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Reconstructing Ripeness I: A Study of Constructive Engagement in Protracted Social Conflicts

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What moves people to work with each other rather than against each other when locked into destructive, long-term conflicts? Ripeness theory has been a useful starting point for understanding such motives, but has limited explanatory power under conditions of intractable conflict. This article is the first of a two-part series presenting the findings from a study that explored various methods of eliciting constructive engagement from stakeholders through interviews with expert scholar-practitioners working with protracted conflicts. A grounded theory analysis was applied to the interviews to allow new insights into constructive conflict engagement to emerge from the data. Our objective was to develop more robust theories and practices. A dynamical systems synthesis of the findings is presented, and its implications for reconceptualizing ripeness are discussed.

Militant Sunni Arabs had tried turning this year's event into a death march, using bombs and bullets to kill at least 150 pilgrims on the road this week. But it seemed that the more they tried to wipe out the Shiites, the more the Shiites were determined to come.

*Edward Wong, New York Times,
March 11, 2007*

The importance and difficulty of facilitating and sustaining constructive forms of conflict engagement from the multitude of decision makers and stakeholders caught up in situations of protracted conflict cannot be overstated. Ripeness theory (Zartman, 1989, 2000, 2001) has been a useful starting point for understanding the conditions under which people in conflict agree to stop fighting and negotiate. However, the theory has limited explanatory power, particularly under conditions of complex, seemingly intractable conflict. Yet even in these dire and dangerous situations, people and groups do move from war to peace. The question is why and under what conditions?

Conflict resolution practitioners working in the field to bring people together across warring divides present us with a wealth of information and insight into this basic challenge of peacemaking. This study, presented in two parts, aims to elicit this knowledge for theory and practice. Here we present the conceptual findings of our analysis of in-depth interviews with seventeen experts experienced in working with disputants in situations of seemingly intractable conflict. A grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis was employed, which can help ground current thinking on ripeness and conflict resolution in the experiences of practitioners working directly with protracted conflicts. Specifically, our study focused on the problem of getting the necessary stakeholders to a conflict actively involved in constructive, nonviolent processes and ultimately maintaining their commitment to such processes. The next article will present the practical methods employed by our experts to foster ripeness and constructive engagement. Through this research, we hope to better comprehend the nature of the underlying motives and constraints involved in different stakeholders' decisions and actions surrounding constructive forms of conflict engagement.

Ripeness Theory

Ripeness theory is one of the most influential theories of motivation and conflict resolution in the field today (see Goodby, 1996; Greig, 2001; Haass, 1990; Kleiboer, 1994; Mitchell, 1995; Mooradian and Druckman, 1999; Pruitt, 1997, 2003, 2005, 2007; Zartman, 1989, 2000, 2001). It offers a metaphor for understanding disputant motivation to resolve conflict that centers on an image of "ripe moments" for negotiation, which is easy to understand and seems to resonate with many practitioners in the

field (Zartman, 2000). As a theory it is parsimonious, elegant, and grounded in case material.

This theory centers on the construct of *ripeness*—a necessary but insufficient condition that is directly linked to the decision to negotiate with an opponent in conflict. This condition is thought to be brought about by the perception of two essential elements: a mutually hurting stalemate (MHS) between the parties, coupled with a mutually enticing opportunity (MEO) to gain a more favorable outcome in the conflict. Zartman (2000) writes: “The concept of a ripe moment centers on the parties’ perception of a mutually hurting stalemate (MHS), optimally associated with an impending, past, or recently avoided catastrophe. . . . The other element necessary for a ripe moment is . . . the perception of a way out, . . . a sense that a negotiated solution is possible for the searching and that the other party shares that sense and the willingness to search too” (p. 228).

The theory proposes that when parties find themselves on a “pain-producing path,” they begin to look for alternatives that are less painful and more advantageous (Zartman, 2000, p. 229). If such an alternative is discovered, they will be moved to seek it out. Thus, ripeness is based on two core motives: pain and opportunities to escape from pain. It is depicted as a state that may or may not exist objectively, but that must be perceived to mutually exist by parties in order for it to motivate. This state can occur either naturally, as the result of external events, or be induced, as by active intervention from parties or third parties. The theory has attracted a good deal of attention from scholars over the past two decades and has received some empirical support (see Mooradian and Druckman, 1999, for excellent examples).

However, as useful and influential as ripeness theory may be, it has its limitations and has been criticized on several fronts (Greig, 2001; Zartman, 2000, Pruitt, 1997; Kleiboer, 1994). Following is a summary of the main limitations and critiques of the theory:

- *A passive metaphor.* The notion of ripeness is often automatically associated with the naturally occurring maturation of fruit (as in “ripe for the picking”), which is seen as primarily determined by external circumstances. Some have suggested that this image (and the theory) incorrectly emphasize external conditions and timing, and underestimate the role of human agency and intervention in creating such conditions (Rubin, 1991).

- *Economically rational cost-benefit assumptions.* As Zartman (2000) states: “The basic reasoning underlying the MHS lies in cost-benefit analysis . . . which assume(s) that a party will pick the alternative it prefers and that a decision to change is induced by means of increasing pain” (p. 229). This form of rationality, though an accurate description of economic forms of decision making in conflict, does not account for other types of decisions (such as social, emotional, and legal decisions) relevant to conflict and peace (see Diesing, 1962; Deutsch, 1985). For instance, decisions related to maintaining group cohesiveness and solidarity typically use a very different set of criteria from decisions to maximize outcomes or achieve goals efficiently.

- *A state, not a variable.* Ripeness theory presents ripeness as a dichotomous state—as ripe or unripe—as opposed to a continuous variable, which might be positively associated with a willingness to negotiate (Pruitt, 1997). This dichotomy contributes to the parsimony of the model, but limits its explanatory power.

- *Assumes joint states.* The elements of ripeness are conceived to be joint states that simultaneously affect both parties to a conflict (*mutually* hurting stalemates and enticing opportunities). This assumption does not allow for the possibility of uneven states of ripeness such as those described in theories of unilateral conciliatory initiatives (Pruitt, 1997).

- *Limited to the individual level.* Ripeness theory focuses on the proximal antecedents of strategic decision making at the individual level (MHSs and MEOs), but neglects the importance of distal (or environmental) variables, whose effects are presumed to be mediated by the proximal antecedents (Pruitt, 1997). Additionally, its main focus is on ripeness of top-down decision makers and neglects the critical roles played by the readiness of midlevel and grassroots leaders, as well as by the general population in peace processes (Lederach, 1997; Stover, 2002). Others have referred to this focus as the missing political dimension in ripeness theory (Haass, 1990; Hancock, 2001; Stedman, 1991).

- *Limited to phases of entry.* Ripeness theory has concentrated primarily on predicting entry into negotiations and has neglected to examine the relationship between entry, commitment, and sustainability of agreements. Although recent iterations of the theory suggest that ripeness may encourage the continuation of negotiation once begun (Zartman, 2000), this is speculative. Furthermore, agreements based on MHSs are believed to be particularly unstable (Zartman, 2000). In fact, research has shown that the

factors conducive to reaching short-term agreements differ substantially from those that promote long-term improvement between enduring rivals (Greig, 2001).

- *Inapplicable with “true believer” conflicts.* Zartman (2000) has suggested that when conflicts involve “true believers” and “true believer cultures,” the mechanisms of MHSs are their own undoing. He writes: “Parties thinking as true believers are unlikely to be led to compromise by increased pain; instead, pain is likely to justify renewed struggle” (p. 239).

Thus, ripeness theory, like many theories in the social sciences, is limited conceptually and narrow in its explanatory scope. It is limited in focus to mutually coexisting states of top-down decision makers and therefore neglects the role of unilateral states of ripeness or bottom-up, emergent changes in the political climate of groups. In particular, it offers limited predictive value under conditions where noneconomic forms of reasoning motivate disputants or where experiences of pain and sacrifice are construed as noble and thereby sustain the conflict.

In recent years Pruitt (1997, 2003, 2007) has proposed a psychological recasting of ripeness theory, which he labeled *readiness theory*. Readiness theory employs the language of variables rather than necessary states and focuses on the motives and perceptions of individual actors, rather than on the joint psychological states of MHSs and MEOs. Pruitt’s revision allows for the testing of factors that lead to changes in degrees of readiness and can be extended to make predictions about other conflict outcomes such as concession making, agreement, compliance, and third-party intervention. In addition, Pruitt extends the scope of his theory by linking it to his *central coalition model*, which gauges political ripeness by the degree to which different groups along a political spectrum (from doves to hawks) are ripe for resolution. In this way Pruitt has begun to address some of the limitations of the original formulation of ripeness theory.

