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CONFLICTS

What We Don't Know Can Help Us:

Eliciting Out-of-Discipline Knowledge for Work with Intractable Conflicts

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### Abstract

In this article, the authors present the results of a study in which a diverse variety of experts in fields outside the traditional conflict domain were interviewed about their ideas regarding intractable conflicts. The purpose of this study was to gather frame-breaking insights and practical approaches that could shed new light on complex, persistent conflict that has been particularly resistant to resolution. The authors argue that outsiders to the field are more likely to provide fresh perspective and radical approaches to the conflict field's most intransigent problems because they are not constrained by the field's pre-existing normative frames. This article examines some of their findings—from ideas on how globalization has exacerbated intractable conflicts, to ways that Biblical metaphors can be used to promote reconciliation, to an analysis of how philosophical concepts such as morality and impartiality can be used to produce fair outcomes, to ideas on the creation of an independent, international regional facilitation corps. In addition to a summary of content findings, methodological recommendations for future similar studies are offered.

### Introduction

Intractable conflicts tend to be self-perpetuating and seem irresolvable, which leads scholars and practitioners to face overwhelming challenges in seeking to understand, manage, and heal them (Coleman, 2003). While in recent years, our understanding of intractable conflict has grown, it has been limited by the particular frames through which we view it, including disciplinary, cultural, role-in-conflict (for example, expert versus disputant), and class-based perspectives. We argue that frame-breaking approaches are needed in order to unlock intractable conflicts, and that outsiders

to the conflict field have a unique ability to identify these new approaches, since they are not constrained by the field's pre-existing normative frames.

Thus, this article presents an exploratory study of extra-disciplinary knowledge for work with intractable conflicts. First, we provide a brief overview of our understanding of intractable conflict. Second, we offer an argument for the important role that frame-breaking ideas can play in enhancing our ability to work with intractable conflicts. Third, we outline our methods for an interview study designed to bring forth some of these frame-breaking ideas. Fourth, we highlight our findings according to an analytic framework that emerged through our analysis of the data. Finally, we offer an overview of methodological learnings and recommendations for conducting this type of elicitive research in the future.

#### Definition and Characteristics of Intractable Conflict

Intractable conflicts are those that stubbornly persist despite continued attempts at resolution. The dictionary definition of “intractable” is “not easily governed, managed or directed; not easily manipulated or wrought; not easily relieved or cured” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2005). This definition reflects our view that intractable conflicts are particularly intransigent and difficult to manage, transform and resolve, but that they are by no means hopeless. We use the term intractable conflict to suggest (as many in the field have; see Burgess & Burgess, 2005) that we must work passionately and rigorously to move these conflicts beyond their current intractable states. (For a more in-depth discussion on the definition and meaning of the term intractable conflict, see Kriesberg, et. al., 1989; Coleman, 2000, 2003; Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2004, 2005; Putnam & Wondolleck, 2003; Burgess & Burgess, 2005).

Intractable conflicts can be broadly defined by three overarching characteristics. First, intractable conflicts are protracted; that is, they persist over a long period of time. For example, they are characterized by long-standing conflict that manifests itself in cyclical patterns, with frequent bursts of violence juxtaposed with periods of relative quiet as conflict brews beneath the surface (Putnam & Wondolleck, 2003; Coleman, 2000). Second, they are waged in ways that the adversaries themselves or third parties perceive to be destructive, such as by bearing devastating financial costs as well as extremely traumatic physical and emotional consequences. Third, they continue despite repeated attempts by third parties to resolve or transform them (Kreisberg, 2005).

Another way to view intractable conflicts is by distinguishing them from more tractable forms of conflict along five specific dimensions: context, issues, relationships, processes and outcomes. For instance, intractable conflicts often take place within a context of injustice and instability; focus on paradoxical dilemmas and highly symbolic issues; involve destructive and polarized relationships between and among individuals and groups; embody intense, emotional and complex processes; and lead to devastating outcomes including protracted trauma that is often perpetuated over generations (Coleman, 2003).

#### Consequences and Costs of Intractable Conflict

The consequences of intractable conflicts are wide-ranging and, for the most part, devastating. Possibly the most striking impact is the toll that intractable conflicts take on human life itself. Since the end of the Cold War, protracted civil and interstate conflicts around the world have claimed millions of lives (Brendt & Scott, 2004). For example, in the protracted conflict in Afghanistan which began in 1979, over 1,000 battle-related

deaths occurred each year between 1989 and 2000. Nearly as many deaths occurred in the on-going conflict in Sudan during the same period (Wallensteen & Sollenberg, 2001). During thirty years of on-going conflict in Cambodia, close to 16% of the country's civilian population died in the fighting (Brendt & Scott, 2004).

