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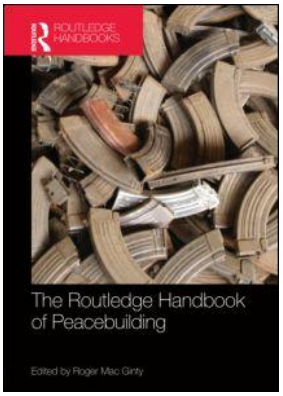

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Roger Mac Ginty

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3

THE LIMITS OF PEACEBUILDING THEORY

Gerald M. Steinberg

Academic interest in and research focused on peace studies and peacebuilding has grown steadily in recent decades, producing a myriad of articles in scholarly journals, books, conferences, workshops, and university programs dedicated to this field. Researchers, practitioners, and officials of funding agencies – government and private – are naturally drawn to the hope or promise for finding a cure for the scourge of war, both between states and within states.

However, in direct contrast to the growth of what has been cynically called 'the peace industry', the situation on the ground remains quite grim. Few stable agreements have been implemented, and many of the major post-Cold War international and ethno-national conflicts continue. Where the violence has subsided, this can often be attributed to a major use of force, as in Sri Lanka and East Timor. In Kosovo, a large peacekeeping presence has provided some stability, but the evidence indicates that enmity between societies and populations remains significant. Conflicts in central Africa include periodic outbursts of extreme violence, Cyprus remains divided, relations between India and Pakistan are volatile, and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict continues to simmer, escalating periodically into wider warfare, as in Gaza in December 2008. And while a few conflicts seem to have been settled, such as Northern Ireland and Angola, the factors involved are unclear and have been not convincingly generalized.

To some degree, the enormous disconnect between the ongoing investment in academic peacebuilding, on the one hand, and the dismal outcomes on the other, can be explained by the enthusiasm of the would-be peacemakers. Many of the theories, models, papers, books, simulations, etc. under the banner of political conflict resolution are guided, written, and produced by researcher-practitioners with strong personal commitments to peace.

As will be shown in this chapter, advocates and enthusiasts often underestimate the fundamental differences between societies – particularly the behavioral and normative distinctions between liberal pluralist democracies and groups dominated by an intolerant ideological, nationalist or religious framework. The social-psychological approach to peace generally assumes the existence of a common foundation based on shared human

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values. Contact theory, dialogue, cross-cultural communications and interaction, as well as forgiveness, reconciliation, and even quasi-legal arguments (or at least legal discourse) are among the main dimensions used in this approach, from which mutual understanding and compromise are expected to flow (Ellison and Powers 1994).

Similarly, the approaches based on democratic peace theories, which are used to justify the liberal interventionist policies pursued by the US and Europe, have also produced meager results. The creation of stable democratic institutions and accompanying political cultures based on pluralism and tolerance has proven very illusive. As in the case of the social-psychological models, the enthusiasts have greatly overstated the likely impacts, and underestimated the obstacles.

While the Hobbesian state of nature and 'war of all against all' is ideologically anathema to hopeful peacemakers and their academic supporters, the evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates the validity of this framework for many conflict situations. The sources of violent identity conflict – in the form of inter-ethnic and inter-religious and similar disputes – remain as intense in the twenty-first century as they were thousands of years ago. Harold Saunders, a former senior diplomat in the US State Department and a strong supporter of the social-psychological approach to peace, observed that 'until relationships are changed, deep-rooted human conflicts are not likely to be resolved' (Saunders 1999: 31). But none of the current theories and models have been demonstrated as reliable means for changing political relationships or the Hobbesian condition, leaving conflict management based on deterrence and defense as the best alternatives to the distant hopes for peace.

Applying social-psychology to international conflict

Attempts to develop consistent and successful models for international peacemaking and peacebuilding have a long history, but few long-term successes. Indeed, the most peaceful periods of history have generally been due to the dominance of major empires – thus the terms and sometimes the nostalgia for *pax Romana*, *pax Britannica* and even the Cold War, when the US and the Soviet Union divided the world and generally controlled conflicts, preventing them from spiraling out of control. These imperial periods of peace reflect the Hobbesian model of the *Leviathan* (1660) – the superpower, or powers, who impose international order.

In contrast, Immanuel Kant's model of *Perpetual Peace* (1795) argued that the Hobbesian state of nature could be overcome through a combination of republican governments accountable to their citizens, international law to regulate state behavior, and economic interdependence to create interests in maintaining peace and avoiding the costs of war. This model developed by Kant and his followers evolved into democratic peace theory, as embodied in the League of Nations experiment, and then refined in the establishment of the United Nations. The Kantian model is also considered the foundation of the European Union, which has prevented a return to violence on this continent for six decades. While Western Europe has been an important exception as a zone of peace, the efforts to export the European experience to other regions have not succeeded. (The starting conditions in post-World War II Europe – the total defeat of the Axis powers and the long occupation of Germany by the Allied powers – were unique, and not applicable to other conflict regions and conditions.)