Nevertheless, we contend that a motivational model of human behavior in conflict that focuses exclusively on pain and its avoidance is too restrictive. Such a focus, no matter how salient in conflict, neglects the many other motives and constraints that may serve to motivate or inhibit stakeholders in settings of protracted conflict. In particular, it ignores the critical role that promotional motives may play, such as needs or desires for nurturance, growth, connection, cooperation, and peace (for similar discussions, see Higgins, 1997, and Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski, 1997).

These motives are central to various alternative “reconciliation” theories, which argue that conflicts move toward resolution as a result of influences such as superordinate goals, basic need satisfaction, relationship repair, and other third-party initiatives (see Deutsch, 1973; Fisher, 1997; Kelman, 1986; Lederach, 1997; Rubin, 1991; Sherif, 2001). Thus, a fuller characterization is needed of the motives and constraints operating in negotiation and other forms of constructive engagement in conflict.

In addition, given the realities of ethno-political conflict today (see Mack and Nielsen, 2005; Marshall and Gurr, 2005), we suggest that it is time to extend our understanding of ripeness and readiness beyond elite decision makers to include members of other stakeholder groups relevant to peace. Once we begin broadening our sense of these processes beyond the initial decision to enter negotiations, we can better comprehend the decisions and actions to engage constructively throughout the life cycle of conflict.

Study Rationale

In response to the conceptual limitations of ripeness theory, we conducted an exploratory study with the objective of developing more comprehensive theoretical and practical models for conceptualizing and fostering constructive engagement in protracted conflicts. In service of this goal, we examined a variety of models and methods of eliciting constructive engagement currently being employed with different groups in conflict by scholar-practitioners in the fields of conflict resolution and peacemaking. We were interested in furthering our understanding of the implicit theories, motivational assumptions, and strategies used by a variety of experts working to constructively engage parties polarized by seemingly intractable conflicts. Specifically, this research sought to explore the problem of engaging disputants and other necessary stakeholders in constructive, nonviolent processes and maintaining their commitment to such processes. Recognizing that prolonged social conflicts often involve many disparate groups (such as the elite, marginalized groups, extremists, the mainstream public, and so on), we sought to understand the distinct strategies used to engage members of these different groups. *Our primary aim was to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon of constructive engagement in protracted conflict for the purpose of developing more robust theories and practices.* To this end, we explored three main questions:

1. What are the implicit and explicit *conceptual models* of people working with intractable conflict for engaging disputants constructively and sustaining their involvement?
2. What are the *practical strategies* and *tactics* employed by practitioners for engaging disputants and stakeholders in a constructive process?
3. What different strategies are utilized for engaging different stakeholder groups? (Examples includes elite groups, midlevel leaders, marginalized groups, extremists, and the mainstream public.)

Methodology

Design. A grounded theory approach to interviews with expert participants was selected as the methodology for the study. Using the conflict resolution and grounded-theory literature, a ten-question semistructured interview schedule was developed to explore the implicit theories, motivational assumptions, and strategies and tactics used by expert practitioners working in protracted conflicts (see the appendix at the end of this article).

Participants. The participants in this study were seventeen expert scholar-practitioners who worked with protracted conflicts in a range of conflict settings: local, domestic, and global (see Exhibit 1). An initial list of participants was generated from the collective experience of the authors. This list was later augmented during the interview process through the nomination of expert colleagues by the interviewees. Several of these nominees were later interviewed. The participants ranged in age from thirty to seventy years, included both male and female experts, and were of varied ethnic background and socioeconomic status. They each signed an information consent form, were informed that their responses would be anonymous, that all information would be kept confidential, and that additional consent would be subsequently requested for attribution if necessary.

Procedure. A trained team of interviewers led the participants through a one-hour, private audiotaped interview that was conducted either face-to-face or by telephone. The interviewer asked participants a series of questions that required them to discuss their experiences, thoughts, and feelings surrounding the strategies and models they use to engage and maintain engagement with different groups (see the appendix at the end of this article). Many of the participants agreed to grant follow-up interviews if they were deemed useful.

Exhibit 1. Expert Participant Profiles

- A former member of the United States Senate and former state judge who has been active in international peace processes for more than ten years
- A lawyer, U.S. diplomat, former international civil servant, development expert, and peace builder concerned about world social, economic, and ethnic problems
- A former high-ranking U.S. diplomat with extensive experience in peace processes while serving in government and since retirement from public service
- A social psychologist and professor emeritus with decades of experience in problem-solving workshops and international peace processes
- The director of an international conflict resolution center at a leading American university and vice president of a nongovernmental organization that facilitates peace processes
- The associate director of a national network that focuses on positive change in race relations
- A conflict-management consultant, mediator, facilitator, trainer, and partner with a nonprofit specializing in methodologies for collaborative decision making and constructive conflict management
- A scholar and practitioner in the field of education law who has been involved in various litigation activities and consulting projects related to law and education
- A consultant working with national organizations that help local communities organize large-scale participation in dialogues and social change activities
- A consultant experienced in organizing, training, and facilitation on issues such as racism, diversity, education, and poverty
- A director of international civil society programs at a leading research institute that specializes in training leadership in civic organizations who writes on mediation, nongovernmental diplomacy, and post-peace building
- A communications professor, author, and leader in the area of intractable conflict who works internationally facilitating peace dialogues
- An environmentalist involved with innovative, science-based work in landscape assessment, design, and policy making
- An associate of a national organization that helps local communities organize large-scale, diverse participation in dialogue structured to support and strengthen measurable community change
- An associate of a national organization that aims to create just and inclusive communities through reconciliation among racial, ethnic, and religious groups
- The founder of a program that brings people together to talk about race relations problems in their community
- An associate of a nonprofit organization that provides research bridging the gap between U.S. leaders and public opinion on issues ranging from education to foreign policy, immigration, and religion

Grounded Theory Coding Analysis. Analysis of the interview data for this study proceeded in three stages. Recognizing the complexity of the domain being researched (intractable conflict), we decided to use a data analysis procedure that would gather implicit as well as explicit types of information from the respondents' narratives. Thus, in the first stage a grounded theory analysis was used to allow trends in the data to emerge without the premature imposition of a priori categories or definitions (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; and Charmaz, 1990, 1995, for more detailed explanations of the grounded theory method). The interview transcripts were divided into *meaning segments* on a line-by-line (often single-sentence) basis, and five aspects of each meaning segment of text were examined. Each segment was analyzed to understand the (1) stated explanation of actions, (2) unstated assumptions (implicit meanings and concerns), (3) intentions, (4) effects on others, and (5) other consequences. One interview transcript was initially coded at this level of analysis by four researchers and then discussed in detail to reach consensus on the coding process. Subsequently, three additional interviews were coded line by line by individual researchers, and then the findings were discussed in the four-person team. Through these initial coding sessions, a set of thirty-nine superordinate categories emerged, which characterized the content of the data (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. Grounded Theory Coding Categories

1. The paradox of peacemaker commitment
2. Role and dimensions of trust
3. The paradox of finding a negotiable agenda in intractable conflict
4. Costs and benefits of the academic metaphor for peace work
5. Strengths and weaknesses of networking methodologies
6. Constructing the parties (conflict system) or managing the object problem
7. Open systems dilemmas
8. Time dilemmas (sufficient yet feasible)
9. Problem orientation (problem-solving workshops) versus possibility orientation (promotion): implications for processes, outcomes, and engagement
10. Public versus private process dilemmas
11. Learning versus action (interaction)
12. Egocentric versus sociocentric peace processes
13. The paradoxes of nondirective versus directive change

(Continued)

14. Impact on dynamics of outcome orientation versus process orientation
 15. Operating within a political (and polarized) context: role of moderates
 16. Role of context
 17. Envisioning the system
 18. Dimensions of influence
 19. Individual learning objective (motivates change)
 20. Addressing multiple constraints
 21. Planned versus emergent outcomes and changes
 22. Incremental versus revolutionary change
 23. Internal versus external forces pushing parties to engage
 24. Maintaining the balance of power between parties
 25. The privileging of articulate members (whether orally or in writing)
 26. How intervenors' notions of *resolution* versus *coexistence* affect the processes
 27. Addressing intragroup differences
 28. Holding onto contradiction and ambivalence
 29. Importance of keeping hope alive
 30. How the values of a process limit who can engage
 31. Prioritizing the reduction of fear
 32. Long-term monitoring or guiding
 33. Funding and resources for engaging and sustaining efforts
 34. Witnessing changes (transformations)
 35. Mastering processes or approaches
 36. Self-consciousness of presentation
 37. Capacity struggles
 38. Intervener skills
 39. Strategies and tactics of constructive engagement
-

The second stage of analysis involved content-coding the remaining thirteen interviews based on the categories created in stage 1. The remaining interview transcripts were divided among the team and content-coded by individual researchers. In this phase the meaning segments were defined not line by line, but in larger thematic sections. Regular meetings were conducted to discuss individual transcripts (with all transcripts read by each researcher) and to refine the categories as needed. After all the interviews had been coded, the meaning segments were compiled by category in preparation for the interpretation and analysis conducted in stage 3. Reports consisting of all the coded lines and statements for each of the

thirty-nine categories were created. These reports allowed the researchers to closely examine the themes most frequently identified, as well as to discover potentially novel phenomena.