Of those who survive intractable conflict, a plethora of physical challenges remain. For example, in the conflict in Sudan, which has been on-going since 1983, more than four million people have been either internally displaced or have become international refugees in the neighboring country of Chad (Brandt & Scott, 2004). Such displaced people are particularly vulnerable to disease, attack by combatants, and natural disasters (Brahm, 2005). Displaced children are particularly vulnerable to death from malnutrition and disease caused by lack of adequate shelter, and the absence of safe water or sanitation (UN News Centre, 2005). In addition, survivors of intractable conflict often sustain entrenched psychological wounds, and a deep sense of grievance, humiliation and victimization (Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2004; Lindner, 2002; Coleman, 2003). For example, a 2001 Physicians for Human Rights (2005) survey of 724 Afghani women found that over 70% of the women living in Taliban-controlled areas met diagnostic criteria for major depression, over 65% of the women had considered committing suicide and over 9% had made suicide attempts.

In addition to physical and psychological consequences, intractable conflicts incur high economic and infrastructure costs (Brendt & Scott, 2004; Coleman, 2003; Burgess & Burgess, 2005). For example, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has persisted for over fifty years, both sides have paid extremely heavy economic costs. From the start of the most recent Palestinian intifada (uprising) in 2000 until 2004, Israel's gross

domestic product loss is estimated to have been between \$7 and \$12 billion (McGreal, 2005), and the number of people living below the poverty line in the Palestinian territories tripled from 637,000 people in 2000 to almost 2 million people in 2003 (World Bank Report, 2003).

Intractable conflicts are currently understudied. Despite the pervasive and costly nature of intractable conflicts occurring worldwide, the subject of intractable conflict continues to be vastly understudied in the academic domain. For instance, a web search using the keywords “intractable conflict” on the academic search engines Lexis Nexis (searching Law Reviews), PsychINFO (database of academic publications in psychology), Social Sciences Index, and ProQuest, which each contain listings of thousands of scholarly articles, returned 9, 25, 47, and 134 articles on the subject respectively. A similar search for “protracted conflict” on each of the databases only returned 8, 15, 82, and 177 articles respectively. In contrast, a search using the more general keywords “social conflict” returned 51, 590, 3,514, and 851 articles respectively. This discrepancy between the number of articles written on social conflict and on intractable, protracted conflict is representative of the growing but limited scope of attention that has up until recently been paid to the area of intractable conflict in the social sciences.

#### The Limits of our Current Understanding of Intractable Conflict

In addition to the fact that intractable conflict is a relatively understudied domain, our understanding and ability to work with intractable conflict is also limited by the particular perspectives through which we approach it. Our individual perspectives can prevent us from seeing and dealing with the conflict in radically different ways—ways

that are necessary if we are to overcome the conflicts' resistance to our efforts. Cognitive scientists' current understanding of the nature of human thought processing helps explain why this is so.

Metaphors and frames determine understanding. The majority of human thought is believed to operate at a level is that outside of normal conscious awareness (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). This suggests that our cognitive unconscious, by helping to shape conscious thought, has the power to determine our sense of the external world. It is believed that the cognitive unconscious manifests itself primarily through metaphor. In other words, we use metaphors, or implicit images, to help us understand unfamiliar, complex phenomena in the world around us (Morgan, 1997).

While metaphors shape our implicit understanding of phenomena, frames are thought to extend those metaphors as they are deployed in the social world (Creed, Langstraat & Scully, 2002). Frame analysis, originated by Goffman (1974) and extended by social movement theorists (e.g., Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986), refers to the way in which our use of metaphors is mobilized into action in the real world, often in the service of collective advocacy or public policy making (Creed, Langstraat & Scully, 2002). As such, frames play a significant role not only in determining our actions in the social world-at-large, but also in the way we deal with intractable conflicts.

Metaphors and frames also limit understanding. Generally, metaphors and frames may be useful in the sense that they enable us to understand otherwise overly complex and abstract phenomena. However, by defining boundaries and directing our attention to what seems relevant in a complex situation, metaphors and frames determine our

perspective and limit our view to only a part of the complex world around us. This is similar to the way that picture frames define, and thus limit, what part of a picture we see (Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Creed, Langstraat & Scully, 2002). In addition, over time metaphors and frames can become so ingrained that they cause us to disregard information that is inconsistent with them, thus further narrowing the scope of our perspective (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Metaphors and frames particularly limit our vision in abstract arenas such as social conflict where we depend heavily on them to make sense of our surroundings.

The field currently uses frames to determine action strategies. Disputants, third parties, scholars and practitioners all use frames to define the issues in a conflict, and to determine what actions should (or should not) be taken to resolve the conflict (Grey, 2003). Coleman (2004) has identified five frames through which scholars and practitioners currently approach intractable conflict: the realist, human relations, medical, post-modernist and systems approaches. Brief definitions and examples of strategies representing two of these frames are offered below in order to demonstrate how frames affect not only our understanding, but also our approaches to dealing with intractable conflicts.