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Going beyond Hobbesian realism and Kantian republican internationalism, new approaches to peacebuilding, based on social-psychological theories, emerged towards the end of the Cold War. This coincided with the emergence of social-psychology as an academic discipline and the basis of both individual therapy and the manipulation of social policies. Academics became enthusiastic supporters of this approach, including Kelman (2000), Kriesberg (2001), and Lederach (1997), joined by practitioner-diplomats such as Burton (1969), Montville (1989, 1993), Saunders (1999, 2001), and many others. This path to peace based on or centrally supported by dialogues, peace camps, and basic human contact, has led to large-scale funding from governments and major foundations.

Much of this activity is reinforced by professional and personal accolades and awards, accompanied by high media profiles. Audiences are drawn to experts promising hope for 'breakthroughs', and by messages of conciliation and images of peace.

However, this enthusiasm has not been accompanied by empirical results. Despite numerous workshops, dialogues, peace camps for youth, joint textbook writing exercises, and other forms of personal and group interaction in Sri Lanka, the Balkans, Cyprus and the Arab–Israeli contexts, peacebuilding efforts have not produced the desired impact. These conflicts either continue to rage, or have been ended (perhaps temporarily) by force, and not via agreement based on compromise and understanding. Northern Ireland appears to be a singular exception, but even here, the evidence that contact and dialogue were central causes in this outcome is unclear.

Indeed, as will be demonstrated below, the methodological dimension of the behavioral and empirical research necessary to measure impacts of social-psychological models in international conflict has been neglected, to understate the situation. In many cases, the mere fact of a contact event taking place – such as a summer camp or theater group with Israelis and Palestinians, workshops involving Serbs and Kosovars, or a track-two conference – is considered to be significant and sufficient, in and of itself. In other examples, anecdotes and impressions substitute for measurements of results.

In scholarly articles on attitude change and reframing in such conflicts, the measurements are often based on observing small groups during short periods of interaction, and the impacts are difficult to discern. Furthermore, the claims that these impacts can be extrapolated to the macro-level of societies, or to the leaders and decision makers, are also based more on enthusiasm than on careful and critical examination of the evidence. The results of 'meta studies' which attempt to integrate a number of inconclusive small-scale analyses involving limited groups, are highly ambiguous (Pettigrew and Tropp 2000; Maoz 2011).

In addition, assertions built on the foundations of contact theory in peacebuilding are generally not falsifiable, meaning that analyses do not include a counter-hypothesis which allows for the possibility of refutation. Many of the conclusions based on workshops, simulations and other forms of interaction that claim success in attitude change among participants, did not consider or measure the impact of alternative explanations and factors. In case studies such as on Northern Ireland, whose authors claim that people-to-people interaction was central in resolution of conflict, the claims of success for the social-psychological interventions (Fitzduff 1996, 2002) erase the other factors that might explain the results, such as economic dimensions, or suppression of terror by military force. Similarly, the 1979 Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty was negotiated by Sadat and Begin in the aftermath of the 1973 war that left both

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countries badly damaged, and without the assistance of peacebuilding workshops and dialogues (Stein 1989).

The following analysis focuses on the evolution of these efforts, examining the theoretical assumptions, as well as the efforts to apply them in specific conflict situations and environments. Evaluation methodologies, to the extent that these exist, will also be considered.

As will become clear, despite the enthusiasm of its supporters, the empirical results have been relatively meager. There is little if any evidence for most of the claims that international conflicts have been fundamentally transformed as a result of the social-psychological approach to peacebuilding. In some cases, these well-intentioned efforts have resulted in counterproductive outcomes by adding to the intensity of the conflict, reifying negative stereotypes and one-sided narratives, and leading to increased violence. Images of implacable hostility are strengthened when participants in dialogues reject the legitimacy of the other side, or repeat stereotypes and conflict-promoting narratives (Hamburger 1994; Hanssen 2001).

Origins: Allport's contact hypothesis

In 1954, Gordon W. Allport (1954) developed the 'contact hypothesis', arguing that through direct interpersonal and intergroup communications, as well as shared experiences, racial prejudice in the United States could be overcome. According to this theory, success required the following conditions: equal status, shared objectives, ability to develop significant social relations; and wider societal support. Through such interactions, negative stereotypes resulting from social, economic, religious and other barriers could be replaced by discovery of common human traits and values in 'the other' (Amir 1976).