The third stage of analysis involved the interpretation and integration of the data. In this phase, analysis centered on drawing from the data the models and assumptions held by the practitioners interviewed, as well as the perceived set of motives and constraints operating with regard to various stakeholders in situations of protracted conflict. During this stage, several propositions were identified that best characterized the orientations and operating assumptions of the interviewees regarding constructive engagement.

Results

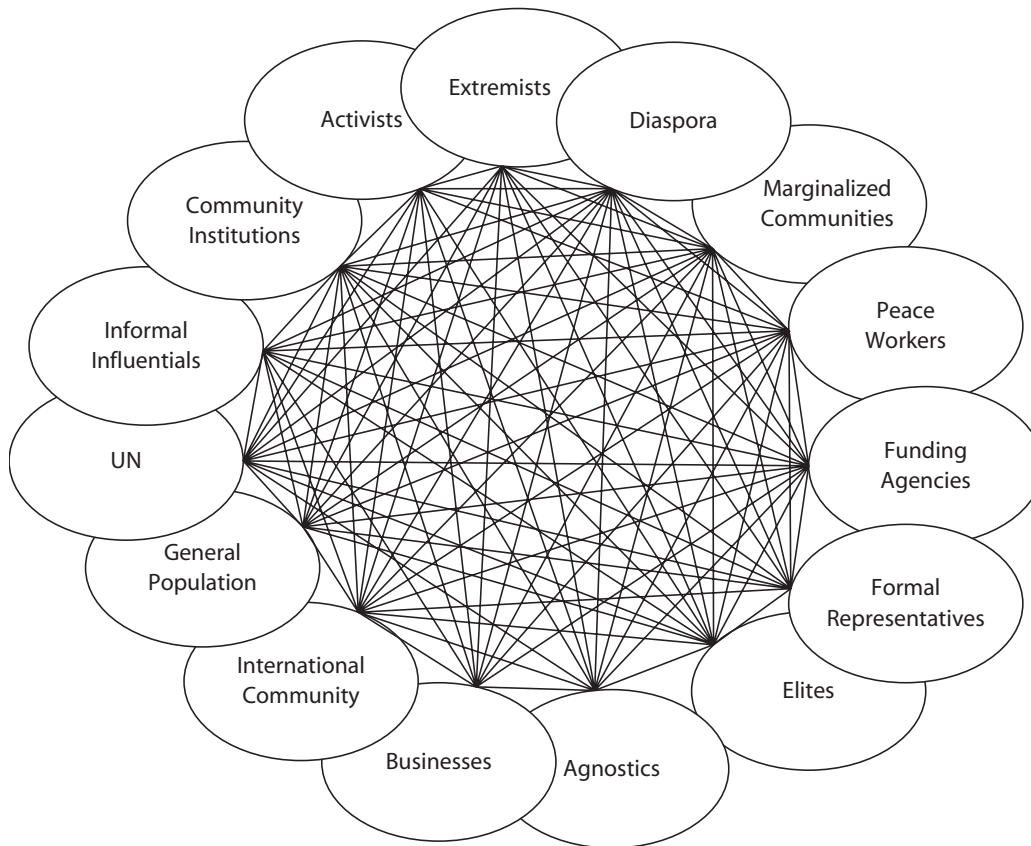
Our grounded theory coding of the expert interviews provided a rich source of data which offered many insights and opportunities for more in-depth study. This section will focus on those aspects of our findings which have the most direct relevance for understanding the nature of the transition from destructive to constructive forms of conflict, and thus for reconceptualizing ripeness in terms of the shift towards constructive conflict engagement. Below, we describe the ten propositions that emerged from our analysis.

A Reorientation of Ripeness: Constructive Engagement

Overall our analysis revealed a set of complex images of both the phenomenon of constructive engagement and the systems of protracted conflict in which it is typically embedded. We found these processes and conditions to be complex in eight ways:

1. *Beyond disputant dyads: Complex stakeholder networks.* Typically, intractable conflicts are described as ongoing struggles between two extremely hostile and polarized groups. In this study, all the participants described the situations in which they worked as involving a multitude of interrelated stakeholder groups that extended far beyond those more readily identified as disputants and third parties (see Figure 1 for an illustration). These included the general population, various marginalized groups, the elite, formal decision makers, funding agencies, extremist groups, important

Figure 1. Example of a Conflict Stakeholder Network



community institutions, governments, the UN, the business and industry communities, activist groups, agnostics (relatively unaware, uninterested, or unwilling groups whose involvement is believed to be critical), and the international community. These stakeholder groups differed considerably by level of power and status in the system, by degree of formal association with the conflict, and by levels of awareness of and interest in the conflict (from highly motivated groups to agnostics). They were at times represented as different “tracks” in the system. As one participant explained, “We talk about nine tracks: . . . government, . . . professional nongovernmental groups, . . . the business community, . . . citizen exchange, . . . research and training, . . . peace activists, . . . religion, . . . funding, . . . and the last track is a circle, which is public communication.” A few of the participants identified third-party interveners as yet another stakeholder group, owing to their interests in fostering a particular type of process (constructive, nonviolent), as well as other interests related to their reputation and funding.

Thus, enduring conflicts, both local and international, were described as involving many interfaces between multiple people and groups of different status and motivation in a web or networklike fashion. In fact, there was some discussion among the experts of a *duration effect*: the longer a conflict persisted, the higher the number of stakeholders drawn into the conflict. This image challenges our more traditional views of bilateral or even multilateral conflicts and peace processes. It suggests a context for the decisions and actions associated with conflict where peacemaking is complex, and encourages us to be mindful of the impact of these many interfaces on individuals and groups when considering stakeholder ripeness and engagement.

PROPOSITION 1. *Decisions and actions regarding conflict engagement in situations of protracted conflict tend to occur within a context involving multiple interfaces between a variety of interdependent stakeholder groups with different interests and differing levels of power and involvement.*

2. *Volatility and stability.* Many participants described working in conflict situations that were paradoxically in a frequent state of flux and turmoil, but where the character of hostilities remained essentially stable. Local conditions, salient issues, key leaders, and power arrangements were at times changing rapidly and tended to be complicated by the multitude of stakeholders involved, which added to a general sense of confusion and hopelessness. However, the general patterns of negativity and group hostilities, though varying in intensity, remained constant. The participants saw these feelings of helplessness and discomfiture as leading to a decreased willingness by disputants to engage peacefully. Consequently, our understanding of the motives underlying peacemaking in protracted conflicts must accommodate both the temporary changes and perturbations inherent to such situations, as well as the more stable aspects of the cognitive and emotional life of the stakeholders.

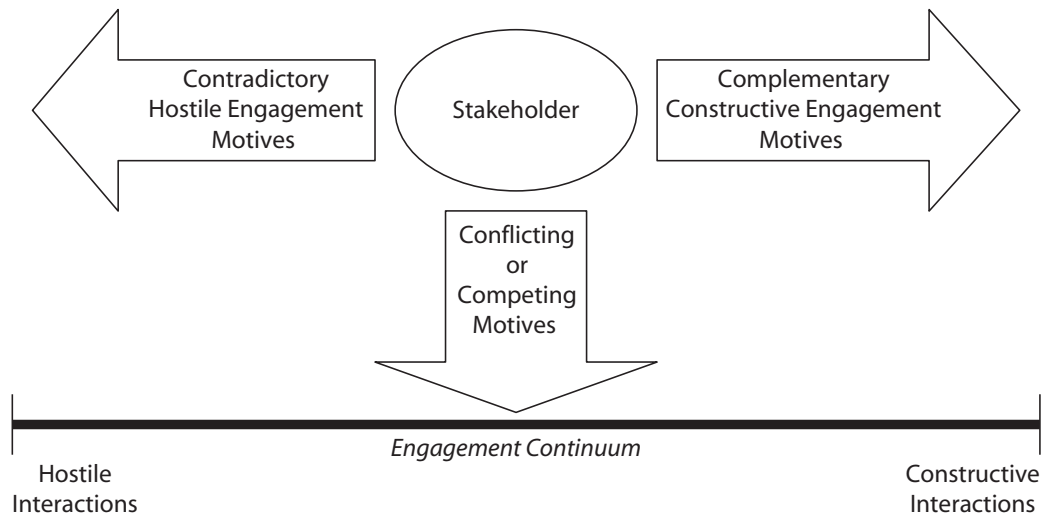
PROPOSITION 2. *Decisions and actions regarding conflict engagement in situations of protracted conflict often occur within a context of flux and turmoil where, paradoxically, hostilities are stable.*

3. *A variety of complementary, competing, and contradictory motives within and between individuals and groups.* The individuals that constitute the many stakeholder groups involved in these conflicts were

described as either motivated to or inhibited from engaging constructively by a complex constellation of complementary, competing, and contradictory motives (see Figure 2). Complementary motives support each other toward similar goals, competing motives contend for attention and can distract, and contradictory motives move against one another. Our analysis identified a total of thirty different motives related to constructive engagement that had been labeled and/or targeted for intervention by our interviewees (see Exhibit 3). They included motives regarding basic and relational needs; emotional motives; needs for agency, inclusion, and power; concerns regarding morality and fairness; and instrumental needs.