The realist frame has been the most influential in the study of war and peace in history, politics, and international affairs. It views intractable conflicts as dangerous, high-stakes games that are won through strategies of domination, control, and counter-control. Strategies stemming from this frame include use of deterrence and force, establishing institutional stability, and using social justice activism. In contrast, the human relations frame emphasizes the role that human social interactions play in



generating, perpetuating, and resolving conflict. It views intractable conflicts as built on destructive human relationships that become hostile and extremely difficult to escape. Change is thought to be brought about through: normative re-education processes emphasizing interdependence and inducing cooperation, uncovering and expressing basic human needs, fostering reconciliation, and cultivating tolerance and coexistence. As these examples illustrate, the frames we use to understand the causes and nature of the conflict determine a unique set of strategies used to manage, and ideally transform and resolve the conflict (Coleman, 2004).

Yet the field still struggles with intractable conflicts. While the frames outlined above have produced useful approaches for dealing with intractable conflicts, they each contain limitations that can prevent them from effectively breaking through the intractability (Coleman, 2004; Grey, 2003). The mere existence of intractable conflicts that “stubbornly elude resolution, even when the best available techniques are applied” (Burgess & Burgess, 2005) is a testament to the limitations inherent in these techniques and approaches. For example, conflict between the Turks and Greeks on the island of Cyprus has been occurring for over 40 years. During that time, many of the world’s powerful third parties, including the U.S., NATO, and the United Nations have made numerous attempts at peacekeeping and peacemaking in Cyprus. These have included interventions such as: direct appeals to the leaders or heads of state, military intervention, mediation, direct negotiations, summit talks, shuttle diplomacy, funding for peace and reconstruction, numerous United Nations resolutions. Grassroots initiatives were also deployed, such as interactive problem-solving workshops and inter-communal dialogues. At times, these initiatives have been successful at containing or managing the violence,

but they have not yet made significant progress in achieving a sustained resolution of the conflict. As UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan has repeatedly stated, the continuing quiet on the island should not obscure the fact that there is only a cease-fire in Cyprus, not peace (UN Website, 2005). The Cyprus case is only one example of protracted conflict that has stubbornly eluded resolution; as described earlier, similar cases abound domestically on issues of abortion, race relations, and sexual orientation (Burgess & Burgess, 2005) and in civil and interstate conflicts occurring in places including Angola, Congo, Israel-Palestine, Lebanon, Sudan, and Tibet-China to name just a few (Brandt & Scott, 2004).

Frame-breaking perspectives are needed to move beyond intractability. It is possible that intractable conflicts are so complicated that they're just unsolvable; it could be that some conflicts will persist no matter how we look at or approach them. However, another possibility is that certain conflicts seem unsolvable because of the way we look at them. Perhaps we get so entrenched in our own perspectives, that we're unable to see new, radically different approaches that could unlock these situations.

We argue that outsiders to the conflict field have a unique ability to identify these new approaches. Outsiders are not constrained by the field's pre-existing normative frames, and thus are more likely to bring fresh, new insight and perspective to the problem. Kuhn (1970) suggests that in order for radical change to take place, paradigms must shift, and this happens when new people look at old problems in radically different ways than their predecessors. Kuhn and others (see Burke, 2001; Gladwell, 2002; and Gersick, 1991) argue that radical change is not evolutionary, but rather occurs in revolutionary ways that are driven by agents of change. In his ground-breaking essay

*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn (1970) asserts that revolutionary thinkers are usually not established experts in a field of study, but rather are more likely to be “either very young or very new to the field whose paradigm they change” (p. 90).

Empirical evidence also suggests that outsiders, as compared to insiders in a field, are better able to make frame-breaking insights. For example, in a study on organizational change, Tushman, Newman and Romanelli (1986) found that “externally recruited executives are more than three times more likely to initiate frame-breaking change than existing executive teams” (p. 42).

Ironically, it is often the perceived intractability of a situation that attracts help from outsiders. Of crisis situations, Gersick (1991) writes,

*“Unless such failures kill the system, they command increasing attention and raise the likelihood that newcomers will either be attracted or recruited to help solve the problems. The newcomer has the opportunity to see the system in an entirely different context than incumbent members, and he or she may begin problem solving on a new path” (p.23).*

In this study, we actively recruited and hand-selected experts well-known for their ground-breaking work in a diverse array of fields including architecture, environmental ethics, history, philosophy, policy, and religion. We solicited their ideas about intractable problems in their own work and how they would translate those ideas into useful metaphors, approaches and practices for dealing with intractable social conflict. We asked them to help us “problem solve on a new path” to break through the intractability of conflict as we know it. This paper presents a study that sought to elicit frame-breaking ideas in the field of intractable conflict.

## Method

### Design Overview

Through an expert nomination process, nine (9) participants were recruited to be interviewed regarding their views on the sources, approaches to, and metaphors regarding intractable conflict situations. Participants were recruited through nominations by members of the University of Colorado at Boulder Intractable Conflict Knowledge Base Project's (ICKBP's) community of approximately 75 scholar-practitioners. Participants were selected based on their expertise in areas considered to be relevant but currently peripheral to the dominant discourse in intractable conflict (i.e., religion, philosophy, architecture, etc.). An eight-question semi-structured interview schedule was developed to explore the participants' views on intractable conflict situations. Semi-structured interviewing and content-coding analysis methods (see Smith, Harre & Langenhove, 1995) were used to elicit, code and interpret information from a series of digitally-recorded and subsequently transcribed telephone interviews.