Allport's model led to the development of strategies of intergroup contact in efforts to eliminate prejudice and ethnic tensions through attitude changes (often measured through surveys and observation). In the early stages, this approach relied on casual interactions, meaning that they were largely unstructured, and the simple act of bringing together members of different groups (primarily Americans from different racial and ethnic groups) was expected to promote attitude transformation and the removal of prejudice.

In efforts to apply and measure the impacts and outcomes, the main variables included time (short and isolated interactions of a few hours or perhaps days, summer camps of a few weeks, and more intensive repeated interaction over months or years, in different settings); the degree of functionalist interaction (from integrated sports teams and theater groups, to joint economic enterprises); and the age of the participants (children and teenagers are deemed to be more receptive to long-term attitude change than adults) (Rothbart and John 1985).

Early efforts to apply Allport's approach can be seen in some aspects of US–Soviet negotiations during the Cold War, particularly after the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis brought the two superpowers to the brink of mutual nuclear destruction. During the arms limitation talks that followed, which resulted in the 1972 SALT and ABM treaties, the host diplomats in Vienna and Helsinki arranged for cultural events and river cruises that enabled the negotiators to mix casually and communicate informally.

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This unstructured interaction was perceived as a means of breaking down cultural and political barriers between the two sides and thereby reducing fears while promoting greater flexibility (Voorhees 2002; Newhouse 1973). The development of epistemic communities of scientists and arms controllers, based on common experiences, perspectives and professional ties, as postulated by Emanuel Adler (1992), is seen to have contributed to this process.

However, a detailed examination of the evidence raises numerous questions regarding the causes and factors that led to the agreements. During this period, the roles of unofficial or 'back-channel' communications channels and strategic calculations were central to the successful negotiations, and suggest that the interpersonal relations and epistemic links played a secondary role, at most (Kissinger 1979, 1982).

Furthermore, social interactions involving elites and officials from the US and the Soviet Union in the context of formal negotiations are not readily applicable to instances of civil war or violent ethno-national or religious conflicts, in which there is often no framework for interaction between the masses of any kind. (The absence of bridges linking elite contacts with mass interactions in the context of peacebuilding efforts, and the implications of this situation, will be examined below.)

Taking a different approach, beginning in the 1960s, John Burton, an Australian diplomat, began to apply 'needs theory' and rational problem-solving approaches to peace efforts. Political conflict is explained as resulting from conditions in which universal human needs, such as security, identity, or acceptance, are absent. This approach was distinguished from traditional theories of international negotiation, which focused on state and interest-based conflict, as well as power relationships. According to Burton (1969, 1987), international conflict would be resolved through processes and agreements that satisfied these basic human needs.

Herbert Kelman, a social-psychologist at Harvard University, adopted and expanded Burton's model, combining it with Allport's contact hypothesis to international conflict (Ruggiero and Kelman 1999). (Kelman was the Harvard Professor of Social Ethics, a position previously held by Allport.) Unlike Burton, Kelman had no training in international relations and no diplomatic experience, but used his personal and family experience to argue that the group dynamics methodologies developed by psychologists such as Kurt Lewin, and combined with Burton's models, were the keys to resolving protracted international conflicts (Kelman 2004).

As a social-psychologist, Kelman's analysis was far removed from both Hobbes and Kant, and based on an intense, if empirically unsupported belief that 'a long-term resolution of the conflict requires development of a transcendent identity for the two peoples that does not threaten the particularistic identity of each. … each side perceives the other as a source of some of its own negative identity elements, especially a view of the self as victim and as victimizer.'

To overcome 'the negative interdependence of the two identities', Kelman brought Israeli and Palestinian elites to problem-solving workshops beginning in the 1970s. The goal was to develop 'positive elements in the relationship' through 'equal-status interactions that provide the parties the opportunity to "negotiate" their identities …' (Kelman 1999). Through the Program on International Conflict Analysis and Resolution (PICAR), he expanded the workshop approach to other ethno-national conflicts. In this framework, current and former government officials, military commanders, top

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journalists, academics and other policy makers and molders of public opinion were brought together. The personal interactions, building on the contact theory and Burton's framework, were combined with exercises focusing on the perceived conflict issues.

Although elite workshops, dialogues and similar activities were conducted for more than thirty years, the results have not been examined independently or systematically, and contributions towards peace, if any, cannot be demonstrated empirically. Instead, these projects expanded regardless of the outcomes due to the ability of Kelman and his counterparts to generate a great deal of enthusiasm and publicity, which were central to receiving significant funding. Major foundations and governments made generous grants, expecting that these activities would produce important breakthroughs towards resolving protracted international conflicts. Such activities are sold as the means 'to replace the typical conflict frame of win–lose with a win–win frame' (Maoz 2004a: 233).