These different motives can be experienced simultaneously with other consistent or inconsistent motives, or sequentially when struggling over the many decisions associated with conflict engagement (see Chaiken, Giner-Sorolla, and Chen, 1996). For instance, an individual may be moved to make peace with his enemy because of a trifling but moving encounter he had with a member of the out-group, but may simultaneously be moved to destroy the other due to past atrocities committed by

Figure 2. Types of Motives



Note: Motives that foster constructive engagement are complementary and can move stakeholders along the continuum toward constructive interaction. Motives that encourage hostile engagement are contradictory and move stakeholders toward hostile engagement. When motives compete or conflict with each other, they tend to hold stakeholders in place on the continuum. Stakeholders will move when motivation constellations shift.

Exhibit 3. Constructive Engagement Motives

Basic Needs

- Needs for food, water, shelter, safety, and the like
- A deep desire for a better life
- A need for attention to their plight
- Voice: a need to be heard

Relational Needs

- A need to be understood
- A need to be respected and dignified by others
- Seeking out or maintaining desired relationships
- Common bonds with members of the outgroups or third parties
- Trust in oneself, the other, the third party, or the process
- A need to avoid public embarrassment for not participating
- Normative pressures from one's group to be more involved
- Ego: needing to be seen in a certain light (such as fair, involved, or competent)

Emotions

- Severe pain from loss and destruction
- A sense of dread about pending disaster
- Being moved emotionally: a touched heart
- Catharsis: a need to express pent-up emotions
- Being surprised: stumbling upon discoveries and insights
- Short-term successes which instill hope

Agency, Inclusion, and Power

- A sense of efficacy and control over an extremely difficult situation
- Feelings of legitimacy associated with the peace initiative
- A desire for votes and political power (usually among decision makers)
- A desire for clarity: current and accurate information regarding the conflict (particularly among decision makers)
- A desire for early inclusion in a peace process as it is taking shape
- Concern over possible exclusion from a process (can't afford *not to be* involved)

Morality and Fairness

- A sense of guilt for wrongs committed or for lack of involvement (particularly among members of high-power groups)
- A sense that it's the right thing to do
- A sense of procedural and distributive justice or fairness associated with the peace process

Instrumental Needs

- Money
 - Seeing a long-term payoff for involvement
 - Deniability: becoming involved in processes that one can deny if need be
-

other members of the out-group. The relative weight or importance of any particular motive or set of motives will depend on the dispositions of the individuals involved and on the salience and level of import attributed to specific motives in particular settings at a given time. It is important to note that the character of the motives identified included both prevention motives (needs for protection and security) and promotion motives (needs for dignity, respect, and improved social relations; see Higgins, 1997). Promotion motives were mentioned almost equally as frequently as prevention motives, which suggests that the experts saw these two types of motives as having essentially equal importance for facilitating constructive engagement.

PROPOSITION 3a. *Decisions and actions regarding conflict engagement in situations of protracted conflict often involve a combination of both preventative and promotive motives.*

In parallel with these complex intraindividual motivational dynamics, we also found stakeholder groups in protracted conflicts to evidence their own internal interpersonal conflicts and intragroup divisions. These intragroup tensions further complicate engagement decisions and actions by establishing a local context for them that is splintered and politically consequential. One participant noted:

It's not only Hamas and Islamic jihad, but also a lot of the Palestinian diaspora. I don't know how broad-based this is, but in terms of the vocal or intellectual politically active elements of Palestinians, let's say in this country and I think the same thing is probably true in Europe, they are very hard-line. So there, too, you have a kind of a divergence. . . . So you do have these major internal differences, and on the Israeli side you have similar ones. . . . There are definitely distinctions even among settlers, even among ideological settlers. And one of the important things—and I'm as guilty of this as anybody else—we tend to put all of these people into one box, and they need to be differentiated.

Thus, on both an intrapsychic and an intragroup level, we see evidence of multiple motives and interests combining and conflicting to introduce further complexity into decision-making processes.

PROPOSITION 3b. *Decisions and actions regarding conflict engagement in situations of protracted conflict tend to emerge from a complex constellation of complementary, competing, and/or contradictory motives held by individuals and expressed within groups.*

4. *A variety of constraints nested within several levels.* In addition to the many underlying motives identified, the experts also discussed a variety of constraints to constructive engagement faced by individuals and groups in these conflicts (see Exhibit 4). These constraints were described as obstacles of a personal, political, and cultural nature (see Figure 3). They included a host of emotional constraints such as a sense of hopelessness, powerlessness, and fear; cognitive constraints like a lack of awareness of problems and overly simplistic thinking; safety constraints such as risky or violent conditions; logistical constraints such as a lack of time, energy, or access to transportation; political constraints like poor leadership or the involvement of isolated constituent groups; and cultural or normative constraints such as clashes with traditional values and practices. These many constraints, particularly when combined, impose severe limitations on the free will of individuals and groups, even when they are substantially motivated to seek peaceful forms of engagement. As one participant explained,

There were some people I wanted to get involved on the Palestinian side, to get involved in my work, and [they] said, “Well, this is not the right time.” And then they would follow up after having said no to me, they weren’t going to cooperate with me, they said, “But please don’t stop.” And my first response was, Well, if they don’t want me to stop, why don’t they help me? ... But then when I thought about it, I felt, well, I could understand. They had their own political reasons—and I always accept that people have to decide in terms of their own situations when it is appropriate for them to become involved and when not—but that even though they did not feel that they could personally become involved, they wanted this kind of process to continue.

PROPOSITION 4a. *Decisions and actions regarding conflict engagement in situations of protracted conflict are often severely constrained by a variety of emotional, cognitive, safety, logistical, political, and cultural constraints.*

Exhibit 4. Constraints to Constructive Engagement

Personal Constraints

Emotional Constraints (18)

- A sense of hopelessness
- Fear of the other
- Fear of the unknown
- Fear of in-group constituent retribution
- Suspicion
- Intense negative emotions such as rage or resentment
- Loyalty to one's in-group
- Distrust of other, the third party, and of the system in general
- Frozen attitudes
- Pushing back: resistance to being forced to participate
- Lack of sufficient support
- A sense of apathy
- Feeling powerless
- Feeling blamed
- Feeling excluded or rejected
- Feeling embarrassed
- Feeling beleaguered
- Feeling destabilized by rapid or radical change

Cognitive Constraints (22)

- Seeing few cognitive alternatives to the current coercive processes
- Zero-sum framing: presuming engagement will result in a loss of power
- A lack of awareness of the issues or of the relevance of the conflict to one's own interests
- Misunderstanding
- Fixed worldviews
- Believing pain and sacrifice to be noble and meritorious
- A lack of confidence in specific peace initiatives
- Doubts about follow-through
- A weak ego: inability to make decisions and act
- Unidentified resources for resolution
- A narrow moral scope: moral exclusion of the other
- Language barriers to comprehension
- Language problems: negative associations with the labeling of processes (such as *mediation*)
- Short-term thinking
- Preventive orientations: a sole focus on the prevention of problems

- Local, nonsystemic perspectives
- Freeloading: allowing others to carry one's burden or responsibility
- Simplistic, black-and-white thinking
- Confusion resulting from the overwhelming complexity of the situation
- Concerns about being judged by the quality of one's involvement
- Abstract stereotypes and images of the other
- Ego: seeing oneself in a certain light (such as strong or contrary)

Safety Constraints (2)

- Concerns over violence
- Risk avoidance

Logistical Constraints (9)