### Participants

Participants represented diverse disciplinary expertise. They ranged in age from approximately 30 to 80 years, included both male and female experts, and were of varied national and ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic statuses. Each participant was paid a \$100 honorarium, signed an information consent form, and was given the choice to participate under conditions of confidentiality or acknowledgement for participation in the study. All participants, with the exception of one, chose to be acknowledged.

In alphabetical order, the participants who chose to be acknowledged were:

Name	Title	Area of Expertise	Geographic Location
Dr. Rudolph Avenhaus	Professor of Statistics and Operations Research, Universität der Bundeswehr München	Game theory	Germany

J. Atieno Fisher	Usoni Method Coach for Groups and Individuals	Psychodrama	Washington, D.C.
Dr. Dale Jamieson	Professor of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy, New York University	Environmental ethics	New York
Dr. Victor Kremen'yuk	Deputy Director of the Institute for USA and Canada Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences	Russian-American history and policy	Moscow
Rosa A. Maria	Architect and Municipal and Urban Projects Manager, Centro de Estudios Urbanos y Regionales, Pontificia Universidad Catolica Madre y Maestra	Architecture and community organizing	Dominican Republic
Dr. Daniel Rothbart	Associate Professor of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, and Affiliate Professor of Conflict Analysis, George Mason University	Philosophy and religion	Fairfax, Virginia
Richard Rubenstein, J.D.	Professor of Conflict Resolution and Public Affairs, George Mason University	Law	Fairfax, Virginia
Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi	Spiritual Leader, Jewish Renewal Movement; Professor Emeritus, Temple University; Professor of Religious Studies, Naropa University	Jewish theology and ritual	Boulder, Colorado

### Procedure

Prior to conducting each interview, participants were emailed a Pre-Interview Memo asking them to review two summary articles on intractable conflict, meant to serve as a link between the participants' disciplinary domain and that of the researchers. The purpose of the semi-structured interview protocol was to elicit new "frame-breaking" insights that would enhance understanding about, and ways to address, intractable

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<sup>1</sup> Although some of the participants identify as conflict resolution scholars or practitioners, they were selected for participation in this study because their unique backgrounds suggested that they had new or different perspectives on the subject that were particularly worthy of being described in this research.

conflicts. In order to do this, we designed the interview schedule to explore: participants' implicitly held metaphorical lenses for understanding intractable conflict; new ideas about ways to effectively approach intractable conflicts; activities participants recommended to address intractable conflicts; and implicit or explicit frameworks that informed the approaches and action ideas participants articulated. Thus, it was designed to encourage participants to share their perspectives on intractable conflict and to enable us to follow the participants' line of thinking.

Upon the conclusion of each interview, participants were emailed a Post-Interview Memo asking them to provide an annotated list of references, including books, articles, websites, videotapes and other materials that would be relevant to the conversation that occurred in the interview. All participants were responsive to this request. Throughout the interview process, we kept a journal describing insights, themes emerging across interviews, and methodological challenges to eliciting out-of-discipline knowledge.

## Results

The information elicited in the interviews was expansive. However, for the sake of brevity, we have summarized several of the more original insights in two broad areas: *metaphors and perspectives* (metaphors and other lenses through which participants view intractable conflicts) and *approaches and practices* (general approaches and specific practices participants recommend to address intractable conflicts) (See Figure 1).

Metaphors and Perspectives	Approaches and Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Empire Metaphor</li> <li>• The Globalization Paradox</li> <li>• The Abraham Metaphor</li> <li>• The Spirits Metaphor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an Independent, International Regional Facilitation Corps</li> <li>• Distinguish Between Morality and Moralism</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use Narratological Analysis and Psychodrama</li> <li>• Work with “Cold Cases”</li> </ul>
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**Figure 1. Analytic Framework: Perspectives and Approaches.**

### Perspectives

Individuals understand the world around them primarily through the use of metaphors, which enables them to make sense of complex and abstract phenomena (Morgan, 1997; Creed, Langstraat & Scully, 2002). Since metaphors affect, and in some ways dictate the way we view the world, in order to illuminate the ways in which the participants understand the phenomenon of intractable conflict, we provide an overview of the metaphorical lenses and perspectives through which they view the problem of intractable conflict.