Academics, such as Ronald Fisher (1983, 1989, 1997a, 1997b, 2001), Azar (1990, 2002) and many others, as well as former diplomats, including Montville (1990a) and Saunders (1999), received funding to hold dialogues involving officials and molders of elite opinion related to the Arab–Israeli conflict, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, the Balkans, Cyprus, Sierra Leone, and many other regions.

In parallel, law school faculty entered the field of international negotiation, also promoting elite dialogues and workshops, couched in the discourse of law and legal philosophy. As in the case of social-psychologists, the law-based theories and models assumed, without analysis or evidence, that they could simply transfer conflict amelioration techniques and experience from family, business and other contexts to international political and identity conflicts. In 1983, Professor Roger Fisher founded the Project on Negotiation (PON) within the Harvard Law School, and with William Ury, published its manifesto, *Getting To Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (1981), which combined the tools of rational decision making, social-psychology and contact theory. Like Kelman's PICAR program, PON also began raising funds and conducting workshops related to a number of international and ethno-national conflicts, including the Middle East.

Pre-negotiation and transformation of elite perception

Theories of attitude change as a key part of conflict resolution are inherently linked to stages of the transformation process, with a particular emphasis on the pre-negotiation phase. As Schiff (2008: 389) has noted, 'the pre-negotiation process is designed to change the beliefs and expectations of decision-makers, thereby enabling them to consider options entailing negotiations and compromise. A change in beliefs and expectations, or the absence thereof, is assumed to be critical for the success or failure of subsequent negotiations' (citing Bercovitch 1991; Druckman and Hopmann 1989; Zartman 1996).

Pre-negotiation in ethno-national conflicts is expected to begin after significant events, such as a major war resulting in a mutually hurting stalemate. Other models consider the potential for positive changes in the form of mutually enticing opportunities, leading to pre-negotiation (Stein 1989; Zartman 1989; Mitchell 1996). At this stage, the conflicting parties, often with the assistance of a mediator, begin to consider alternatives to the ongoing zero-sum conflict, and signal a willingness to explore compromise win–win outcomes.

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In the pre-negotiation stages, analysts such as Mitchell (1996) emphasize the importance of developing 'internal ripeness' for compromise and attitude change at the societal level. Schiff (2008: 389) observes that '[t]he required change in the beliefs and expectations is effected through several functions', including 'establishing mechanisms that facilitate perceptual changes', building mutual trust, and granting legitimacy.

The process of transforming a 'winning mentality to a conciliating mentality', to use Zartman's terminology (1989), is often seen as requiring active third-party involvement. Third parties – diplomats or academic practitioners, for example – assume activist roles, seeking 'to provide the setting, create the atmosphere, establish the norms, and offer occasional interventions that make it possible for such a process to evolve' (Kelman 1992: 65 cited by Schiff 2010; Maoz 2005). In structured frameworks, the cross-group interactions are intentionally controlled and manipulated in order to 'influence perceptions, opinions, and reactions' (Maoz 2004a).

In another variation, track-two dialogues are a form of unofficial or semi-official diplomacy, in which elites and opinion leaders from opposing sides in international conflicts meet to discuss substance. As Schiff (2010) has shown, the objective of such activities is 'to trigger changes in relationships and perceptions that are essential for disputants to recognize the necessity of an official negotiation process, especially in ethno-national or identity conflicts' (citing Davidson and Montville 1981: 145–157).

The participants are expected to focus on 'developing strategies, influencing public opinions, and organizing human and material resources in ways that might help resolve the conflict' (Montville 1991: 262; Saunders 1999, 2001). 'The assumption is that if the conflicting parties overcome their psychological obstacles to negotiation, they will consent to meet for official negotiations and will conduct such negotiations on the basis of shared interests, which is an essential element in conflict resolution' (Schiff 2010 citing Burton 1969, 1987; Kelman 1987; Montville 1990b).

Many of the properties associated with ripeness, pre-negotiation and associated contact-based peacebuilding activities remain ambiguous. In the Sri Lankan and Israeli–Palestinian frameworks, for example, the fact that dialogues between officials or elites were taking place was used to claim ripeness. When these discussions broke down, and violent conflict resumed or increased, the absence of impact from dialogues and other contact-related activities became clear.

