer to the West Bank has a strong connotation that the current Israeli government, the Likud Party, does not recognize the Palestinian ties to this land or its natural resources. These statements represent an extreme approach to water allocation that relies only on entitlement and exclusion of the "other." This same goal of maintaining exclusive Israeli control over the West Bank's and the Gaza Strip's potential pumping areas is also echoed by the Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University in Israel (Gvirtzman 1998).

This intimate link between water and national security and perception of water as vital to the establishment and survival of the state of Israel explains Israel's tendency to acquire more water. To that end, Moshe Sharett, Israel's first Foreign Minister, sums up the value of water to Israel by stating that "water for Israel is not a luxury; it is not a desirable and helpful addition to our natural resources. *Water to us is life itself*" (Rouyer 2000, 108). Understanding the correlation between water and security helps in understanding the rationale behind Israel's negotiation strategy. Israel realizes that improving its access to water resources requires maintaining control of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights of Syria while continuing to implement restriction on the Palestinian and Syrian water use (Lonergan and

Brooks 1993). Based on that, Israel seems hesitant to negotiate and reluctant to reach agreements over water resources. Agreements which suggest the need for Israel to give up some of its water supplies, even though they are acquired from other territories, or stop the expansion of illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights of Syria are often rejected by Israel. This point is clearly delineated in the Likud Party Platform that holds that “immigration will be increased, and settlement will be strengthened. The decision to freeze settlements will be rescinded” (Virtual Jewish Library 1996).

### **The Psychological Environment and Ideological Dimension**

Perception of land, natural resources (including water), and the “other” impacts riparian states’ behavioral tendency to either cooperate or altercate (Dolatyar and Gray, 2000; Lipchin 2003). This translates into policies, strategies and actions on the ground (Lowi 1995; Rouyer 2000). Understanding these physiological and ideological discourses has profound implications on understanding the nuances of the overall conflict and envisioning appropriate resolutions. Consequently, without this understanding of the perception on the local level and the different interpretations of the appropriate water management measures, policy makers will fail to produce holistic solutions that successfully manage trans-boundary water resources and will continue to employ inept policies.

### ***Perception of the “Other”***

Both parties’ view of the “other” is tailored to reflect general hostile views materializing into two forms of representation. First, communicative discourses, namely the representation of the “other” party induced by media and educational system, are incorporated as part of the statecraft and doctrine system. Many of the Arabs and Israelis remain captive to the idea portrayed by their media that the ongoing violence, which is represented in a cynical way, is

inherently a key characteristic of the Middle Eastern culture. Many of the dimensions and true implications of the conflict were censored from the media, and images and narrations are being manipulated one way or another and appear to be out of sink to serve the interest of the most powerful party. Israel, through its media, represents itself as an established sovereign state surrounded by a sea of hostile Arab nations whose only aim is to annihilate it. The complete exclusion of most of the Israeli policies and activities in the Palestinian territories by the media, namely house demolition in the Gaza Strip, tends to distort and deceive the public opinion and, in turn, shape their perception about the reality of the conflict. In contradistinction, the Palestinian media represents the conflict as a byproduct of occupation from which everything else, including the construction of the separation wall and land confiscation, emanates. They view resistance as a legitimate response against the structure of occupation and oppression of the shrinking and noncontiguous Palestinian land and population. These distorted communicative discourses are believed to target and manipulate public perception of the self and other's position as well.

Another example emerges from the educational system, where Palestinian and Israeli children alike have usually been taught in school two very different points of view about the conflict and the other party involved in it. Employing these prominent forms of communicative discourse, Israel often tends to deny the term "occupation" and further developed a pejorative attitude towards the Palestinians and their water needs (Lowi 1995; Rouyer 2000). Palestinians, on the other hand, usually view Israelis as invaders and occupiers, fought by heroic Palestinian resistance. In response to Israel's insensitivity to their needs, Palestinians tend to develop a feeling of resentment towards Israel, which prevents them from achieving mutual understanding and cooperation.

Second, it is often the case that Israel, through its political, intellectual, and popular discourses, makes the argument of needs, as opposed to the water rights and entitlement argument, as a basis to not only justify their exclusive control and consumption of water, but also to provide support for the many *ad hoc* water resolution proposals for the water shortages that the Palestinian communities exhibit (Alatout 2000, 2003; Shmueli 1999). Although the Palestinians do not reject the idea of allocating water based on actual needs *per se*, representing the Palestinian water crisis as a matter of absolute need in separation from rights is a misrepresentation of their real issue, which remains to be a major concern to them. Water rights are essential from the Palestinian perspective as an uncompromised part of their rights to their land, which has been denied. As such, the Palestinian perception provides a radically contradictory ideology to that of Israel regarding their water use, asserting that “Israel is using the Palestinian water” (Rouyer 2000). Palestinians blame the Israelis not only for attempting to destroy their identity by occupying their land and squandering its natural resources, but also for denying their inherent rights. Saeb Erekat, a high official in the PNA, reiterated the Palestinian belief that water is part of their occupied land by stating that “The Israelis are stealing our water and it must stop. They must be reminded that they are sitting on our chests; and not by an act God, but by an act of war” (Rouyer 2000, 186).

Regardless of their level of accuracy, truthfulness, or legitimacy, these perceptions of the “self” versus the “other” (or “us” versus “them”) invoke fear and ungrounded rationales for the annihilation of the “other.” Furthermore, because of these perceptions of one another as the adversary, which continue to widen the communication gap and create a state of distrust, it is unlikely that the Palestinians or Israelis will respond to any attempts for reconciliation as long as they are unilaterally proposed and initiated by the “other” adversarial party.

***Different Interpretations of the Notion of Water Use “Efficiency”***

This conflict connotes dramatically diverse and conflicting ideological descents, interpretations of key concepts, and representations. The concept of “efficient” use of water, for example, has been subject to different contradictory interpretations depending on who defines it and for what purpose. Palestinians and Israelis have different representations and interpretations of “efficiency.” “Efficiency” for Israel, on one hand, means “more crop per drop” regardless of how much water is used (Postel 1999). This interpretation of the concept of “efficiency” is linked to the notions of “productive efficiency” and “allocative efficiency” (Frisch 2000). “Productive efficiency” has its roots in the technological advancement of Israel’s water management that aims to obtain a greater yield from a unit of water, whereas “allocative efficiency” emerges from the market-driven water allocation and pricing system (Allan 1999). This understanding of “efficiency” as “productive efficiency” promotes the search for water management options to increase supply or decrease demand. Efficient agricultural practice includes drip irrigation, water reuse (which constitutes 70% of Israel’s municipal water supply), desalination, greenhouse technology, cloud seeding, and genetic bioengineering of crops for drought and salinity resistance (Selby 2005; Wolf 1996). “Allocative efficiency,” on the other hand, is linked to economic values and production (Allan). For Israel, water consumption, although may be considered excessive by many other standards, is viewed as efficient based on the aforementioned criteria of efficiency.

As such, Israel is often regarded as an example of sound water management. Evidently, Israel’s water management and efficient water use is handled well on the micro-level, namely at the consumer level (Lonergan and Brooks 1993). However, efficiency of water allocation is missing on the macro-level, posing a great challenge for Israel, which seems to be confronted

with an acute state of vulnerability to water shortages now and in the near future (Lonergan and Brooks). Except for rare occasions of conservation, typical Israeli policy in water resources management relies more on increasing supply than decreasing demand. One of the demand side management strategies that Israel tends to rely on to alleviate pressure on natural resources and maximize “efficiency” is restricting water consumption. Given that Israel’s *per capita* water consumption constitutes 25% of that of the US, claims are often made that Israel’s water allocation strategies are efficient (Lonergan and Brooks). However, figures of water consumption data indicate that Israel still consumes great volumes of water for irrigated agriculture. This is partially due to its national policy in handling water distribution and pricing system, which seems to paradoxically contradict with the very aim and definition of both “productive” and “allocative efficiency”. Namely, the problem here seems to be strongly linked to Israel’s policy in subsidizing water for agricultural irrigation (Lonergan and Brooks). This policy tends to increase water consumption in the long run and undermine both “productive” and “allocative efficiency” by counteracting conservation and market economy goals. Nevertheless, the key issue is not whether Israel is reducing its water use *per se*, but rather whether this reduction is sufficient enough to match the magnitude of the crisis facing the region (Naff 1990).