- Time constraints: Competing demands on one's time
- Energy constraints: competing demands on one's energy
- Location access: difficulty getting to site of process
- Lack of skills for engaging constructively (listening skills, complex thinking, and so on)
- Lack of transportation, day care, and the like
- Age constraints (too young or too elderly)
- Health constraints
- Financial constraints
- Financial costs of engagement

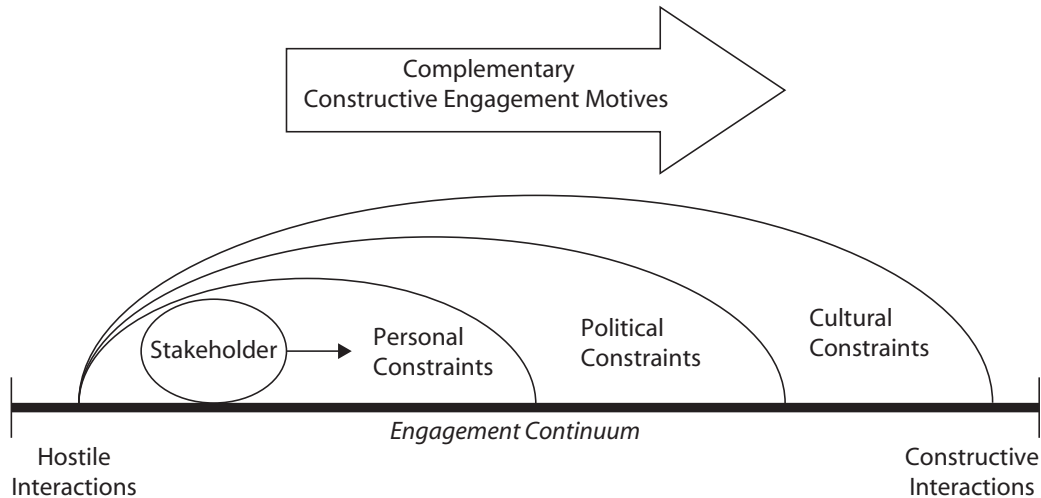
Political Constraints (9)

- Political communication obstacles
- Intragroup divisions
- Concern with overstepping legal or political bounds
- Concerns about temporary leadership and real follow-through (due to election cycles)
- Power shifts in various constituent groups
- Lack of clear, stable, effective leadership
- Isolated constituent groups (such as extremists)
- Severe imbalances of power
- Top-down ambivalence or sabotage

Cultural or Normative Constraints (7)

- Normative pressures to engage destructively
- Path dependence: group commitments to the current course of action
- Escalation of commitment
- Concerns over corrupting cultural traditions by engaging in new practices
- Stylistic preferences
- A strong ethos of political correctness
- Cultural differences in readiness and pacing

Figure 3. Nested Constraints to Constructive Engagement



Although present under other conditions, these constraints become particularly exacerbated in situations of prolonged conflict. The participants attributed this tendency to the conditions of the local context, the global context, and the specific context of the intervention, as follows:

Conditions Affecting Engagement in Protracted Social Conflicts

Local Context

- A legacy of dominance and oppression
- A dangerous and difficult context
- A foundation of intransigent truths

Global Context

- The degree of perceived relevance to international order
- General trends in funding

Intervention Context

- The degree of physical and psychological safety provided
- The public (open) versus private (closed) nature of interactions facilitated by the intervention
- Locally respectful processes

Several aspects of the local context of the conflict presented the most direct and serious obstacles to fostering peaceful engagement between stakeholders, as listed below:

- *A legacy of dominance and oppression.* Participants who attempted to work with marginalized communities spoke of a high degree of

suspiciousness resulting from a history of mistreatment by the dominant group. This manifested in a wariness of the intentions and authenticity of anyone claiming to offer help. One expert described:

Suspicion of . . . how their participation is going to be viewed, . . . and just sort of a history and tradition of racism . . . in county leadership, and government and organizations, institutions. . . . So it's like, "Why should we do this? You know, why do you want us to be in part of this? What's gonna come of it?" You know, some people who say we're tired of just talking. It's always just talk and nothing ever happens, there's that as a challenge . . . "Why are you asking me, just so you can have your token minority?"

These legacies also lead to a high degree of resistance and defensiveness against those in power. Another participant stated: "I think they often feel beleaguered and targeted by groups that want to take up these public issues. That they feel that anybody that wants to talk about this is going to blame them. 'It's your fault that we have this sprawl in our community. It's your fault that we have racism. It's your fault that families are poor.'"

- *A dangerous and difficult context.* Although the cases discussed within the parameters of this study varied by degrees of intensity and by levels of direct and structural violence, many of the situations had a history of atrocities and levels of tension and violence that induced fear. One participant explained:

I would say that the desire for change—the desperate need for change—is definitely there anytime you have an international deadly conflict. I think it's almost axiomatic—the problem is that very frequently the violence and the resentment and the dynamics of the conflict itself in a way prevent that change to emerge as powerfully and strongly and constructively as it could and should, and as frequently as the larger population desires. So you have a situation in which change becomes impossible because the dynamics currently at play through the violence of the conflict prevent that change to occur even if it is desired, even if it is what people usually like, what people dream.

These conditions heightened the sense of risk associated with interacting with out-groups and with trying any new alternatives to the standard

coercive and violent strategies. Inhabitants of these settings are typically socialized to rely on coercive tactics in relation to their enemies, which become normative and institutionalized. Thus, new peace initiatives are viewed as “weird,” ineffective, and overly risky.

In addition, participants discussed the obstacles presented by the difficult life conditions associated with many of these conflicts. Violence, intimidation, poverty, disease, lack of child care, and damaged infrastructure (transportation systems, communications systems, and so on) introduced very concrete challenges to simply bringing people together. These conditions, of course, had a disproportionate effect on underprivileged individuals in these settings. One practitioner said: “We have a concern for the low, low-end economic group. Only because they are not getting involved the way that we would like, and there are a number of reasons why, and we understand that. They have to work. They don’t have the time. Maybe they don’t have the transportation or they feel, ‘Why talk about it? What, you know, what’s going to happen?’”

- *A foundation of intransigent truths.* Communication in these contexts typically revolves around basic, often rigid and exclusive narratives depicting “the truth” regarding the history of the conflict, its villains and victims, and the non-negotiable criteria for peace. These stories bring meaning and a sense of purpose to otherwise miserable life circumstances, and so become cherished. One interviewee described:

Well, one of the things that I think is really true if you have intractable conflict over long periods of time and you’re gonna resolve that and change that, . . . you have to say that some of the truths that you have held dear, that you have gotten from your parents and your grandparents, . . . some of the things that you really believe . . . you have to now say those are not true . . . or they’re not as true as I thought they were. And some of the truths that other people have that I know aren’t right, now I have to accept those, and maybe they’re okay. And that’s a hard thing to do, and it doesn’t happen overnight, and it doesn’t happen if you don’t trust the people that you’re dealing with.

Another interviewee said: “And how can I get some of this change to occur that you’re talking about here that’s gonna benefit me . . . without losing some of the things that are dear to me . . . that my daddy taught me? Daddy taught him. You don’t wanna lose that stuff.”

Thus, people's willingness to be engaged in a peace process, however well intentioned, must always be understood in the context of what beliefs it threatens, and how engagement may be interpreted in light of these deeply established truths.

Two characteristics of the broadest level, the global context, were discussed as constraints. First, *the degree of relevance of a specific conflict to the general world order* was mentioned as often determining the level of attention a conflict receives and thus the ease with which agents could mobilize stakeholders (particularly the international community) to address the conflict. One interviewee stated: "Because any international deadly conflict at the moment is, in a way, irrelevant to the general order. Even Afghanistan, it's a big thing, but in many ways its marginal. It's not the Second World War. It's not keeping everybody really busy or taken. Everybody's more concerned about Tiger playing golf, than what's really happening in Afghanistan."

Second, *general trends in funding by governments and philanthropic organizations* were cited as a key constraint that affected the types of engagement initiatives that could be offered and sustained by change agents and their supporting institutions. Participants suggested that many of these organizations are fairly risk-averse in their orientation. As one put it: "First of all, there are very few foundations that will listen. They have been comfortable during the forty-five years of the Cold War to fund anything that has security in it. Research papers and books and things like that. That's easy because there's no risk in it. We're saying we want you to be involved—to go out there and do things that people aren't doing. And they're scared. I think their boards are leery."

Finally, a few key characteristics of the most immediate, *specific context* of an intervention (such as a workshop, training, or dialogue group) were cited as potential constraints to constructive engagement. These characteristics are described below:

- *The degree of physical and psychological safety provided within the intervention context.* Typically, involvement in peace processes in situations of ongoing conflict is highly risky and requires, at a minimum, assurances of physical and psychological safety. However, this is often challenging, depending on the types of individuals involved, the willingness and ability of individuals to travel to safe locales, the current levels of hostilities associated with the conflict, and the choice of whether to bring people together for face-to-face encounters. Any sense of insecurity within the confines of the peace processes themselves can easily derail the initiative.