In some cases, third-party involvement has gone beyond indirect encouragement of dialogue. For example, after failing to persuade top Israeli and Palestinian leaders to meet and 'overcome their psychological obstacles' under his direction, Kelman took the role of practitioner-scholar to an extreme by meeting directly and publically with PLO leader Yassir Arafat in 1983. Kelman gained a great deal of publicity for himself by publishing his 'professional analysis' in an academic journal, claiming that Arafat had changed, and was signaling a readiness for peace. To Israeli and other skeptics, Kelman explained 'the continuing ambiguity and inconsistency of these signals' (including ongoing terror attacks) as resulting from 'political and psychological' factors. 'Analysis of Arafat's cognitive style and image of the enemy, as revealed in two lengthy conversations with the author, reinforces the hypothesis that he has the capacity and will negotiate an agreement with Israel, based on mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence, if offered necessary incentives and reassurances' (Kelman 1983: 203). In this way, Kelman placed himself directly at the center of the Israeli–Palestinian relationship, substituting

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his personal aspirations and hopes for those of the protagonists, in a highly counter-productive manner. Twenty years later, after failed peace efforts and extensive violence, nothing remained of Kelman's 'academic' analysis of Arafat (Ross 2004) and Israeli contacts were largely confined to fringe groups (Seliktar 2009: 13–14).

Among the reasons for such direct involvement, academic practitioners often refer to the need for symmetry in power relations in order to change attitudes in conflict situations, based on Allport's emphasis on equal status. In this framework, third parties are encouraged to act as artificial power balancers by aiding the weaker parties in order to promote attitude change and other peacebuilding processes (Rouhana and Korper 1997; Maoz 2004b). Among some researchers in the field of peacebuilding, this emphasis is reinforced by post-colonial ideology in which power is associated with aggression, and weakness is linked to morality and victimhood (Steinberg 2007).

However, assessing relative power is highly subjective, and the conflicting parties compete to present themselves as weak and threatened by the power advantage of the other, in order to gain the support of third parties. Different forms of power include military capabilities, including standing armies, advanced technology, and asymmetric warfare; economics, demographics, alliances, and 'soft power' dimensions. With the exception of extreme cases, such as South Africa under apartheid, there are no reliable and accepted measures for comparing between these dimensions. As a result, peacebuilding models that give significant weight to perceived power imbalances, as well as efforts to intervene in order to offset such perceptions, are highly problematic.

Bottom-up approaches and people-to-people (P2P) programs

As the number and extent of peacebuilding workshops and dialogues increased, without noticeable reductions in intergroup violence, some analysts recognized that the narrow focus on elite activities was insufficient to resolve protracted religious, ethno-national and other forms of identity conflicts. To supplement the elite or top-down exchanges, bottom-up forms of interaction and contact were developed in order to change social attitudes and perceptions at the societal levels. Theorists argued that without extensive support for concessions and compromises with the enemy, agreements among leaders would be readily undermined by 'spoilers' and would not stand the test of time.

This diagnosis led to efforts to promote the wider societal transformations viewed as necessary for resolving religious, ethno-national and other forms of identity conflicts, in the form of unofficial diplomacy, and 'people to people' (P2P) or grass-roots activities. Such processes were expected to create the broad empathy and understanding necessary to cut across the divisions, thereby, according to the theory, promoting collective attitude changes necessary for peace (Chigas 2007: 559–560).

A number of P2P workshops were held after the Rwandan genocide, bringing Hutus and Tutsis together 'to promote psychological healing from the traumatic effects of the genocide as well as skills in promoting healing in others … [and] more broadly, a more positive orientation toward members of the other group' (Staub and Pearlman 2000). Similar programs were held in the context of the East Timor and other ethno-national conflicts.

During the Palestinian–Israeli Oslo Process (1993–2000), P2P was given a central role in peacemaking, with funding from the governments of Norway, the US, European

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governments and elsewhere. 'Its goal was to cultivate grassroots contacts between Israeli and Palestinian civil societies and lay the foundations for a culture of peace and coexistence. People-to-People appeared in the context of an attempt to change the dehumanized and stereotyped perceptions of "the other" society and nurture empathy, personalization and recognition of each others' goals and needs' (Perlman and Nasser-Najjab 2006). According to one study published in 2004, over 275 'contact programs' involving Jewish and Arab–Israelis were being conducted in this period, and designed to involve different age groups, professions, etc. (Abu-Nimer 2004: 406). Activities included sports encounters, joint theater and art-oriented programs, 'peace radio' stations, and other formats.

A number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and quasi-autonomous NGOs (QUANGOs) promoting similar agendas often received funding to hold P2P workshops and dialogues, including PRIO (Peace Research Institute Oslo) which is supported by the government of Norway, and Search for Common Ground, which is based in the United States. The organizations involved, as well as their funding agencies, tend to promote themselves and advertise their achievements, without independent evaluation.