“Efficiency” for the Palestinians, on the other hand, means conserving water at all times. Water allotment follows the overall guiding principles of demand side management (DSM) and water conservation. Realizing the importance of water conservation, the Islamic teaching encourages people to conserve water even if a running river is present (Faruqi 2001). This is because Muslims believe that the earth is not a gift that was given to humans unconditionally, but rather a sacred trust that has been placed in human hands for safekeeping. This includes animals, plants, soil, water, and even the very air that we breathe, which are all borrowed

property that will ultimately be recalled and asked for one day. Water in particular is deemed as a blessed and sacrosanct resource sent from God to purify and cleanse the earth. As such, it is worth saving.

They believe that humans are equal not only in sharing rights, but also responsibilities. Rights include securing equal access of clean and reliable source of water to all people, rich or poor (Abukhater 2009). In addition to rights, there are a series of unspoken moral principles, yet well-known to everyone, that guide the overall perception of “efficiency” and water consumption. These include moral and ethical responsibilities in maintaining the integrity of water resources and preventing waste. For example, only 2–3 liters of water is the recommended amount for a sufficient bath by the Islamic and societal standards (Faruqui 2000). Moreover, people are encouraged to share water and prohibited from depriving others from water that they need. In this regard, one must not withhold water from travelers who need it (Faruqui). The process of water allocation is, therefore, solely and exclusively based on respecting and catering to all parties’ needs, including the right of the environment. This understanding of the concept of “efficiency” is closely linked to water conservation and calls for proportional distribution of not only benefits, but also costs, of water use among all parties.

### ***Perception of the Land and the Environment***

Zionists view Israel as a Jewish “safe haven” land. Their perception of the “promised land” shaped the way they value the land and its natural resources as being sacred and nonnegotiable. Water is a central component of the Zionist ideologies and ethos of nation building (Rouyer 2000). For Zionists, the “ideology of agriculture” is at the core of their belief that constitutes a predominant part of their identity (Lowi 1995). Large-scale agricultural development is deemed essential to accommodate the large numbers of Jewish immigration

(Rouyer). Because of its importance to agricultural production, water is viewed by Israelis as an essential element for the establishment and survival of this sovereign Jewish state, referred to as “*Eretz Yisrael*” (Lowi). As such, water, in addition to its economic value, is intimately linked to ideological and political prisms which are proven significant to Israel’s survival and security.

Water is regarded as an essential element not only to accommodate the growing population, but also for stabilizing their ties to the land. In their continuous quest to keep the land “green,” Israelis acquire as much water as necessary to farm and irrigate the land (Lowi 1995). This ideologically-driven push to keep the land green motivated Israel, in the 1950s, to establish its 130 kilometer-long National Water Carrier, referred to as the Kinneret-Negev Conduit, that transfers water from Lake Tiberias and delivers it to the rest of the country penetrating into the depth of the Negev desert to support agricultural development (Rouyer 2000; Shamir and Haddadin 2003). However, in light of the fact that agriculture is considered a minor sector in Israel’s economy, the reason for keeping the land green seems to have little to do with agricultural production and economic development. The establishment of this National Water Carrier would not have been possible without Israel’s advantageous hydro-strategic position with the annexation of the Golan Heights, which allows it to secure access to the principal headwaters of the Jordan River.

By continuing to avoid entering any peace negotiation with Syria over the Golan Heights, Israel continues to not only utilize those water resources, but also prevent Syria from diverting more water from the Yarmouk River and its main tributaries. By so doing, Israel ensures its exclusive control over Lake Tiberias. Because of its strategic location, bordering the northeastern part of Israel, the Golan Heights provides an example of how Israel’s perception of water

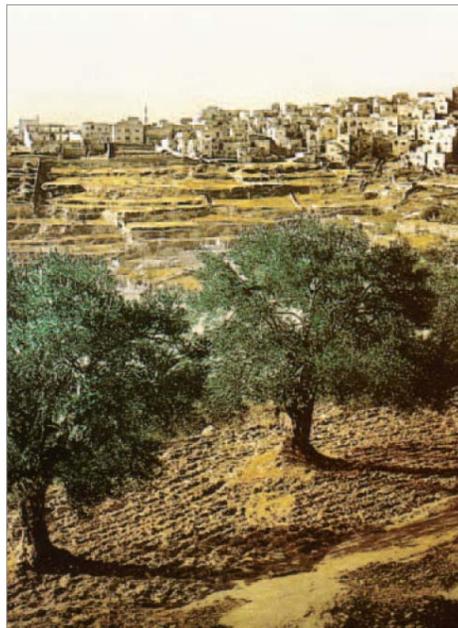
resources and land shapes the course of action taken in securing its access to its natural resources.

Moreover, many scholars tend to justify Israel's relatively high use of water based on the argument that the more astute the society is, the higher the amount of water it requires for its development. To them, the Palestinian water scarcity problem is believed to be solely related to infrastructure mishaps. Their representation of the problem holds that the Palestinian water crisis is linked to the lack of adequate infrastructure that would allow them to extract greatly increased volumes of water to meet their exponentially growing demand.

The Palestinian perception, on the other hand, is shaped by, and reflects their fear of dispossession and the 20th century Jewish immigration (Rouyer 2000). They feel that the origin of the conflict stems from the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent relocation of the Palestinians, known to them as the "Nakba" or catastrophe (The American Task Force on Palestine 2005). In addition, their view of their land as being occupied since 1967, namely the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, shaped the way Palestinians perceive and interact with Israel, the land, and its natural resources (The American Task Force on Palestine, 2005). For Arabs, who are living in a predominantly agricultural society, water is seen as an extension of their land and an integral part of their daily life (Lowi 1995). Their view of the land and water is not only confined to economic values, rather, Palestinians maintain that they have been living in harmony with their environment, which they envision to be part of their identity and sense of belonging and pride. They believe that no peace can be attainable unless the water crisis is adequately resolved first.

### ***Agricultural and Landscape Patterns***

Landscape defines and reflects not only states' national identity but also their use of water. Examining the agricultural and landscape patterns in both Israel and Palestine helps understand agricultural water consumption and its geopolitical and hydropolitical implications. For example, the landscape of the Gaza Strip reflects small and fragmented farm lands, a small town feel, and a gradual transformation of an indigenous landscape across the region. This indigenous agricultural and landscape pattern that dominates the Palestinian terrain (shown in figure 1) represents more conservational water use. Bearing in mind that this is a semi-arid region, such indigenous landscape still thrives without harming the environment through careful management of water use. On the contrary, the Israeli landscape indicates large-scale agricultural development and reflects an alien landscape to a semi-arid region, high use of technology, and extensive water use to sustain and keep land green. It is clear that this amount of large-scale agricultural land demands significant amounts of water considering the aridness of the landscape and environment.



*Figure (1): formal structure of the Palestinian landscape - olive trees and small towns*  
*Source: Susiman, D., et al.,2005*

## **Discussion and Closing Remarks**

We cannot live without water. Water is essential to human survival and development. The significance of water has led to the creation of many dramatic and complicated conflicts among different nations throughout human history, all of whom vie for their fair share of water for different uses. Moreover, the intricacy of man-made boundaries and the natural delineation of upstream and downstream riparians make the issue of international water disputes a formidable and volatile one (Mirumachi 2007).