- *The public or private nature of the intervention.* Peacemaking initiatives differ in terms of the general open or closed nature of their processes. Open processes, such as some formal peace processes, need to be responsive to important changes in the environment (such as election cycles, power shifts, or the loss of lives in battle) and are typically open to some degree of scrutiny by constituent groups through the media or through the direct reporting of participants. Closed processes may be clandestine or confidential and may choose to stay the course laid down by their self-defined mandate, despite important changes that occur in the context. Such processes stress the importance of protecting the boundaries of the work, which is seen as contributing to peace through indirect or bottom-up channels. At times, processes can change from one (closed) to another (open), which can have a significant impact on the experiences of those involved. Following is an example of this shift:

The only time there was an exception to this was in the joint working group . . . and because of the new political situation they made the Oslo agreement. We set ourselves a new agenda which was actually to come up with joint papers, which we called “joint concept papers,” focusing on the final status agreement, final status issues, and on the future relationship between the two societies. And that’s, you know, it’s a very, very time-consuming job and it was also challenging to our methodology. Because we lost, we sacrificed some of the strength of our methodology to the new agenda—one of the strengths of our methodology is that people are able to interact without being concerned about outside audiences, without being concerned that they will be quoted. So they could freely explore, they could play with ideas, they could say things without feeling that they’re making a commitment, and it really opened up the process for learning and for a certain degree of creative thinking. . . . We also maintained confidentiality and nonattribution up to the last minute, and of course everybody had the option of signing a paper. But at the end of the day the idea was that we would use a paper that would be made public and would have their names on it. And so that . . . constrained it to some degree; in other words, we got more into a bargaining mode, you know; very often we had to deal with, How do you say this? and finding language, sometimes even it was counter to the philosophy, sometimes even looking for creative ambiguity, which is the name of the game in negotiation, but it should not be in problem solving.

Both open and closed processes have their limitations and will constrain the type of people who can be involved and the types of outcomes that can be achieved.

- *Locally respectful processes.* The majority of practitioners we interviewed tended to welcome and respect local knowledge and understanding of the issues in the conflict and looked to those more intimately involved with the conflict to define those issues. However, most interveners brought in a specific type of process, such as dialogue facilitation or problem-solving workshops, which they then applied to the issues. In some cases, these processes clashed with local values and preferences. As one practitioner described:

We've also worked, for example, with a Native American population in Milwaukee and in South Dakota. And just the way that they talk and have discussions is just very different from our process. . . . For example, they're not used to . . . twelve, thirteen, fourteen people sitting in a circle having a discussion with a moderator . . . sort of a facilitated discussion. But people . . . We advise people not to . . . you know . . . You don't have to raise your hand, you just sort of speak freely as if you're having a conversation, and . . . in the Native American culture, what we've found is that they do not like that method at all. That's not the way that they do it, and it's considered rude. So, you know, we've had to make adjustments that way . . . It's their community and it's their discussion . . . We've been humbled to say you don't have to do it our way because our way is right for a lot of places, but it may not be right for you. So they are much more comfortable sort of going from one person to the next to speak. And they sometimes will hold a feather or a stone or something and it get passed to the person. So whoever is holding that has the right . . . to speak.

The accumulation of these constraints over time at the specific, local, and global levels suggests the following proposition:

PROPOSITION 4b. *Decisions and actions regarding constructive engagement in conflict are likely to become more constrained the longer the conflict persists.*

5. *A series of experiences, decisions, and actions taking place over various stages.* In this study, we defined *constructive engagement* as “the problem of getting the necessary disputants and stakeholders actively involved in a constructive, nonviolent process and ultimately maintaining their

commitment to such a process.” As a result, our interviews with practitioners covered a wide temporal scope of the phenomenon of engagement, including favorable and unfavorable antecedent conditions; current motives and states of readiness; decisions, actions, and levels of commitment; and methods of maintaining long-term commitments to peace. However, all these elements were discussed in relationship to bringing about *changes* in people and situations that resulted in their active involvement in constructive conflict processes. Thus, the image of constructive engagement that emerged encompassed a variety of different stages and processes related to fostering change in people and situations over time.

PROPOSITION 5. *Constructive engagement in situations of protracted conflict involves a complex series of experiences, decisions, and actions across different stages of conflict and resolution.*

6. *Requiring openness to change.* Ultimately, in order for stakeholders to transition from destructive to constructive orientations and actions, the pattern of experiences of stakeholders must foster some degree of *openness to change* in the individuals and groups involved. In other words, movement from the status quo of destructive relations to other forms of relating with out-groups operates through a series of transitions that require some degree of openness to change. This openness to new information, ideas, perceptions, actions, and relations was described as alternately momentary and fleeting, sporadic, or profound and permanent. However, a consistent pattern in all the interviews was the overarching attempt by interveners to foster such shifts in individuals in order to ready them and their groups for more radical types of changes in relations between disputants.

PROPOSITION 6. *Constructive engagement requires some degree of individual or group-level openness to change. This finding suggests that there is much to be gained from reorienting our focus in ripeness research from the conditions that foster pain to those that may enable individual and group change.*

7. *Top-down embedded and bottom-up emergent processes of engagement.* Our interviewees fell into two camps: those who targeted formal and informal leaders and influentials for change and those who attempted to engage as many people as possible at the grass roots. The first group emphasized the importance of top-down leadership and support for mobilizing stakeholders and bringing about significant change in intractable conflict systems. The second group envisioned a bottom-up process of consciousness-raising and organizing that could result in thousands of interactions

between stakeholders, culminating in a groundswell of support for changes in how conflict is taken up.

Intervention at the individual level could be portrayed in a parallel fashion. Some targeted the consciousness and cognition of individuals, believing that if you change people's thinking, their behavior will follow. Others targeted external social conditions, mundane social interactions between people, and emotional experiences, suggesting that these experiences are more effective pathways to changing behaviors and, ultimately, to changing minds.

PROPOSITION 7. *Constructive engagement in situations of protracted conflict can result from both top-down methods and bottom-up processes of emergence.*

8. *Beyond negotiation: A multitude of constructive objectives and processes.* Traditionally, peace processes are conceived as attempts at bringing disputing parties to the negotiation table and securing an agreement that facilitates peace. In contrast, our interviewees described a wide variety of constructive processes that, in addition to negotiation and mediation, are designed to bring about a host of complementary objectives related to readying, triggering, and establishing sustainable peace. These included the following:

- Indigenous conflict resolution and harmony enhancement methods
- Dialogue groups
- Reconciliation encounters
- Problem-solving workshops
- The development of joint working papers
- Publication of articles
- Public speaking
- Public engagement processes
- Legislation
- The reformation of policy-making habits
- Litigation reform
- Community organizing
- Nonviolent action
- Consciousness-raising events
- Future envisioning processes

- Emergent cooperative activities (joint newsletters, e-mail discussions, and so on)

The choice of processes in any given context was dependent on the specifics of the conflict and on the expressed interests and objectives of the various stakeholders involved. Again, it is critical to broaden our sense of the types of processes made available to stakeholder networks in order to involve them more constructively in these settings, and the various motives and constraints associated with such initiatives.

PROPOSITION 8. *Constructive engagement can involve a variety of processes and objectives related to achieving sustainable peace beyond negotiation and negotiated agreements.*

In summary, our analysis of the interviews portrays the transition to and maintenance of constructive engagement in long-term conflicts as a complex psychosocial process involving a multitude of experiences, decisions, and actions in response to diverse motives and constraints, often operating within highly complex, dynamic, politicized, and dangerous environments. Ultimately, the general pattern of such experiences must result in changes in people and groups in order for stakeholders to move from escalatory spirals or states of hostile indifference to begin to engage constructively. There are, of course, many obstacles to change in these situations. Interveners working within these settings offer a variety of different initiatives and types of support to facilitate such shifts and elicit the sustained involvement of people in constructive forms of conflict engagement. This high degree of complexity suggests that we reconsider the essentialist motivational assumptions of ripeness theory and reconstruct our understanding in a manner that is more consistent with such complex systemic processes.