Despite the extent of such activities, no concrete and measurable impact has been discerned. Peacebuilding based on P2P and unofficial diplomacy share many of the limitations found in the elite level application of contact theory in the context of intense identity conflicts and violence. Attitude changes of individuals are difficult to measure, time-limited, and generally confined to a very small group of self-selected participants. There are fundamental and inherent problems in transforming micro-level changes in perceptions, attitudes, and policy positions towards the conflict, to the extent that they occur, into macro-level political changes (Schiff 2010 citing Burton 1987; Kelman 2000, 2002; Azar 2002; Fisher and Kelman 2003; Fisher 2007).

Many P2P programs placed a particular emphasis on bringing together students from opposing sides in international conflicts, in order to equip the next generation with the tools for conflict resolution, as imagined in the social-psychological approach (Connolly, Fitzpatrick, Gallagher and Harris 2006). Harvard Law School's 'Middle East Negotiation Initiative' includes a major negotiation skills training program for Jewish and Arab students (Harvard PON 2012).

The 'Seeds of Peace' program was one of the largest (in terms of number of participants) and most publicized youth-oriented P2P projects based on the contact hypothesis. Its founding paralleled the 1993 Oslo agreements (the Declaration of Principles) between the Israeli and the Palestinian leadership. The stated objective was 'to give Arab and Israeli youngsters the opportunity to look at the world afresh, to rise above the hatreds of their elders, and to develop a shared desire to create a new world free of hostility and violence' (Richard Solomon in Wallach 2000: ix).

This framework involved bringing 'hundreds of youngsters from very different backgrounds living, playing, and working together for three weeks in the beautiful woods of Maine' (Wallach 2000: ix). In the three-week program, campers were expected to discover 'how much they have to gain by building the friendships that are the seeds of a constructive future'. The interactions involved sporting events (teams were composed of participants from the opposing sides) as well as daily 'coexistence sessions' where 'the youngsters argue about their positions and vent their anger and frustration…'. Ignorance

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and misinformation were to be replaced by 'mutual understanding and humanized relationships', discovering a 'shared human reality that transcends differences in background'.

Repeating the claims of the contact hypothesis, Seeds of Peace leaders declared: the simple fact of living with youngsters from the other side 'does much to dispel prejudice' (Wallach 2000: x). If each camper could '"make one friend" with a camper from among the "enemy"', the effort was deemed a success. Stereotypes would break down 'when you actually learn to like them, share personal secrets, or find common ground' (Wallach 2000: xi).

As is the case with many such programs, no methodology was applied to assess results (see the generalized analysis below). Organizers declared that 'the Seeds of Peace program has received remarkable results. Almost everyone who learns about this program finds Seeds of Peace inspiring. Even hardened politicians, skeptical diplomats, and world-weary journalists find themselves sensing a more hopeful future …' (Wallach 2000: ix).

However, in the absence of detailed evidence of success and systematic evaluation, such claims cannot be taken at face value. Indeed, as the conflicts continue at many levels, the impacts of such programs are difficult to discern. The inspiration to overcome differences and make peace, inculcated during two decades of programming – the earliest participants are now adults – and involving thousands of individuals had no measurable impact on the conflicts. Even if hundreds, or even thousands of individuals had undergone significant and long-lasting attitudinal changes, these failed to influence millions or tens of millions of citizens on the two sides of the numerous conflicts.

Reconciliation, forgiveness and peacebuilding

A further extension of the bottom-up social-psychological and contact hypothesis approach to peacebuilding is reflected in the application of theories of victimhood, forgiveness and reconciliation in international conflict. In a skeptical observation, Hermann (2004: 40) notes that 'the most salient term that conflict-resolution experts have recently elaborated … is that of "reconciliation" … as the panacea that can rescue us from the shortcomings of the theories and practical blueprints for getting from war to peace'.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, applied during the transition from apartheid in South Africa, is often cited as a highly successful demonstration. Under this mechanism, individuals on all sides of the conflict were given 'the chance to express their regret at failing to prevent human rights violations and to demonstrate their commitment to reconciliation. … Guilt for wrongdoing needs to be translated into positive commitment to building a better society – the healthiest and most productive form of atonement' (South Africa Ministry of Justice 1995). Expanding from this experience, various forms of 'truth and reconciliation' processes have been proposed and, in some cases, applied to a variety of other peacebuilding efforts, including Rwanda, the Balkans, and Colombia (Hayner 2001; Schaap 2007).

This approach is an extension of the collective (rather than elite-based) people-to-people approach to attitude change in international conflict resolution, with a particular emphasis on claims of historical injustice and efforts to promote forgiveness and reconciliation. Joseph Montville (1989) wrote of a 'healing function' to reverse the

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impact of 'victimhood' and trauma among populations involved in political conflicts. 'After well over a decade as a practitioner [in the US State Department] and theorist in political conflict resolution, the author is convinced that healing and reconciliation in violent ethnic and religious conflicts depend on a process of transactional contrition and forgiveness between aggressors and victims which is indispensable to the establishment of a mutual acceptance and reasonable trust. This process depends on joint analysis of the history of the conflict, recognition of injustices and resulting historic wounds, and acceptance of moral responsibility where due' (Montville 1993: 112).