The Middle East in general, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular, represents cases in which water availability trends (among other influential factors) provide evidence of catastrophic water shortages. This is because water remains an unresolved conundrum facing the whole region. In the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it is one of the major issues, along with Jerusalem and the right of return that have been deferred to the final round of negotiations. This, which poses a potential obstacle to a lasting peace agreement, could be viewed as good news, however, in the sense that water could propitiously be a source of cooperation and a catalyst for sustainable peace, rather than a *casus belli* (Fisher et al. 2001).

I contend, however, that the water problem in the Middle East and in other arid regions is not simply a matter of water shortage, but rather it is related to the lack of equitable water allocation. To that end, Mirumachi (2007) astutely points out that "...there is a growing consensus that water scarcity is not the major and sole factor that prompts war..." The persisting inequity in its allocation to and across national boundaries fosters hydro-hostility (and therefore excavation of water) instead of hydro-stability and multi-

national cooperation. It is often the case that water resources allocation is challenged by the question of equity, which is a major concern in water conflict management. To that end, Wolf (1999, 4) states, “application of an ‘equitable’ water-sharing agreement along the volatile waterways of the world is a prerequisite to hydropolitical stability which, finally, could help propel political forces away from conflict in favor of cooperation.”

As such, recognizing that equity is at the core of such conflicts, a plethora of conflict resolution methods are developed and considered to manage equitable sharing of trans-boundary water resources as well as peaceful relationships among riparian states. Notwithstanding, severe conflicts over water still exist, where a group of people receives more water than their actual need, while many others suffer because of that. As is the case in many arid regions of the world, inequitable water distribution is common and means that some groups will suffer from lack of water access, while other groups may enjoy disproportionate benefits from accessing more than enough water for their needs (Isaac 1999; Shmueli 1999). Developing and applying principles of equity on water allocation processes tends to foster optimal water management, which procures an atmosphere conducive for seeding cooperation and rooting out altercation. Equity in water resources allocation and the ongoing pursuit of sustainable peace in the Middle East are inextricably linked. The application of equitable water-sharing to disputed water resources in the Middle East is of paramount importance in enticing hydropolitical stability.

The applicability of the international law to the volatile watercourses of the Middle East is inconclusive and should take a more proactive turn. Enforcing the law is crucial in this regard. Without clear and puissant enforcement mechanisms, the situation could easily

escalate into chaos, where little hope for peace is left. It is imperative to point out that international law provided general rules to allow room for flexibility and adaptability for states to more easily find solutions for various cases. However, in the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict, this flexibility caused more disagreements among disputed parties over the meaning and interpretation of the law to justify and legitimize their positions. Aside from these laws, the focus should be on finding common ground for equitable distribution of water resources based on real needs of the population, rather than the desire of the riparian states for territorial and resources accusation. Regardless of water ownership and entitlement, satisfying the urgent need for domestic and potable water should have priority over agricultural application. In short, the international law is necessary, yet not sufficient by itself. Good will on both sides, the intervention of a third party, and an ongoing negotiation and cooperation process are warranted for the success of effective and environmentally sound water allocation practice.

The fact that the water issue remains unresolved impacts the political arena and exacerbates the conflict. This deferment of water negotiation means that not only will the water scarcity crisis remain unresolved, but also a situation of inequity and water deprivation for the Palestinians will continue to disrupt and hinder any chances for peace. According to scholarly consensus, it is surely to the detriment of the whole region's future peace and prosperity that Israel has expropriated away not only the Palestinians national and land rights, but also the right to have access to a clean, reliable, and equitable water supply. With limited channels of communication and meaningful diplomatic efforts among the two disputing parties, the situation is characterized by unidirectional relationships, where one state, looking out for self interest, causes environmental harm to the other, but manages to inflict no harm to itself. This situation

will entice the most powerful state, Israel, to continue pursuing large-scale plans unilaterally, to maximize its allocation of the shared water resources.

If all sides have enough water to meet their demands, peace may become, and could stay, within reach. This is because water, a simple substance, is very crucial to the survival of both nations. This is especially the case since the larger political and cultural clash (issues of high politics) is intertwined with the problem of water shortage (issues of low politics) (Wolf 1995b; Daoudy 2009). They have emerged as major contributors to the regional hydro-conflict, which makes the chances of success for any attempt to craft a meaningful and practical resolution almost insurmountable. Therefore, it is hard to skip the conclusion that without equitably resolving the water crisis of the Palestinians, Israel's own interests, security, and stability will continue to be at risk. Attaining and maintaining water equity and security is a prerequisite for the overall regional stability. Similarly, resolving the overall conflict enhances chances of resolving disputes over shared water resources. Any resolution attempt must recognize the link between the two factors and the importance of equitable water sharing to succeed.

Further, given the complexity of sharing the region's natural resources, fresh water scarcity generates and derives conflict among multiple parties sharing these resources. However, neglecting the overall regional and multilateral nature of the dispute, most treaties accomplished thus far are bilateral. Evidently, there are plenty of solutions proposed for the water scarcity problem along the volatile watercourses of the Middle East by various riparian states, none of which recognize the region and the different populations as a whole. For instance, under the threat of water shortages, a medley of plans have been proposed by different riparian countries, all of which lack a regional outlook. Confining their target population to their own people, many disputing states often tend to provide national solutions neglecting the regional scale of the crisis.

Clearly, the conundrum is not only pertinent to identifying what issues are disputed, but also related to the number of disputants involved and the way conflict resolution approaches have been sought. These unilateral attempts of bilateral approaches often tend to provide national solutions to a regional problem (Ganoulis 1996). The problem, therefore, is not related to a shortage of solutions or resolutions, but rather to the lack of a holistic approach that ties all of these unilateral resolutions into a unified regional approach applicable to all nations in the region. Without regional, comprehensive, and sustainable solutions that consider the future of the region as a whole, a disastrous water problem is almost guaranteed. Similarly, approaches that depend merely on technological solutions are not adequate to resolve the problem. Rather, approaches that treat quantity and quality issues together, recognize the importance of mutually shared rights and responsibilities, embody both technological and political solutions, and incorporate equity as part of the solution are considered to be more desirable and effective.

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**Letters of Intent, Costly Signals, and Local Peacemaking  
in the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict**

**Spencer B. Meredith, III**

**Abstract**

*A state of near-war lasted for almost two decades between Georgia and the separatist region of Abkhazia. Localized violence plagued neighboring communities while United Nations agencies, humanitarian groups, and religious organizations worked with both sides to resolve the conflict's underlying causes. Unfortunately, those diverse and long-standing efforts proved fruitless when the parties went to war in August 2008. This article examines the reasons for the conflict's enduring nature and presents an example of grassroots peacemaking completed by university students focused on the plight of Georgia's domestic refugees. An in-depth case study reveals the impact of their unilateral peacemaking efforts to present costly signals of benign intent.*

**Introduction**

Local peacemaking plays an important role in conflict resolution. It enables individuals and social groups to move beyond the trauma of violence towards tolerant cohabitation at a minimum, and full reconciliation in the best cases. The problem facing such efforts is the lack of real power to change the structural conditions fostering violence. Limited by scarce resources and few connections between hurting communities, local peacemaking often has little impact on decision makers responsible for officially

ending hostilities. There have been, however, noted exceptions that inspire continued efforts. South Africa's indigenous peace churches, Catholic and Protestant inter-community repentance services in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, truth commissions in Sierra Leone, and Palestinian-Israeli wilderness encounters in the Sinai all give hope that peace is possible, even if only on a small scale. The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict offers another potential example of local peacemaking despite the bleak prospects for large-scale conflict resolution.