Discussion

The findings from our analysis of the interviews present the components of an alternative model for conceptualizing transitions from destructive to constructive conflict relations. Our grounded theory approach to data analysis allowed us to deconstruct the content of the interviews and mine them for implicit images, assumptions, and new insights that were grounded in expert practice. By doing so, we hoped to reconceptualize

ripeness in situations of protracted conflict and construct a new model that could yield benefits to others working with such conflicts. The model that emerged portrays transitions to constructive engagement as involving *complex dynamics*, both embedded within complex stakeholder networks and intragroup dynamics, and emerging from complex interactions between complementary, competing, and contradictory motives and constraints. Given this high degree of complexity, it is logical that early depictions of ripeness emphasized the importance of timing, because fleeting opportunities for ripeness emerge from complex interactions and then dissipate for a time (see Zartman, 1989, Rubin, 1991).

However, the new model resulting from this study identifies a core component of constructive engagement: change. A series of shifts in attitudes and behaviors is required of people and groups in order to transition from destructive relations through different stages of readiness, action, and transformation associated with sustainable peace. The model also identifies how factors at several levels, from personal to cultural, may affect such transitions. Thus, the model begins to move beyond assumptions of pain as the sole motive in readiness; beyond assumptions of economic cost-benefit rationality; beyond notions of dichotomous, mutually occurring states of ripeness; and beyond a sole focus on individual-level, entry-stage phenomena.

Below we provide a preliminary sketch of a dynamical systems model of constructive engagement, synthesizing our propositions and additional coherence to our alternative perspective on ripeness or readiness.

A Dynamical Systems Model of Constructive Engagement: From Ripeness to Tipping Points

The dynamical systems perspective on social processes (Nowak and Vallacher, 1998; Vallacher and Nowak, 2006) offers an orientation to conflict and change that can integrate many elements of our current understanding of intractable conflicts with the complex view of constructive engagement derived from our interviews. A dynamical system is defined as a set of interconnected elements (such as different beliefs, feelings, and behaviors) that change and evolve together over time. A change in each element of a system depends on influences from various other elements. Because of these mutual influences, the system as a whole evolves over time. Thus, changes in any element of a conflict (such as in levels of intensity and escalation) depend on influences of various other elements (each party's

motives, attitudes, actions, and so forth), which evolve over time to affect the general pattern of interactions between the parties. From this perspective, conflict is viewed as an *evolving system* in which different elements within a person (thoughts, feelings, behaviors) and/or within a community (norms, beliefs, symbols, and so on) become organized around incompatibilities with another person or group (Coleman, Bui-Wrzosinska, Vallacher, and Nowak, 2006).

From the dynamical systems perspective, intractable conflicts are seen as a particular type of self-organized dynamical system (Coleman, Vallacher, Nowak, and Bui-Wrzosinska, 2007). In this view, intractable conflicts are strong patterns of destructive thinking, feeling, and acting that are maintained as a result of many interacting elements of the conflict. These elements correspond to a wide range of stakeholders, institutions, identity groups, social norms, beliefs, and so on involved in conflict, as well as to a range of different processes such as exchange, revenge, mediation, and funding (Proposition 1). These elements are not stable; rather, most of them are highly dynamic and change over time.

Intractability typically stems from the way the elements of a conflict are assembled into a dynamical system. Here, elements are interconnected by multiple positive feedback loops, such that each element of conflict activates and reinforces other elements. This can occur psychologically, when beliefs, attitudes, and feelings become mutually reinforcing to drive hostilities, and/or structurally, when norms, institutions, and cultural symbols feed each other to sustain a conflict. These situations are thus characterized by dynamic processes, where recalcitrant hostilities between parties are maintained by a constant flow of positive feedback from various elements (Proposition 2). Thus, intractability is not due to the fact that individual elements (such as key leaders) cannot be changed in the direction of reconciliation, but because changed elements will typically be reinstated by other elements in the system back into the hostile pattern. This is the case when leaders who advocate peace (such as Gandhi in India and Rabin in Israel) are killed by members of their own ethnic or religious groups.

Self-sustaining levels of hostilities can be described in systems terms as a stable equilibrium, or *attractor* (Schuster, 1984; Coleman, Vallacher, Nowak, and Bui-Wrzosinska, 2007), of the conflict system. Because of the nature of interactions between the many elements, the system resists changes and will return to its attracting state, or equilibrium, if perturbed. The degree of intractability of a conflict is thus a consequence of the

structure of the system—of the way the elements are related to each other and influence each other. In other words, intractability is an emergent property of the system and is unlikely to be located within any specific element (such as an issue, attitude, or leader). Its emergent nature makes conflicts much more difficult to resolve, because in emergent conflicts the conflict operates outside of the control of any one stakeholder in such a way that they cannot independently decide to end the conflict. The higher the complexity of a conflict—the more stakeholders, interests, motives, and processes interconnected by positive feedback loops—the less obvious it is to stakeholders how their actions may affect the conflict, and the stronger their experience of powerlessness.

The multiple positive feedback loops that reinforce the elements of a conflict and lock groups into hostile patterns may be fuelled by a complex constellation of complementary and competing motives held by individuals and expressed within groups, and by the relative absence of contradictory motives (which would act as obstacles to hostilities; see Proposition 3). In complex systems composed of many interacting elements, constraining the elements results in frustration of the system, where elements cannot adjust their state to influences from other elements, and thus the system cannot undergo relaxation. Emotional, cognitive, safety, logistical, political, and cultural constraints can therefore freeze the system, as elements cannot adopt the states that might alleviate the conflict (Proposition 4).

It follows that any single action, even by ripe individuals in high power, is unlikely to resolve intractable conflict. Even if such initiatives result in changing a subset of elements, they will likely be reinstated by other elements. Thus, intervention for constructive engagement should be directed to the disassembly of the dynamical system of conflict. Since multiple elements influence each other in the direction of conflict maintenance, intervention should involve a series of mutually supportive actions: changing elements, maintaining the changes, modifying feedback loops, and changing back elements that get reinstated into conflict (Proposition 5). Since each individual is constrained in a hostile state by other individuals, the whole system becomes frozen in a destructive state. Movement out of this state requires some individuals or groups to be open to change (Proposition 6). Once some elements change, their new state (constructive conflict) can influence others to change. This movement can result in a self-reinforcing process; the more elements undergoing change, the more pressure for others to follow, and the smaller the number of elements

instigating hostility. At some point, a radical change may occur in sentiments, attitudes, or behaviors (of individuals or groups). This is a tipping point (see Gladwell, 2000).

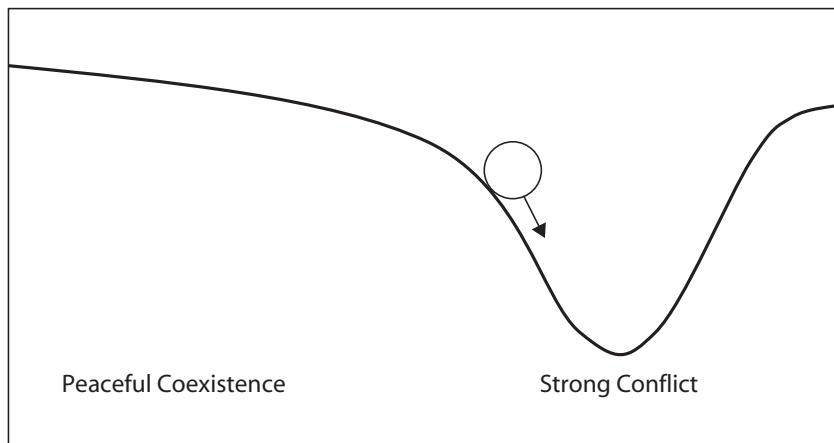
Since a system of intractable conflict is composed and maintained by interactions of elements both within and across levels, constructive engagement may involve elements at various levels (Proposition 7). Top-down initiatives, such as formal negotiations and mediations, involve direct targeting of high-level elements. Once these elements change (namely, when an agreement is reached), they may no longer support conflict at the lower levels and can effect a reduction of hostility at lower levels. Bottom-up engagement initiatives (such as consciousness-raising activities and community organizing) aim to change lower-level elements, but can begin to disassemble the system of the conflict at higher levels as well by affecting the political will of the public. It follows from our analysis that engagement aimed at multiple levels is likely to be most effective, since elements of unresolved conflict on any level can reinstate the conflict at other levels.

Elements of a system of intractable conflict go well beyond stakeholders. Like a cancer, malignant conflict can permeate many processes in society, turning seemingly irrelevant elements into mechanisms of support. The spread of conflict into some areas is obvious: the education system may serve in the indoctrination of the young into the conflict, artwork can be used to symbolize and glorify conflict, the mass media may fuel hostilities, and so forth. Other elements of a conflict may be less obvious, such as diminished social capital and high states of misanthropy. Effective disassembly of conflict systems requires change to be directed toward a number of elements and processes that go well beyond the issues within the conflict and address other areas where the conflict has permeated (Proposition 8). Efforts such as building social capital, fostering a sense of efficacy, and bolstering institutional stability may in many situations be more effective in addressing intractability than direct conflict resolution techniques.