Similarly, Lederach (1997) published a model of peace based on 'truth (open expression of the past); mercy (forgiveness); justice (restitution and social restructuring); and peace (common future, well being, and security for all the parties)'. Kelman (1999) revised his social-psychological approach by publishing a model of 'positive peace' which incorporated reconciliation.

Amidst a myriad of definitions, Maoz (2004a: 225) sought to bring clarity to the concept: '[r]econciliation is a cluster of cognitive and emotional processes through which individuals, groups, societies and states come to accept relationships of cooperation, concession and peace in situations of former conflict' (Azar et al., 1999; Staub and Pearlman 2000; Bar-Tal 2000; Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004; Maoz 2000; Miari 1999; Kriesberg 1998). Public acts and ceremonies, highlighting the reconciliation theme, are important elements in many models (Bargal and Sivan 2004). But, Hermann questions the degree to which leaders are able to 'repent or forgive for the body politic they represent' (2004: 43).

Furthermore, the context of South African apartheid was unique, with universally acknowledged injustices, and most attempts to generalize from this case ignore the details. In contrast, in most international, ethno-national and religious conflicts, such as in Northern Ireland, Cyprus, the Middle East, the Balkans, Armenia and Azerbijan, Turks and Kurds, etc., each group claims victimhood and their respective narratives attribute aggressor status to the enemies. These labels, and the processes of forgiveness and building of trust, then become additional arenas for conflict.

Thus, as Hermann (2004) demonstrates, 'the notion of reconciliation cannot serve as the key concept for cracking the enigma of peacemaking and peace stabilizing'. The definitions and frameworks are highly variable, making 'reconciliation little more than a buzzword, an amenable but loose framework for different contents depending on the user's disciplinary affiliation, cultural background, or the particularities of the cases at hand' (Hermann 2004: 41).

In practice, and given the differences in historical narratives and perceptions of justice, the attempts to implement such processes can be counterproductive, themselves generating additional conflict rather than the reverse (Schimmel 2004; Hamburger 1994; Hanssen 2001).

Beyond enthusiasm: Downsizing expectations

Efforts to apply contact hypothesis and wider social-psychological theories to peacebuilding begin with the premise that conflict resolution techniques used in families and business disputes are readily transferable to complex, protracted and violent ethno-national and religious conflicts. This transfer erases the Hobbesian 'state of nature' and

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inherent anarchy of international relations, as well as the degree to which collective religious, ethnic and other affinities and hatreds are fundamentally different from other conflict frameworks. This reality cannot be overcome primarily through dialogue, understanding and 'talking to the enemy', whether at the elite or grass-roots levels.

In examining this approach, Pettigrew (2011: 185) acknowledges that 'institutions and societies are social systems and, as such, are more than the sum of their individual parts. Moreover, macro-units, too, have unique properties of their own … For instance, when psychoanalysts discuss the individual's proclivities for aggression and violence and then extrapolate these insights onto the problems of war and societal violence, they are committing a gross example of the compositional fallacy'.

However, such honest assessments are unusual, and in many cases, many proponents of contact-based peacebuilding, in its various forms, substitute enthusiasm for independent, systematic and falsifiable evaluation methodologies necessary to test the claims and results of related activities. And in the cases in which rigorous evaluations are used to measure attitude change among participants, the results are very limited (Maoz 2004b, 2011). As in the case of public opinion polls and similar techniques, the degree to which questionnaires and interviews provide meaningful measures of political attitudes in a conflict situation is the subject of intense debate.

Beyond the question of reliability, most evaluations, including those provided by Maoz, only seek to measure attitude changes at the particular time of the contact activity, and do not provide any indication of long-term impacts. These are found to generally erode over time, in what is known as the 'sustainability' problem in applying the contact hypothesis.

In addition, most studies of attitude change in protracted political conflicts were based on artificial situations, in which different groups were brought together under laboratory conditions (Hanssen 2001). Results claimed in these situations have not been duplicated among general populations, or in 'natural' settings involving cross-cultural communication and interaction (Hanssen 2001; Dixon et al., 2005; Maoz 2004b). Analyses have shown that new friends from 'the other side' are regarded as special and atypical, while the group stereotypes and generalizations remain (Hamburger 1994).