Prior to the outbreak of open hostilities in 2008, a state of near-war lasted for almost two decades.<sup>1</sup> Local violence plagued neighboring communities while United Nations agencies, humanitarian groups, and religious organizations worked with both sides to resolve the conflict's underlying causes. Unfortunately, those diverse and long-standing efforts proved fruitless when the parties went to war in August 2008. The Summer War appears to have ended Georgia's hopes of recapturing Abkhazia, but it did so without ensuring the conditions necessary for lasting bilateral peace. Instead, official relations will likely remain frozen for the foreseeable future.

This article discusses the reasons for the conflict's enduring nature and the recent war that brought Russia directly into the violence. However, its most significant contribution is to present an example of grassroots peacemaking completed by university students focused on the plight of Georgia's internally displaced persons (IDPs – the official term for refugees living within their own country but not their original communities.) Their story deserves repeating because of the courage, empathy, and self-sacrifice they exhibited in the face of resistance by the Georgian government and longstanding suspicion by the Abkhaz leadership. An in-depth case study reveals the

impact of their unilateral peacemaking efforts to present costly signals of benign intent to the Abkhaz people and government. It also shows the structural limitations of such an approach when the controlling government has ulterior motives contrary to its declarations of peace.

### **Historical Context**

The Abkhaz have sought independence from Georgia for decades. Academics, policymakers, and the antagonists themselves offer numerous reasons for their separatist inclinations, including Soviet legacies of regional autonomy, forced Georgian immigration during the twentieth century, strong ethnic connections to groups in southern Russia, and *de facto* internal sovereignty within Abkhazia itself. Despite the range of explanations though, every Georgian government from the early Soviet period to today has claimed Abkhazia as part of its territory.

Even if it were possible for outside analysis to establish which side is correct, each group's deeply held beliefs would likely remain unchanged, especially so after the events of 2008. However, centuries of ethnic intermarriage, cultural homogenization, and outside control make them far more similar than the separatists claim. The Abkhaz are closely related to groups in Southern Russia, but in many ways can be seen as part of the Georgian cultural community. Each Georgian area has its own unique customs and dialects, but all share the same basic qualities of Orthodox Christianity, common cuisine, and the Georgian language. The Abkhaz have rejected the Georgian language altogether but retain the first two.

The Abkhaz government restored the use of their language after decades of neglect and subservience to Georgian, but its phonetic similarity to Mengrelian gives credence to the view that the Abkhaz belong in the larger Georgian social construction; many regional dialects differ from the others but this patchwork community has existed for centuries as the model of Georgian society. Unfortunately, political decisions during the Soviet period greatly complicated relations within Georgia by emphasizing Abkhaz differences rather than similarities, thereby fueling separatist aspirations and making a difficult situation far worse.

The Bolsheviks initially offered full Republic status to Abkhazia and the border areas of the North Caucasus. For seven years Abkhazia was on par with the other Transcaucasian republics, but Stalin eventually withdrew his support and placed the area firmly under Georgian control. He may have done so out of loyalty to his Georgian heritage, his penchant for creating political confusion as a way to maintain personal control, or simply as one of several territorial reorganizations in the early Soviet period. Whatever the reason, the Georgian Soviet Republic seized the opportunity to eliminate dissent by closing local language schools, forcing mandatory Georgian language instruction, and prosecuting regional leaders for instigating factionalism and treason. The heavy-handed approach left a lasting bitterness and fear of political servitude among the Abkhaz.

The issue of territorial sovereignty might have ended then but the Abkhaz were given a reprieve when Khrushchev authorized the creation of Abkhaz schools, special Abkhaz positions in the Georgian government, and increased funding for social programs in Abkhazia. However, Moscow's imposition of separatist ways soured Georgian views

of Russia and the legitimacy of regional autonomy. A widespread view among many Georgians has been that Moscow actively seeks to divide their country in order to ensure its weakness and compliance. Creating a false state in Abkhazia in the Soviet period, then siding with it during the post-Soviet civil war contributed to a deep mistrust towards the Russian government that the Summer War confirmed.

Antagonistic nationalism increased in both areas during the late Soviet period, and the Abkhaz eventually appealed to Moscow to restore the first Soviet Constitution that had granted them independence. Gorbachev denied the request, but the attempt increased Georgian resentment.<sup>2</sup> Skirmishes broke out in Abkhaz capital of Sokhumi (Sukhum in Abkhaz), and in 1990 the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet declared independence from the USSR and Georgia. The Georgian government responded by removing its legislative authority, declaring its own independence from the Soviet Union, and electing a radical nationalist to the presidency. Full-scale war broke out soon after driving close to three hundred thousand Georgians from their homes. Casualties were high on both sides with claims of human rights violations leveled by both governments. Accounts bear a striking resemblance to other regions engulfed by ethnic civil war: mass executions, torture and rape, burning victims alive in their homes, and infanticide. While neither side can claim the moral high ground, the Georgians suffered the added trauma of fleeing their homes *en masse* with little hope of return. This more than the violence itself would define the next two decades of bilateral relations.

Approximately fifty thousand Georgians eventually returned to the Gali border region of Abkhazia, corralled in a buffer zone guarded by Russian peacekeepers. Abkhaz government officials claimed this was an effort to restore Georgian property while

preserving the Abkhaz nature of their country (Interviews June 2007). Squatters were given *carte blanche* to claim abandoned homes, with the stipulation that Georgians with legal claims in the area be given priority over refugees from Abkhazia proper; the latter were seen as illegitimate migrants resulting from Georgian political domination. The ability of the Gali residents to restore normal lives remained limited given the pervasive localized fighting and persistent fears of escalating violence. However, life in Gali was infinitely better during the “decade of conflict resolution” than what followed during the Summer War of 2008.

The intervening years witnessed increasingly hostile cross-border relations between the Georgians and Abkhaz, and their respective international patrons, despite numerous peacemaking efforts at all levels of government and society. The United States and UN Security Council repeatedly asserted the territorial integrity of Georgia to Abkhazia, while Russia used its peacekeeping mandate to pressure the Georgian government into various political and economic concessions. Things got much worse after the 2003 Rose Revolution soured relations across the board. The new Georgian administration pursued closer relations with the United States and began pushing back against Russian influence in the region. Bitter exchanges ranged from the mutual expulsion of diplomatic representatives and trade embargoes, to Georgian claims that Moscow was behind increasingly aggressive domestic opposition rallies.<sup>3</sup> Hostile rhetoric ratcheted up threat perceptions on all sides as Georgian media and government sources focused on Russia’s imperialist intentions and the separatists’ illegal pro-independence actions,<sup>4</sup> while the separatists and Russia blamed Georgian President Saakashvili for radically destabilizing the long-standing peace.<sup>5</sup>

The separatists claimed to be under threat of outside aggression since they maintained purely defensive positions under the 1992 Sochi Agreement that established a Russian supervised cease-fire. There had been small-scale skirmishes around Gali for years but nothing more than the occasional flare-up, and neither the Georgian capture of the Kodori Valley in northern Abkhazia in 2006,<sup>6</sup> nor growing Russian claims that violence was imminent in early 2008 changed the military *status quo*.<sup>7</sup> However, the Russian government abandoned the pretense of neutrality and forcefully intervened in both separatist regions once Georgian troops began killing Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia, and the Abkhaz used the opportunity to push the Georgians out of their territory for good.