The Empire Metaphor. While third party intervention in intractable international conflicts is often necessary, certain types of interventions do more harm than good. A primary example of this is what Richard Rubenstein calls the “relationship of empire to conflict.” He describes empires as entities that seek to maintain broad territorial control while also resolving conflict among client states. Rubenstein suggests that because the empire’s efforts at conflict resolution are often confounded by its own interests in the conflict region, the empire tends to contribute to the intractability of conflict, rather than resolve it. For example, he notes that the U.S., like the traditional empire, has become caught between competing agendas: on the one hand, it puts forth an idealistic goal of helping other countries to resolve conflict, and on the other hand, it acts on behalf of its own interests. He says,

*This is part of the American exceptionalist thesis: that we were not going to imitate these other old empires. Our relationship to the world was going to be*

*something different, and it was going to be less coercive. It was going to be more idealistic. And so, you know, we would force the French out of Southeast Asia, and force the Dutch out of Indonesia, and force the French out of Algeria, and force the British out of Africa, or at least if not force, you know, cheer them as they left. And it's only recently, really only since Vietnam, which was the first great shock, when we tried to replace the French in Vietnam, it's only at that point that this whole problem gets raised. And it's a problem with the relationship of empire to conflict... [For example,] why did the United States commit itself to the support of the vicious dictatorship in Iran if had nothing to do with interests that are in a broader sense economic, that have to do with the interests of the U.S. and other Western economic elite and the interests of political elite?*

In addition to the example Rubenstein offers about the U.S.'s relationship with Iran, the current situation in Iraq offers another illustrative example of the ways in which the U.S. as empire exacerbates conflict. While some may view the U.S.'s intervention as the right thing to do in response to a perceived threat, the U.S.'s real or perceived economic and political interests in the region prevent it from being perceived by many Iraqis and others as a liberator working on behalf of the Iraqis' best interests. Rubenstein suggests that there is some complacency in the world at large which leads us to accept as the status quo the empire intervening with its self-interest at the top of its agenda. He notes,

*In a sense, everybody understands that [self interest] was a factor [in the U.S. relationship with Iran] and so they understand it and then they forget it. Maybe they forget it because they think basically there's nothing they can do about it... There's a tendency among people in our business, in every other academic discipline and business to say well, that's a fact. You can't really change it, so you just live with it. And the second stage is not only do you live with it, you don't think very much about it. But, you know, to my mind there are identity group conflicts that can be talked about that don't have much to do with the kind of global drive for economic supremacy by large corporations and states aligned with and representing large corporations. But, so much of the conflict in the world that's most contentious and most intractable is intractable because, it seems to me, because it has structural sources. And [the empire's conflation of conflict resolution with self interest is] one of them.*



Rubenstein further suggests that the “empire as conflict resolver” syndrome may indeed implicate the field of conflict resolution itself as Westerners become viewed as having their own interests at the top of the agenda, no matter what their official role. The recent violent kidnappings, killings and beheadings of UN officials, journalists and aid workers in Iraq speaks to the unwillingness of some Iraqis to distinguish between the occupying forces and those who might consider themselves to be more neutral.

Rubenstein says,

*There's a question for our field now as to whether, in an era of U.S. attempts to become or maintain economic or political hegemony on a global scale, there's a question as to whether the conflict resolution field is going to become basically an adjunct to that effort. That in the new Roman Empire...we're the soft imperialists. You know, we're the ones who resolve conflicts among the satellite states and go over and help resolve conflicts [between] the various groups in Iraq so that the Americans can stabilize their control. Or whether we're going to be looking at global conflict as coming from systemic sources which implicate the United States.*

To deal with the problems that are generated by the relationship of the empire to conflict, Rubenstein proposes ideas that can help conflict scholars, practitioners, governmental officials, security advisors and others to think more critically about the nature of the current “empire”-based intervention approach and to begin to seek alternative conflict resolution mechanisms in the international arena. In the *Approaches* section of this paper, we highlight an alternative idea Rubenstein discusses regarding the creation of an independent, international regional facilitation corps to more effectively manage international intractable conflicts.

The Globalization Paradox. There are at least two different stories one can tell about globalization. The first, more popular story focuses on the benefits of a globalized world. This story elicits images of a global village, in which communication, travel and

commerce are made easier, and many people benefit: the global citizen becomes exposed to different cultures, the businessperson expands markets, and global companies coordinate more efficiently and successfully.

However, a second less rosy picture is that globalization has set off the current increase in conflict around the world. Why would this be the case? First, like any new phenomenon that has far-reaching political and social implications, globalization has the power to bring about substantial change and instability in a region. Significant change in a system can weaken normative influences on social behavior, encouraging people to question the status quo and voice previously unspoken needs and concerns. This type of questioning can decrease the public's level of trust in conflict resolution procedures, laws and institutions, and weaken their ability to deal with problems, thus destabilizing the situation further. Under these conditions, intractable conflicts are more likely to occur (Coleman, 2003). For example, we can see this in the current situation in Iraq, where political, social and economic instability has led to an increase in violent, deadly conflict.