Implications for Reconstructing Ripeness

According to our dynamical systems model, intractable conflicts become organized into strong attractors for destructive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, which are self-perpetuating. Here, ripeness—or any degree of willingness to engage positively with the other—appears absent. Figure 4 offers a simple graphical depiction of this state. In the attractor landscape

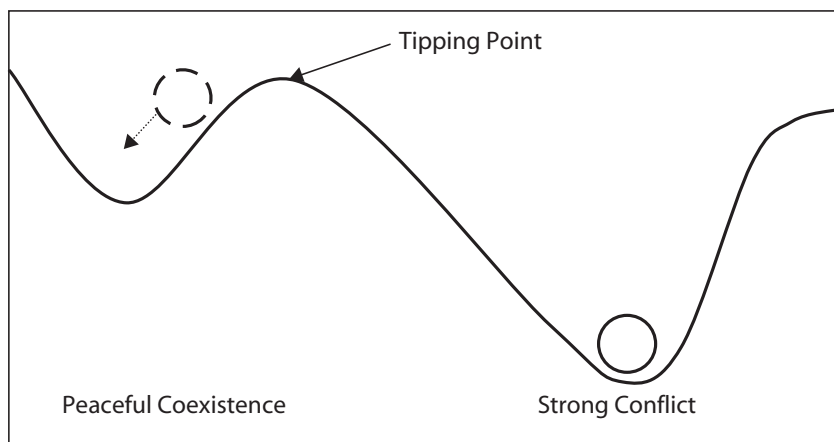
Figure 4. Attractor Landscape for Intractable (Unripe) Conflict



portrayed in the figure, the ball represents the current state of the system with respect to conflict—the current intensity of a conflict. The landscape represents the long-term tendencies of the system. In this picture the attractor, which is located at the bottom of the valley, corresponds to a strong, destructive pattern of interaction. It is the only state that can be maintained for long periods of time. Any other state will be transient and unstable and will evolve over time towards the attractor of destructive conflict (as shown by the arrow). Thus, any positive thoughts, feelings, or behaviors regarding the other, if they occur, will be fleeting.

However, it is important to note that in a given system several attractors can coexist. Some may represent nonhostile states (see Figure 5). Conflict is intractable (and unripe for resolution) if the attractor representing conflict is very strong, or when no other attractors exist. A conflict begins to ripen for resolution when, in addition to the attractor of conflict, an alternative attractor develops, corresponding to some form of peaceful engagement that can capture the dynamics of the system. As long as the current state of a system remains in the domain of a destructive attractor, conflict will be maintained or will intensify. However, if the system for whatever reason adopts a state that is close to a peaceful attractor, it will fall within the domain of the alternative attractor, and this previously latent attractor will capture the dynamics of the system (see the dashed circle in Figure 5). Such transitions can be triggered by rare events (such as when natural disasters mobilize disputants to work together) or by intentional conciliatory initiatives from parties or third parties.

Figure 5. Attractor Landscape for a Ripening Conflict with an Active Attractor of Destructive Conflict and a Latent Attractor for Peaceful Coexistence



This state will be maintained until some force, like an aggravating event, moves the system back into the domain of attraction of the destructive attractor. At this time the destructive attractor becomes active, and the constructive attractor becomes latent again. The weaker the conflict attractor and the stronger the attractor for peace, the easier it is to stabilize the attractor of peace and move the system out of the conflict attractor.

The metaphor of conflict as an attractor can help explain the complementarities of different perspectives of ripeness. In the original formulation of ripeness (Zartman, 1989, 2000, 2001), the pain felt by those in conflict provides a repelling force pushing the system out of the attractor of destructive conflict. The perception that a less painful state is possible (and desired by both parties) corresponds to the visibility of the latent peaceful attractor to the stakeholders of conflict. Once the latent attractor becomes visible, its achievement may begin to organize the actions of the stakeholders. The manifest or latent attractors of conflict or peace, however, may be stronger or weaker, so they can be characterized as continuous variables, rather than dichotomous, which corresponds to the terms of *readiness theory* (Pruitt, 1997, 2003, 2007). Also, the transition of the system from a destructive attractor to a constructive one is most likely to occur when the state of the system is located in the unstable area between the two attractors (a tipping point, as shown in Figure 5). Because these in-between states are unstable, systems rarely occupy them for long, so opportunities for these transitions are fleeting. This transience explains the original

emphasis on the importance of timing for ripeness, and on the view of the transition between unripe states to ripe states as categorical (Zartman, 1989). Furthermore, for the latent attractor of peace to capture the dynamics of the system, it must be sought by a sufficiently broad coalition of the stakeholders; otherwise the system will be returned to the domain of attraction of the hostile attractor by those who are not influenced by the peace attractor. This tendency is consistent with Pruitt's (2007) central coalition model.

It is important to highlight here that the attractor model of conflict and constructive engagement not only allows us to integrate previous models of ripeness or readiness, but also broadens our understanding of the phenomenon and identifies alternative pathways to constructive change. For instance, tolerance-building and reconciliation initiatives are typically aimed at fostering positive forms of stakeholder interaction, rather than at direct attempts at conflict resolution (Weiner, 1998). Here, ripeness progresses by developing the positive attractor rather than trying to move the system away from the negative attractor. These approaches tap into positive social motives such as needs for nurturance, growth, connection, cooperation, harmony, and peace, rather than motives of fear and pain. The implications of activation of promotional motives versus prevention motives have been well documented in psychology (see Higgins, 1997) and have clear implications for fostering ripeness (see Coleman, 2000).

In summary, the conditions and processes that can increase the probabilities of ripeness and constructive engagement in long-term conflicts include (1) factors that strengthen positive or neutral attractors for thinking, feeling, and acting; (2) factors that weaken negative attractors; and (3) factors that tip the state of the system from the attractor of destructive conflict to the attractor of peace. Although these components of ripeness are interrelated, they must be understood as independent contributors to constructive engagement and sustainable peace.

Conclusion

This study was motivated by the critical importance of understanding human motivation in long-term conflicts and by a sense that the most influential theory in this area—ripeness theory—offers limited explanatory power in such situations. Thus, we began the long journey of building new theory by honoring practice and speaking with experts who are

working effectively to bring stakeholders together constructively in situations of protracted conflict. The model of constructive engagement that emerged from our analysis is preliminary but promising. However, considerable work lies ahead to specify it, test it, and refine it, so that it can help conflict scholars and practitioners move forward in their understanding and practice. This work is currently under way (see www.dynamicsofconflict.iccc.edu.pl). In the article that follows, we will outline the specific methods employed by our experts for creating constructive attractors and deconstructing destructive conflict attractors, thereby fostering constructive engagement in long-term conflicts.

Appendix: Interview Schedule for Expert Practitioners

We'd like to thank you for your participation in this research project that we are conducting at the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution (ICCCR). We are interested in exploring the strategies used by experts, disputants, and stakeholders working to address protracted social conflicts. Specifically, our study will explore the problem of getting the necessary disputants and stakeholders actively involved in a constructive, nonviolent process and ultimately maintaining their commitment to such a process.

Recognizing that prolonged social conflicts often involve disparate groups (such as the elite, marginalized groups, extremists, and the mainstream public), we will seek to understand the distinct strategies used by practitioners to work with these different groups.

There is a wealth of untapped knowledge in the field regarding the methods and strategies used by practitioners to gain disputant involvement and commitment. The objective of this study is to gather this knowledge for the purposes of theory building and practice enhancement.

1. Please describe the work you do (or your organization does) in the protracted conflict arena and list your goals and objectives.
2. Many people in the field of protracted conflict talk about promoting change. How do you feel about this idea?
 - a. Does it apply to your approach? If so, what are you trying to change (people, communities, systems, or other elements)?

3. How do you know that change has occurred (criteria, assessments, measurements, follow-up, or other)?
4. In many protracted conflicts, you have different social categories of people: elite or decision-making groups, marginalized groups, mainstream or general population, and extremists. Are there particular groups that you tend to work with more? Why or why not?
5. Please think of one social group you have worked with, preferably a challenging group.
 - a. What does engagement mean to you in the context of this group?
 - b. What do you think are the main obstacles for getting this group to engage?
6. When members of the group choose to engage, what do you think motivates them to engage in the process?
7. Do you use different strategies with different groups? If so, why and when?
8. Are there specific strategies that you find particularly effective?
 - a. How do you choose to engage them initially?
 - b. How do you keep them engaged?
 - c. What are the short-term versus long-term strategies?
9. What are some conditions that encourage one group to agree to continue to engage with the other group(s)?
10. What sort of future skills do you feel you need to develop in your growth as a professional?

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