The war began outside Abkhazia but quickly spread there as Georgian and Russian troops advanced towards the border. Russian troops participating in a counter-terrorism exercise responded in defense of their peacekeepers and entered South Ossetia and Abkhazia to destroy Georgian groups claimed to be undermining the pro-Russian separatist governments.<sup>8</sup> What followed was “peace coercion” to ensure the Georgian government would never again try to alter the *status quo* in its favor. This led to a full-scale invasion of northern Georgia, driving the Georgians out of their American-financed bases near Zugdidi (the closest town to the Abkhaz border), and maintaining security zones for several weeks to eliminate guerilla activity in the area. Abkhazia was also fortified by sea and land forces through newly repaired roads and railways connecting it to Southern Russia.

However, the Russian offensive into Georgia proper calls into question the view that Moscow’s policy was a) peacekeeping, b) the Right to Protect civilians against

aggression, or c) outside intervention in support of oppressed ethnic groups. It seems clear that breaking the stalemate, reestablishing regional hegemony, and punishing Georgia were the ultimate goals, goals which Moscow completely succeeded in accomplishing. Official recognition of Abkhazia followed soon thereafter.

The separatists clearly benefited from Russia's military intervention and diplomatic strong-arming, but the long-term effects remain unclear.<sup>9</sup> While the lack of broad international support has not slowed Russian efforts to build up the separatists' internal security forces or Abkhaz appeals for full recognition by other countries, the area is no closer to becoming a viable independent state than before the Summer War. In addition, its new Russian-sponsored status has not encouraged Georgian IDP repatriation, one of the most contentious and heart-wrenching problems facing thousands of the war's victims. Russian security guarantees to protect all sides ring hollow after its military actions, and a climate of fear, intimidation, and mutual animosity remains widespread and deeply entrenched.

The new balance of power is a *fait accompli*, wherever blame ultimately lies, and political relations have been fundamentally altered. However, there are still stories to be told, stories of courage and sacrifice in the face of overwhelming opposition which can offer hope to hurting individuals and broken communities elsewhere. The following sections examine one such effort, an eleventh-hour unilateral attempt to bring reconciliation several months before the war's occurrence.

### **Unilateral Initiatives and Empathy**

Reconciliation often requires both parties to engage in admission of guilt and forgiveness.<sup>10</sup> Beginning the process need not require mutual effort though; it is also possible for one side to express contrition and a willingness to repair the broken relationship. The type of response usually determines the pace of peacemaking, and may even derail the entire process if some form of reciprocity is not given. However despite its limitations, unilateral initiatives remain an important part of the conflict resolution toolkit.

Boyle and Lawler (1991) build on existing theories of Graduated Reciprocation in Tension-reduction (GRIT) and Tit for Tat to show that unilateral initiatives reduce threat perceptions more effectively than does a strategy of strict reciprocity. The challenge for such efforts is to express benign intent without appearing to be weak and vulnerable. They suggest small, symbolic gestures that do not degrade an actor's fundamental security, but are large enough to illustrate the gravity of the issue at hand and a degree of risk for the initiator. Motivations for such signals of benign intent come from either trust in the good nature of the Other (either through *bona fides* provided by a trusted outsider or through learning-to-trust activities fostered by GRIT, Tit-for-Tat, or similar strategies) or from a defensive mindset.<sup>11</sup> Aggressive actors reduce their ability to win if they give up something fundamental to offensive strategies; defensively minded actors do not need offensive power assets and do not reduce their security by eschewing them.

The success of such unilateral initiatives often depends on existing balances of power between antagonists (Lawler 1999). Disparate power relations create barriers to accurate perceptions of intent, with both sides feeling their present vulnerabilities or

fearing being perceived as weak in the future. Therefore, signs of benign intent are most credible between equally powerful actors; slightly less effective are concessions made by the weaker side. In contrast, concessions by the stronger party embolden the weaker side to advance its demands based on perceptions of weakness in the stronger. This leads to heightened threat perceptions by the stronger and a retreat from reconciliation.<sup>12</sup>

The constraints of playing a two-level political game make these perceptions even more challenging for decision-makers as domestic regime constraints affect the range of negotiation win-sets. This is especially true for democracies since election promises capture elites and limit their ability to operate with impunity in the international arena.<sup>13</sup> Increasing the size of one's win-set at the negotiating table signals flexibility, and potentially increases the chances of reaching a compromise, but the electorate may perceive it as less representative and punish elites in the next election. Nationalist rhetoric used during campaigns places even more severe restrictions on negotiators because it ties issues to indivisible identities of nation, culture, and ethnicity (Wiegand 2002). Backing away from such rhetoric risks alienating domestic supporters and reducing bargaining credibility, thereby decreasing available compromises.

Large (1999) shows one possible solution to the problem, arguing that signals about peripheral issues are more easily perceived as non-threatening and less likely to be seen as signs of weakness. By avoiding contentious central issues, these signals do not activate "knee-jerk" rejection responses by international negotiators or domestic groups. Relatively high costs to the giver also increase the successful perception and reception by the receiver. Trust builds as the receiver sees the gift as a meaningful sacrifice by the giver, more so than because of any perceived benefit he or she might receive personally.

Thyne (2006) labels these efforts as “cheap” signals, distinguishing them from traditional costly signals made in alliance commitments, military deployments, sanctions and other material sacrifices. However, “cheap” does not mean they are valueless since they signal a degree of risk taking in the cause of conflict resolution.

Cheap signals can include speeches by elite decision-makers, ambassadorial changes, media interviews, and statements of intent by low-level government bureaucrats. Thyne examines the timing and intensity of such signals to government and opposition groups poised on the edge of civil war, and shows that enduring cheap signals of support for governments have the greatest impact in deterring civil war. However, the reception of any cheap signal largely depends on the place of empathy between antagonists.

Keller and Yang (2009) discuss the centrality of empathy in elite decision making as part of a two-stage process, arguing that empathy during the first stage – narrowing possible choices – leads to the greatest chance of conciliation; empathy during the later implementation stage helps as well but less by comparison. They include several factors that shape empathy including personal experiences with the Other before the crisis, the presence of multiple channels to contact the Other, and the Other’s familiarity with Self.<sup>14</sup>

Empathy can be defined generally as the ability to see situations from another’s perspective. “Walking in another person’s shoes” gives new insights into how the Other perceives him/herself and other people. However, getting to that place is a persistent challenge for conflict resolution theorists, practitioners and the antagonists themselves. Komorita et al. (1992) argue that Tit for Tat can be an effective strategy if participants

are taught to trust the rules. Feeling safe enough to do that is a difficult, but necessary condition. However, creating space for empathy training can be frustrated easily since weaker groups tend to favor changing the *status quo*, while participants from the stronger side try to build new relationships within the current system (Dessel et al. 2006). Opatow et al. (2005) describes this problem as one of moral exclusion by rival groups, arguing for more inclusive identity development within and between antagonists through fairness education exercises, resource sharing, and personal investment in the process of peace by respected community leaders.

Rossi (2003) proposes a teaching model that can be used in these situations, either across antagonist groups or in single-identity work, as participants discuss their past experiences and recognize their common future.<sup>15</sup> He suggests some kind of catharsis is necessary to start the process of building empathy, usually personal or group trauma, psychological distress, or trust in a respected leader's guidance, many of which were evidenced in the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict resolution context. The process gains momentum over time and reaches a tipping point when empathy becomes the new norm and the common motivation to make peace.<sup>16</sup>

Rossi's practical curriculum requires practitioners first to build the participants' interest in the issues and determine the rules for communication. Role-playing then forms the basis of empathy training with extensive time for learning about the Other through personal information sharing and research. Individuals are encouraged to take their roles seriously and identify beneficial and harmful forces shaping their interest fulfillment. Instructors let participants interact within broad parameters, reminding them that the goal is not to reach a settlement *per se*, rather to gain mutual understanding.