Second, prior to globalization, groups who differed ethnically, racially and religiously may have been sheltered from one another by geographical distances. However, globalization has led to a relative ease of communication across such distances, bringing about the proximity of formerly isolated groups. This new proximity can force groups to confront their differences and inflame identity and worldview clashes. Such differences of ethnic, racial or religious identity can fuel long-term conflict. However, even if the issues themselves are not necessarily inherently irresolvable, geographical constraints often make it difficult, if not impossible, for the parties to extricate themselves from the situation. This inability of the parties to be removed from the

situation contributes to its intractability (Coleman, 2003). On the topic of formerly isolated groups, Rubenstein says,

*...If there's a fundamental cause of intractable, long-term conflict it's the coming together, the being brought together of disparate groups, groups that are disparate in every way, culturally, power and so forth, the bringing together of formerly isolated groups...It inflames identity problems; it makes worldview problems which weren't even visible, all of the sudden visible; it increases competition for resources, etc. It also produces the basis for a possible, you know, community of man, humanity. So that the same time you get this kind of glowing promise of global solidarity, of global familiarity and so forth, right next door is this greatly inflamed conflict caused by the fact that people, really over a long course of human history...According to a lot of the anthropologists, we seem to have started out as a relatively small population on earth...homosapians, scattered all over the place. Very diverse and everybody doing whatever they wanted to do in terms of their own communities and not having much contact with other communities. And then around the time that written history begins, that changes. Now it's just hurtling ahead towards what I call the real globalism, of which AIDS and all of that is the most dramatic and visible and scary symptom.*

Rubenstein and Dr. Victor Kremenyuk suggest that the new proximity of formerly isolated groups can raise groups' sense of relative deprivation. A state of relative deprivation is said to exist when a gap exists between what people feel they deserve and what they feel they can achieve in comparison to a relevant reference group (Gurr, 1970). Kremenyuk proposes that, whether the resources are actually limited or not, once the sense of relative deprivation arises in a population, especially if individuals are socialized to believe that material resources are limited and that in order for one group to gain in wealth another must lose, intractable conflicts arise. Kremenyuk states,

*You know, it maybe was much easier to live, say, a hundred years ago when millions of people somewhere in Egypt or in some other...They never knew anything about America, about the high standards of living in the more developed nations. They lived a traditional life. But due to the globalization, this isolation was broken. And now millions of people in India or Bangladesh or in any other, you know, poor country, they know that there are nations which live much better. Or millions of people here in Russia, they also know, they have seen movies, they have seen other TV programs. So the problem is now what to do with their desire to live better. Then it'd be framed as a constructive force which will make the*

*people become more active for reforms, for changing their lives, or it may be used to frame a hostility towards the richer country. To say that you are poor because they are rich...If you want to become richer, they should be robbed. So this is the only possibility for you to become rich. Then, of course, that will be framed as an ideological conflict. In that case, the communistic ideology will come back and the millions of people will believe again that to make their lives better, they should attack and destroy the bastions of capitalism or, if to speak about the Islamic war, the millions of those people, they want to make their lives better, they have to attack or fight against the infidel and to take part of their wealth and to share it.*

The Abraham Metaphor. Issues in intractable conflict situations tend to be highly symbolic, and they often take on their symbolism through their connection to pervasive conflict narratives, or stories, that define what is good, moral and right in a conflict situation (Bar-Tal, 2000). For example, the Biblical conflict between Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, has historically been drawn upon by Jews and Muslims to justify their continuing conflict (Gopin, 2002). However, Dr. Daniel Rothbart argues that a reinterpretation of that story, with a focus on both peoples' shared lineage from Abraham, can help promote reconciliation rather than continued violence.

In the Biblical story, Sarah, Abraham's wife, has trouble bearing children, so she offers Hagar, her maid-servant, to Abraham, and Hagar gives birth to a son, Ishmael. Jealous of Hagar and determined to give Abraham a child of her own, at an old age, Sarah is finally able to conceive, and gives birth to a son, Isaac. When the two are young boys, Ishmael taunts Isaac, and Sarah's jealousy of Hagar and Ishmael builds. Sarah admonishes Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away from the family home, and Abraham follows her advice, banishing Hagar and Ishmael to the desert.

*Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing. She said to Abraham, "Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his. But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she*

*says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you. As for the son of the slave-woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed” (Genesis 21:9, translated by The Jewish Publication Society, 1999, p. 114).*

The favored status of Isaac over Ishmael, and the two sons’ conflictual relationship lasts for many years. However, when their father Abraham dies, his sons join together to bury him.

*And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the Cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron...After the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled near Be’er-Lahai-Roi (Genesis 25:8, translated by The Jewish Publication Society, 1999, p. 140).*

A commentary on the Biblical passage above states,

*Isaac and Ishmael are reunited at their father's funeral, a sign that Ishmael changed his ways as he matured. Although he could not have forgotten how his father treated him and how his brother supplanted him, he seems to have forgiven Abraham for having been a less-than-perfect father. Isaac too seems to have come to terms with his father's nearly killing him on Mount Moriah...Can we see this as a model for family reconciliations, forgiving old hurts? And can it not be a model for the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac, contemporary Arabs and Israeli Jews, to find grounds for forgiveness and reconciliation? (The Jewish Publication Society, 1999, p. 140).*

The first part of the story, which focuses on the conflictual relationship between Isaac and Ishmael has been used by their descendants, throughout history and in modern times, to justify continued jealousy, hatred, and violence. However, when the second part of the story regarding the brothers’ reunion at their father’s burial is brought into focus, the story has the potential to promote mutual recognition and reconciliation between the two peoples. In his book *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East* (2002), Dr. Marc Gopin describes how he uses the Abraham metaphor to bring together religious leaders in the Jewish-Muslim conflict for dialogue and peace building initiatives in the social, religious and political arenas.