The self-selection of participants in people-to-people dialogues and workshops in conflict environments is another limitation that is generally overlooked. Volunteers for such frameworks are predisposed towards communication with and positive images of 'the other' from the beginning, while others without these views are not interested in, and are generally not invited to participate in these frameworks (Hermann 2004; Hanssen 2001).

Elite-based processes focusing on attitude change involving decision makers and opinion leaders – politicians, journalists, academics, teachers, etc. – are designed to overcome these limitations through micro- to macro-level 'spillover'. But there is little evidence for such spillover and general impact confidence building (Steinberg 2004). The meager impacts on peacebuilding from hundreds of workshops, dialogues, people-to-people activities, and similar efforts to effect attitude change, validates these observations.

In contrast, Northern Ireland stands out as an example that would seem to demonstrate that under certain circumstances, extensive contact activities at different levels can contribute significantly to peacebuilding. Fitzduff (1996, 2002) and others

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point to thousands of contact programs promoting 'pre-political dialogue', in which participants exchanged views on 'issues of mutual concern'. Elites from the opposing communities engaged in 'tough dialogues' to prepare their constituencies for compromise. Initiative 92 'received over five hundred submissions from people and groups in Northern Ireland'. Churches facilitated tolerance through social action, 'shared Bible study groups, inter-denominational worship, joint services and demonstrations following murders, participation in cross-community justice groups, setting up inter-denominational clergy groups and inviting clergy of other denominations to preach in their churches'. In parallel, business groups and trade unions promoted similar agendas and activities (Fitzduff 2002; Church and Visser 2001; Pollak 1993; Nelson 2000; Cairns 2000; O'Halloran and McIntyre 1999).

The claims made by Fitzduff (2002) and others that these activities were the fundamental reasons for success are not supported by rigorous and falsifiable analysis. Indeed, as Mac Ginty (2010) has noted, the periodic eruption of cross-group violence, years after the 1998 referendum (seen as the official end of the conflict), reflects ongoing grievances, 'persistent low-level intergroup hate crime … and growing sectarianism'. In the absence of detailed evaluations based on appropriate methodologies in order to attribute cause and effect, such conclusions are subjective and do not provide guidance in applying the techniques in other conflicts. Many factors were at work in Northern Ireland, including wide-spread economic incentives involving the European Union (Dougal 2005), as well as intense British military actions and the policies of the Irish Republic and the US Government in bringing pressure on the IRA to end its use of violence and accept compromise. Based on this evidence, the rational actor model can explain a great deal of the policies and changes in the Northern Ireland peace process.

At the same time, there is also no basis for excluding the possibility of significant impacts from the cross-community dialogues and cooperative projects in Northern Ireland. Widespread changes in attitudes, perceptions and stereotypes can be considered necessary, although not sufficient and perhaps also not primary conditions for the reduction in violence and promotion of peace efforts in protracted identity conflicts. Clearly, far more detailed, systematic and falsifiable evaluations are needed in order to reach substantive conclusions regarding the impact of contact-related processes in protracted identity conflicts.

In dealing with such complex environments, with many variables and very little information on processes, academics from different disciplines would be well advised to proceed with caution. As noted in the case of Kelman and others, enthusiasm has blinded many observer-practitioners to the need for systematic, appropriate and independent evaluation methodologies. As in all areas of academic endeavor, theories such as peace studies, international negotiation, and diplomacy require methods that can distinguish useful, if modest results, from barren and even counterproductive efforts.

However, in voicing these criticisms, it is also important not to exaggerate them. The reality of intractable conflict in many regions does not exclude a positive role for dialogues, particularly in pursuing the less ambitious but more realistic objective of conflict management within the Hobbesian framework. In such situations, in which intense core disputes over territory, history, power, and justice continue, a ceasefire based on mutual deterrence can be supported by dialogue and 'agreeing to disagree' on narratives. Perhaps this is a more realistic view of Northern Ireland, and may explain the

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situation in Cyprus, Ngorno-Karabakh, and relations between Israel and the Palestinian West Bank. Through cross-cultural communications, workshops, low-profile joint economic enterprises, track-two discussions, and similar exercises, shaky ceasefires can be strengthened and extended. While short of peace treaties that mark the 'end of conflict', such limited aspirations replace messianism with more realistic goals.

After a long career in international negotiation, Harold Saunders (1999: 4–5) urges fellow diplomats and would-be peacemakers to focus on 'the human dimension'. This is still important advice, if taken in a broader context. The failed history of peacebuilding clearly shows that in the context of intense and protracted conflict, the 'common human dimension' is insufficient to make the transition from war to peace. But with a more modest agenda, accompanied by rigorous evaluation methodologies, diplomats, academics and practitioners might play a positive role in helping to manage ethno-national, religious and other forms of identity conflicts.

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