Peace circles are another effective, though less didactic way to build empathy. Based on the principles of interconnectedness, equality, and diversity, peace circles follow several prescribed stages (Boyes-Watson 2005). Opening ceremonies set the tone and the “process keeper” explains the guidelines. Participants then pass a talking piece around the circle with each person taking turns to speak. This gives people time to consider their words, while drawing shy people into the discussion and preventing any single member or subgroup from dominating the conversation. Participants discuss their expectations, decide on the definitions of key words, and share their views. The circle then closes with another meaning-laden ritual to reinforce empathy and understanding.

These approaches work best at the grassroots level and can be used in either single-identity or inter-community settings. They also have a legitimate place in broader conflict resolution efforts despite their structural limitations influencing policy making. Evans-Kent (2002) rightly criticizes international peacemaking efforts that overlook local factors and rely exclusively on elite decision-makers. Such approaches ignore the role local grievances have in fomenting violence that often spreads to neighboring communities. She also criticizes exclusively elite-driven approaches that reframe issues which were once malleable and suitable for conciliation into highly politicized and inflexible positions. Using the Dayton Peace Accords as an example of an imposed/non-local peace, Evans-Kent shows that ethnic identities hardened despite the decline in violence, creating stereotypes and reinforcing fear of traveling to neighboring “foreign” areas; better integration across multiple diplomatic tracks could have prevented the growth of latent hostilities while stopping the overt violence. NGOs helped overcome some of these problems afterward by focusing on empathy building in several villages.

School programs to teach children values shared by their former enemies, microfinancing for small businesses, and job training for unemployed men were all successful in reducing hostilities between neighbors and across ethnic lines.

Kelleher and Johnson (2008) present similar success stories of religious groups in Sudan and Northern Ireland. Local workers had a high level of cultural understanding since many were members of the antagonist communities and had suffered through the violence themselves. In addition, international groups had proven expertise in conflict resolution methods used in other areas, and local leaders gave legitimacy to the activists because they committed to stay until life improved for the locals. All of these attributes facilitated peacemaking at the local level even when structural violence and injustice remained unchanged.<sup>17</sup> In addition, many programs were started unilaterally. One group bravely faced their enemies armed only with goodwill and peace, knowing that their signals could be misinterpreted, or worse, taken advantage of by the other side. A similar project occurred in the months preceding the Summer War.

### **Letters of Intent**

I traveled to Georgia in 2007 on a Fulbright Scholarship to apply multi-track conflict resolution strategies between Georgia and Abkhazia. One approach was to engage government officials in Tbilisi and Sokhumi, working with existing ministries and international organizations to create new avenues of communication. I met with several members of the Georgian Ministry for Conflict Resolution staff, including then-Deputy Minister Davit Bakradze, to discuss current efforts and future possibilities. The US Embassy facilitated the meetings and most resulted in broad support for grassroots

efforts. I had not yet formulated a specific program for my students,<sup>18</sup> but the overall government view was supportive of cross-cultural communication, as were the views expressed by the Abkhaz Foreign Ministry; Deputy Minister Maxim Gunjia was particularly helpful.

One original approach began with local Orthodox priests to increase their peacemaking efforts among refugee communities in Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Zugdidi (the three cities with the largest IDP populations). The Patriarchate supported a host of suggested plans, including a peace march to the Russian checkpoint at the Inguri River separating the antagonists. Unfortunately, even though priests were highly effective at conflict resolution in their communities, Track Two projects to build peace with the Abkhaz proved unsuccessful (Meredith 2008-2009).

The final component of my research was a grassroots letter writing project developed with students at Tbilisi State University and International Black Sea University, during which time I applied many of the theoretical and practical guidelines mentioned in the above literature review. Our first meetings began with a combination of didactic and interactive learning. Students introduced themselves and told if they were natives of Tbilisi; roughly one third were IDPs from Abkhazia. Ground rules for the semester established how topics would be discussed and the format for questioning each other's statements. The goal was to build a safe, honest environment where students could express their deeply held views about the Georgian government, their plight, the Abkhaz, and international actors trying to assist them.

The students were initially reserved during the first few classes, with only a handful speaking out. The main reason was their unfamiliarity with discussion as a form

of instruction; most of their formal education had been in lectures and they were not yet comfortable speaking in public. Language barriers were quickly overcome though, as students with better English language facilities translated for those with limited abilities, and after three weeks, almost everyone spoke every class period. The courses then moved into the research and analysis stage.

Each student was asked to write down the main actors in the conflict with Abkhazia, then rank them in terms of responsibility for the violence. They blamed the Abkhaz as a whole, followed by the Russian, US, and Georgian governments. The results were read aloud to the class and discussion of the rankings brought further classifications: the Abkhaz people held less responsibility than their government, the Russian government expanded to include the Russian people in general, and the US and Georgian governments remained unchanged. The process of exonerating the Abkhaz people while blaming the Russians was an unexpected result, one that led to increased empathy once the letter project took shape.

Over the next two weeks, classes broke into smaller groups of four or five students to define national interests for each government involved. They concluded that Georgian interests were to maintain its territorial integrity, return all IDPs to their homes (or Abkhaz homes if theirs were no longer available), and if necessary, use military force to reassert national pride. Abkhaz interests varied from independence, a medium position of *de facto* autonomy with Russian protection (the *status quo* position) or directly joining Russia. They described Russia as imperialistic bent on keeping Georgia weak and driven by strategic interests to gain Abkhazia's Black Sea ports, or worse, determined to recapture Georgia itself. The United States was seen as using Georgia to annoy the

Russians, but unwilling to commit fully to its defense in the likely event of Russian aggression.

The students then conducted research for the next few weeks. They read Western and Russian media sources to compare with their perceptions; some changed in degree but the overall tone remained the same. The next stage involved teaching conflict resolution strategies. Several lectures dealt with the different diplomatic tracks, specifically assessing the value and likely success of each in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Few students had hope for inter-governmental relations, although they believed people-to-people contact still held promise; nearly half had taken part in NGO-sponsored encounters with Abkhaz students. Despite those experiences, the biggest challenge was overcoming their apathy and anger after nearly two decades of failed negotiations and broken promises by the international community and their own government.

Weeks passed with heated discussions, harsh words, and even tears. Over time the hard-line Georgian nationalists began to see the need to compromise, and the apathetic renewed their hope for change. Their perspectives represented many in the larger community, and the movement towards reconciliation encouraged bolder steps. The topic of costly signaling came up for discussion midway through the semester, and the students learned about threat perceptions and how to show benign intent through role playing and connecting the concepts to their personal lives. Dating, friendships, and family relationships served as templates for extrapolation to relations with the Abkhaz.<sup>19</sup> Empathy began to develop as students saw their struggles for identity in a post-conflict country, broad economic hardships resulting from international relations beyond their control, and the need to forgive as equally valid for the Abkhaz as for themselves.

Orthodox Christianity played a significant role for many of the students reaching that tipping point, and even more importantly, the movement toward forgiveness.<sup>20</sup> By this time sufficient trust had been established between the students and with me as their leader in peacemaking. We began to discuss the church's teaching on peaceful relations, and their responsibilities to sacrifice and live humbly as Christians. Statements by several well-known local priests laid the groundwork justifying what became the letter project.