Of Gopin's work, Rothbart says,

*[Marc Gopin's] argument is that there are certain moral categories and values that are established in this narrative in the Biblical story which can be exploited, as it were, for transforming the way in which the participants relate to each other. Instead of hatred it would be harmonious interaction. To overcome the hatred by looking for, as it were, the values that are portrayed in these stories. Both Arabs and Jews are seeking to secure a home, to avoid conflict, to recognize the sacred land...They need security...They need dignity, honor, compassion, and he's saying that certain elements in the story suggests a kind of recognition of the other.*

The example that Gopin has set by using the Abraham metaphor as a model of reconciliation can and should be replicated in other conflict contexts. For example, in the increasingly polarized communications between political right and left wing groups in the U.S., the metaphor of democracy could be used to help parties on both sides accept their differences as a natural part of a democratic, free society, rather than to view the other side as bad or wrong.

The Spirits Metaphor. When practitioners work with groups involved in conflict, issues around blame and responsibility inevitably arise. Who is responsible for getting us into this mess? To whom can we attribute the blame? While determining responsibility is often a necessary part of resolving conflict, assigning blame can lead to defensive behavior, which tends to contribute to the intractable nature of a conflict rather than resolve it.

J. Atieno Fisher suggests a useful method for helping individuals acknowledge a problematic dynamic that is present in their interactions, without threatening their sense of identity, or raising the level of emotionality and defensiveness that is already present in most intractable conflict settings. Fisher proposes using the metaphor of "spirits" to name a dynamic in an intractable conflict system. The spirits metaphor can focus

individuals' attention on the dynamic without assigning blame to any one person or group. For example, Fisher notes,

*... When you're in a group and you recognize that there is a spirit here of fear, or of scarcity, or—one thing that is really great about it is that it depersonalizes it. So instead of, you know, this very narrow psychological focus on: people need to be less selfish, they need to get over their fears, and it's all about people...I don't need to tell you it's very threatening when it's like, “Oh, my identity is under attack?”... Where there's this spirit, and it's inhabiting a group process, it's much less threatening, it's much more—you know, a group can unite around: “Ok, let's not embody that spirit. Let's send that spirit. Let's embody this spirit that we want as opposed to [another one].”*

The spirits metaphor can be effective not only because it helps depersonalize the issues, but because it can particularly resonate when working with people whose religious or cultural backgrounds embrace the idea of spirits. For example, Fisher says,

*And I think also culturally, in a lot of cultures it really makes sense. People know exactly what you're talking about when you mention spirits. And it's just a great metaphor to be able to talk about it. Like, “Bring the spirit of [blank].” I remember doing psychodrama with this Native American woman and she was talking about the gods, and when I had her concretize them, they were her ancestors. That conversation that she was having with them was really the context for her whole story.*

Fisher describes how, once the facilitator has named the “spirit,” a group can unite around sending the spirit away, and can choose to embody a new spirit in place of the old one. She notes that a facilitator working with an organizational conflict could say,

*“There's a spirit and it's evident in the upper levels of this institution. It's evident in how we're interacting in the business spirit of this institution, and it's in the larger spirit of this [place]...There's a pattern here; we can embody it, or we can embody a different one.”*

Using the spirits metaphor can be a powerful way for facilitators to raise parties' awareness about conflict-perpetuating dynamics without causing people to feel defensive. Once this awareness is raised, a renewed metaphor can help the parties break the cycle of

the negative dynamic and shift into a new pattern of interaction, which can otherwise be very difficult to do in intractable conflicts.

### Approaches and Practices

The ideas highlighted below describe general approaches and specific practices that conflict resolution scholars and practitioners can use to deal more effectively with intractable conflict situations.

Create an Independent, International Regional Facilitation Corps. To address the problems inherent in the “empire as conflict resolver” syndrome (see the *Perspectives* section of this paper), Rubenstein proposes the creation of an independent, international regional facilitation corps. The facilitation corps would be implemented on a global scale. It would be comprised of regionally-based, independent facilitators who would not represent the interests of any particular nation. Their primary job would be to enable the parties involved in international disputes to work together to develop their own approaches and solutions to their conflicts. The facilitation corps would be built on the foundations of conflict resolution scholarship and practice and would employ individuals with demonstrated expertise in those areas.