The critical discussion came one month before my scholarship ended. I asked the students what it would look like for them to offer peace to the Abkhaz: would they have to humiliate themselves or could peace also come through strength. I challenged them to set aside the traditional methods they had learned or witnessed over the past fifteen years and to be creative. A female student named Natia spoke up, saying that she had come to realize peacemaking required a radical shift in tactics, but that real strength came from sacrifice not violence. She referenced the American civil rights movement and the peaceful demonstrations in Georgia and Ukraine that brought about political change. She committed herself to doing whatever she could to make peace, even if that meant giving up her notions of Georgian statehood; what mattered to her was helping the victims of the war, not preserving her national pride. The power of her words was made stronger by her previous position against any compromise on territorial integrity. While Natia was not a norm entrepreneur creating a new way to interact with her enemies, she served as a catalyst for other students to express empathy and a desire for forgiveness. That class discussion produced a plan to write letters on behalf of the thousands of IDPs wanting to return home.

The letters had a simple message translated into four languages. They stated “Please, let me come home” in Russian, Abkhaz, Georgian and English. We spent much time debating the message and meaning of those words. Some feared they would seem weak in the eyes of their enemies. Others thought the letters would be taken by the Abkhaz government and never shown to the Abkhaz people, the real target of the project. Still others wanted a more aggressive tone that asserted Georgian rights and called on the Abkhaz to do the “right” thing and rejoin Georgia. In the end, the words recorded in the Christian Gospels, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God” convinced the hold-outs to proceed with the more humble message (Matthew 5:9-10). One student added the next Beatitude as further reason to put their lives on the line for the sake of peace, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

The front side of the letters contained the four-language message and space for a signature. The reverse side had a poem written by the students. It expressed their pain from the past violence, and their present isolation from historical homelands; their fears that nothing would improve and the conflict would drag on indefinitely; a growing hope that the Abkhaz people were just like them – tired of war and wanting to be reunited; and finally, a willingness to change their perceptions and believe the best about former enemies. Written in Georgian, the English translation is as follows.

We are peacemakers. We are people of the Caucasus.

We grieve for the pain of all our pasts. We hope for the promise of all our futures.

We are men and women, sons and daughters. We remember, but we do not hate.

We have suffered loss, but we long for reconciliation.

We have seen horrors in war, but we hold onto hope in peace.

We have tasted death, but we want to breathe life.

We are a proud people, but we are not enemies.

We want justice, but we offer mercy.

We belong to the land, but the land does not belong to us.

We are the future, but we must live it together.

We are peacemakers. We are people of the Caucasus.

The choice of Georgian was primarily for the people who would be asked to sign the letters, the thousands of IDPs living in despair and poverty throughout Georgia.

We made roughly five thousand letters to be signed in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Zugdidi. Students spoke to their families and neighbors, school friends and work colleagues. They visited elderly pensioners, parents, unemployed day laborers, and anyone else they knew. They made new connections and expanded their circle of influence until all the letters were signed. Almost every person they spoke with signed a letter, but few conversations were easy. The students showed what they had learned and internalized about conflict resolution, sometimes spending hours talking with people. Individuals would invite relatives and neighbors to hear what they were doing, and heated discussions often developed, but the students held firmly to their convictions and convinced many to join the project. Daily debriefing sessions allowed the students to share their successes as well as struggles, and advice filtered through the groups. My role became one of encouragement rather than instruction.

We made plans to deliver them at the border once all the letters had been collected. The students would go to the center of the Inguri bridge separating the conflict

zones and deliver the letters to the Abkhaz and Russian soldiers stationed nearby. Some had been there before for peace demonstrations, and locals regularly crossed the border to buy produce and visit relatives. My own experiences at the border crossing had always been uncomplicated, and a local television news crew agreed to cover the event and broadcast it throughout the country.

The students chose ten representatives to take the letters, three of whom had previously been their staunchest opponents (Natia was one of them). Traveling by overnight train, they arrived tired but excited to see the fruit of their labors. However, our plans began to unravel once we reached the Georgian checkpoint.

Word of the project had spread to Members of Parliament through several professors at the universities, and officials waited for our arrival and confiscated the letters. This was a complete surprise to me as I had spoken with the Chair of the Department of Conflict Resolution at Tbilisi State University about the project weeks before our trip.

Border personnel refused to allow anyone past, claiming the letters would incite violence from the Abkhaz. I tried to show that the letters were signs of goodwill, and that as humble, self-constraining messages of peace they would not be construed as aggressive. While I had no idea what the soldiers would do with the letters afterwards, I assured the Georgian officials that the message would benefit the government's stated position of conflict resolution. I mentioned my conversations with the Abkhaz Foreign Ministry, but this only aggravated them more and precipitated the arrival of the regional security commander for northern Georgia. He too was unmoved by theoretical reasoning, examples of similar efforts in other conflict areas, and even several students' open

weeping. The boxes remained behind the Georgian border and our peacemaking efforts looked to be at an end.

However, the students decided on one final gamble: I would hide a handful of letters in my shirt and deliver them myself; the television crew would not be able to accompany me, but they interviewed the students and promised to run the story later that day. I had been in Abkhazia before but the Georgian officials tried to stop me from going again. Dire warnings aside, my American passport ensured my trip across the bridge one more time. I delivered the letters as planned and spent several tense hours being interrogated by Abkhaz intelligence officers sent from the capital, only escaping a trip to Sokhumi because of the friendship I had struck up with the local soldiers.

None of us heard any more about the letters, whether the ones confiscated at the border or those delivered to the Abkhaz. I had told Abkhaz Deputy Foreign Minister Gunjia about the project weeks earlier and I hope they reached him. Whatever their fate though, one year later Georgia and Abkhazia were at war and the chances for cross-community peacemaking disappeared for good.

### **Conclusion**

What lessons can be learned from the letter project and can any principles be generalized to other conflict areas? Despite its failure to change the course of events in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, this grassroots effort made three valuable contributions to the practice of conflict resolution. First, unilateral initiatives can change the giver even if the receiver remains unmoved. Very few students initially supported reconciliation and forgiveness, and several hated the Abkhaz outright. All of them moved towards

peacemaking in the process and committed to carrying on the effort despite the results at the Inguri bridge.

Initial meetings with participants had two key aspects that made this progress possible, but may not always be available in other contexts: 1) the participants were students and 2) they had an existing knowledge base for evaluating political decision-making. The first aspect established a hierarchy between me and the students, one that was initially deferential and allowed for easier teaching than if they had been adult volunteers with low exit costs. The students had committed to their Georgian professors to listen respectfully and try to keep open minds. Their willingness to move beyond cognitive dissonance and embrace new ideas was extremely important to building trust early in the project. Equally important was the legitimacy I received from the other professors; cross-cultural education works best when resident teachers welcome outsiders as equals and require that students respect them as native instructors.

In addition, the students' previous studies in political science and conflict methodology allowed us to move beyond rudimentary lessons to more complicated tasks of analysis and application. This enabled the students to become agents for change in their communities once they became convinced of the project's merits. However, unilateral initiatives at the grassroots level take time to diffuse throughout society, sometimes taking years to overcome resistance within local groups. Norm entrepreneurs are also critically important in the process. Their presence as respected community leaders gives them access to critical social network connections enabling them to influence widely dispersed members. South Africa, Northern Ireland, Mozambique and Sierra Leone left behind decades of violence through the efforts of social leaders

committed to the cause of peace and the thousands of individuals working alongside them in their local communities. Local Orthodox priests played that role in the letter project.

Unfortunately the students and priests ran out of time when war broke out one year later.

The second lesson shows that despite the changes in people's thinking, education was not enough to move all the students down the path of peacemaking. While not exclusive to the process, religion played a key part as Christian teachings offered by the students and supported by local priests repositioned religion in their understanding of the conflict. The most pervasive use of religion in the country has been to connect Orthodox Christianity with nationalist political agendas. Utilizing the existing connection between religious and ethnic identities to revise political goals occurred at several levels of the project, but its most important location was between the students themselves. Over time my role became more similar to a "process keeper" in peace circles than the traditional professor most students had encountered before. Engaging them in personal ways helped to internalize the material, but their interactions with each other carried the greatest weight, and interactions with other Georgians outside the classroom revealed the extent of their personal transformations.

Finally, the unfortunate results at the Ingui bridge show that grassroots peacemaking needs the support of government officials to bring about cross-community interactions, to say nothing of reconciliation. Despite initial offers of support and tacit approval, the Georgian government resisted most efforts conducted outside their stagnant, unproductive approaches. I spoke with many long-term peacemakers at all levels of conflict resolution, and their views rang through with frustration at the hypocrisy of official peace efforts. The government's unwillingness to engage original solutions

outside its control could have resulted from the interplay of complex domestic challenges, specifically the rising opposition against Saakashvili's administration and his stated policy of territorial integration. It may also have resulted from a lack of empathy for the Abkhaz. More troubling would have been a hidden agenda to cast off the guise of conflict resolution and affect the balance of power militarily, in which case we simply got in the way. Or perhaps it was a parochial mentality that was reluctant to welcome new actors into the process. In either case, the result brought the country closer to its deadly showdown with Russia the following year, and every attempt to build new bridges with the Abkhaz failed.

However, hope for unilateral peacemaking remains because suffering people gained a measure of comfort through the project, and many built new connections and meaningful relationships based on the shared goal of peace. The future may look bleak for Georgian territorial integrity, but every student expressed their desire to help those around them forgive and move on with their lives. In the end, that was all one could hope to achieve.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article focuses on the Abkhaz component of Georgia's civil war, leaving the South Ossetian question for later analysis. The two separatist causes share many similarities, but the goal here is to tell the story of a peacemaking effort directed specifically at the Abkhaz.

<sup>2</sup> Georgians usually describe the Abkhaz as opportunists and Russian puppets. More severe descriptions include Stalinists, terrorists, and even animals and savages. There is broad acceptance of these views in the government, academia, and society at large. The Abkhaz have similar names for the Georgians. Soldiers at the border with Georgia shared deep hatred for their neighbors and the United States for supporting them. Bank tellers in the Abkhaz capital of Sokhumi had almost visceral reactions when they saw Georgian currency, refusing even to touch it (Interviews March-June 2007).

<sup>3</sup> The November 2007 opposition demonstrations revealed a growing weakness in the government's monolithic control. How far that weakness would have extended in the absence of outright war with Russia seems less certain. George and Stefes (2008) make a convincing case that Saakashvilli could have weathered the storm without fundamentally damaging Georgia's democratic consolidation.

<sup>4</sup> Russian actions in 2007, specifically shooting down Georgian unmanned aerial vehicles and a helicopter attack on Georgian positions in the Kodori Valley, had taken relations in a decidedly negative direction, but

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the real change occurred when Russia opened official relations with the separatists in April 2008. This step, with greater diplomatic significance than the previous issuance of Russian passports to locals, signaled a major shift from tacit approval to outright recognition.

<sup>5</sup> President Saakashvili changed the title of the previous Ministry of Conflict Resolution to the more assertive Ministry of Territorial Integration. While such an action escalated the hostile rhetoric, it was by no means the catalyst for the war; it can be explained either as playing to nationalist sentiment in the face of growing domestic opposition,<sup>5</sup> or simply as fulfillment of a campaign promise to restore Georgia's long-lost territory. In either case, renaming the ministry did not violate the international agreements governing relations between the parties, and the Georgian government even offered full autonomy to the separatists in early 2008, granting them a wide range of political and economic rights in a renewed Georgia. Such a compromise represented a major step towards reconciliation, but the separatists rejected all proposals that included territorial reintegration.

<sup>6</sup> Georgian paramilitary forces advanced out of the Gali region and established a base of operations in Kodori. From that position, the Georgian Government of Abkhazia in Exile met and issued proclamations. Their position was always precarious and proved indefensible during the Summer War. (Interviews May, 2007 with members of the Government in Exile)

<sup>7</sup> Regardless of their ulterior motives, Russian military commanders claimed an attack into Abkhazia would come in the immediate future (Vignansky 2006; [http://www.russiatoday.ru/Top\\_News/2008-04-17/Build-up\\_of\\_Georgian\\_troops\\_on\\_Abkhazia\\_border\\_causes\\_concern.html](http://www.russiatoday.ru/Top_News/2008-04-17/Build-up_of_Georgian_troops_on_Abkhazia_border_causes_concern.html); *RIA Novosti* 8 August, 2008).

Saakashvili countered that the Russians and Abkhaz were preparing a breakout across the Inguri River, the main border crossing between Abkhazia and Georgia (*L'Express* 1 September 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Accounts differ as to which side actually started the fighting in South Ossetia, with the Russians claiming the Georgian army began shelling Ossetian villages in the early hours of August 8<sup>th</sup>, while the Georgians counter that Russia invaded their sovereign territory and theirs was only a response to aggression (Pladysheva 2008; Dulkan 2008). This article does not focus specifically on the causes of the war, rather seeing them as the part of the larger context of fear, violence, and bitterness between the Abkhaz and Georgian people. See "Restoring Georgian Sovereignty, Redux," *Foreign Policy Journal*, August, 2009 for

more details on the war's causes.

<sup>9</sup> This is the subject of a forthcoming article on quasi-statehood and international aid as rents.

<sup>10</sup> See Theissen (2004) for an excellent review of the roles various conflict resolution actors play in transforming conflict mentalities at the systemic, national, and local levels. Accordingly, the basic premise that reconciliation requires some measure of honest confession and forgiveness is born out through empirical evidence in numerous cases, the most noted being South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. While this statement does not preclude other options for reaching reconciliation, it does assert the broad value of confession and forgiveness in peacemaking.

<sup>11</sup> Mitchell (2005) offers a solid treatment of steps and obstacles involved in choosing to take the risk of signaling benign intent, specifically the need to interpret signals accurately and how third-party practitioners can provide valuable information for those perceptions.

<sup>12</sup> A fundamental problem is determining the relative strength of the parties and who makes the decision. Perceptions of one's own capabilities can be as mistaken as those made about the Other (Francis, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> The same can be said for full-fledged democracies or pseudo-democracies that maintain the façade of democratic ideals but whose use of power and its concentration remain outside the electorate's control. See Diamond (2002) and Lynch (2005) for classifications on regime types and examples of each.

<sup>14</sup> These were especially important during the early 1990's since many Abkhaz and Georgian elites had worked together during the Soviet period. The first civil war shaped those interactions, usually in negative ways, but cooperation increased over time under the Shevardnadze government. However, the 2003 Rose Revolution brought new characters to the Georgian side which made *a priori* empathy less likely. The challenge for the Abkhaz was deciphering Saakashvili's intentions: he offered broad autonomy to the formerly separatist region of Ajaria but was more ambiguous about how he intended to deal with Abkhazia.

<sup>15</sup> Self-selection for participation need not bias the results; Rossi looks at people who are trying to make peace, but need help getting there.

<sup>16</sup> Tipping points are notoriously difficult to define *a priori*, but this article does not seek to predict their occurrence, instead showing when they occurred in the letter project described later.

<sup>17</sup> Kelleher and Johnson do not discuss the reasons local peace correlated to national peace in Northern

Ireland but had limited impact on Sudan's government. It is sufficient for this article to focus on the grassroots effects.

<sup>18</sup> There were several UN and NGO programs already in place (with a long history of student-student interactions), and my goal was not to duplicate successful programs, rather to find new avenues for communication and cooperation.

<sup>19</sup> While not a perfect match to cross-community conflict, the easy application of basic principles to their lives allowed them to appreciate more complex measures in larger contexts.

<sup>20</sup> Religion was by no means sufficient in this process, but its necessary role was very clear to me throughout my time there.