By drawing on the skills and strengths of professionally-trained conflict management experts, the facilitation corps would serve parties involved in intractable conflicts using well-established as well as new, cutting-edge conflict resolution techniques. The expert facilitators would enable the parties to develop their own solutions, thus avoiding the “top-down” approach that at times further entrenches nations in conflict. By employing neutral facilitators who do not represent any nation’s interests, the facilitation corps would help ensure that international intractable conflicts were



approached more fairly, taking into account the needs and interests of the parties first and foremost (rather than those of an intervening country). By employing regionally-based facilitators, those working with the conflict would be more likely to be knowledgeable about the context-specific conflict issues and to have excellent access to resources (such as people, documents, and institutions) that are often necessary to learn about and effectively address the needs, concerns, and interests of the involved parties.

Rubenstein describes the idea of the Corps:

*For example, the model of the OSCE, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which is a voluntary organization set up by the European states to do things together and to resolve conflicts. That's been tremendously effective in some ways. And [Dr. Marc] Gopin is asking, and I think he's exactly right, "Why shouldn't the Middle East have the equivalent of an OSCE that would help the Iraqis now, for example, deal with questions like, do they want their oil nationalized or privatized? Do they want to have an Islamic state or non-Islamic state or some kind of combination?... I mean, these are questions which the Americans are now presuming to answer for everybody. And saying that there's some U.N. committee that should answer them isn't much better. The parties themselves need to answer those questions. And the parties most directly affected are the Iraqis themselves and their neighbors. So Gopin has been screaming now for two or three years that this kind of regional conflict resolution, using independent experts like us, who would be truly independent. That is to say wouldn't be representing our government or anybody else, we could be facilitators. So we can't make the decisions for the folks; we can be facilitators. And that this should be done not only in the Middle East. It should be done in the Balkans, and it should be done in South Asia, all the places where the Transcend organization people have been active and some of us have visited and so on. So that I'm not talking now so much about a system...I mean, I can fantasize about a better system. But I'm talking now more about process and I'm talking about a negative. And the negative is: the American empire doesn't decide these issues. Also, the American empire allied with the old European empire doesn't decide these issues. The people in the areas most directly affected with whatever facilitation they need and want decide these issues...I think it should be the job of our field to help to help develop those alternatives.*

Distinguish Morality from Moralism. Morality can be defined as a code of conduct put forward by a society, religion, or other group that, under certain conditions,

would be supported by all rational people (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2004).

In contrast, Dr. Dale Jamieson uses the term “moralism” to describe a phenomenon in which individuals and groups inappropriately use moral codes to support their own point of view. This type of behavior occurs frequently in the context of intractable conflicts, and in fact, is often exactly what makes some conflicts so difficult to resolve. Jamieson offers an example of Israelis’ and Palestinians’ attempts to use moral values to justify their own rightness in the conflict:

*... When a Jewish settler says this land is only big enough for one of us and it's going to be us, or a Palestinian says this land is only big enough for one of us and it's going to be us-- that is exactly the opposite of moral thinking. Whatever people might say about “we were here first,” or “the Bible gave the land to us” and so on and so forth, there's no real moral thinking that's going on in this case because there is a complete failure of impartiality... That's what makes [morality] different from moralism. Moralism can be dressing up my own interests or preferences in the language of objective right or truth. And there certainly is a lot of moralism in these conflicts, but that's not the same [as morality].*

Jamieson suggests that one way to address intractable conflicts steeped in moralistic arguments is to help the parties distinguish between morality and moralism. He proposes that the concept of impartiality is at the essence of morality. According to Jamieson, impartiality can be defined as working to bring about the best overall results in a situation, regardless of the distribution of those results. For example, if one is asked to make a decision by choosing from among a set of policies without knowing which one might benefit or harm oneself, the choice is said to be made impartially. In this sense, impartiality signifies a concern for the whole system rather than concern only for one's own piece of it. A simple example of impartiality in a conflict situation is the “cut and choose” system, in which two siblings fighting over a piece of pie might decide that one sibling will cut the piece of pie in half, and the other sibling will have the opportunity to

choose which piece to take first. This system encourages the person who cuts the pie to be as fair as possible, since she doesn't know which piece of the pie she'll receive.

Jamieson suggests that morality, and by extension, impartiality can be used in intractable conflict situations to help individuals and groups shift from a moralistic point of view to a moral one. He says,

*...Morality, essentially, is an institution or a set of social practices that is pretty culturally universal, and evolved, I think, as a way of regulating social behavior. In that sense it would be kind of weird to think that morality was part of the problem in generating intractable conflicts, since morality, just as an evolutionary artifact, is one of the ways that we cope with having to live together in society. [The concept of morality] has resources, once people really do engage in moral thinking, for making progress on some of these conflicts.*

The concepts of morality and impartiality can be used at many levels of intervention, from interpersonal conflicts to international conflicts. On the interpersonal level, let us take the case of a husband and wife who are in the process of filing for divorce and are engaged in a bitter conflict over the custody rights for their child. The wife argues that the child belongs primarily with his mother, and she justifies her position by contending that all children need a mother's nurturance and guidance. The husband supports his own logic by arguing that the most important thing his son needs is a male role model and father-figure. Each parent uses moral values to justify his or her own position. This is what Jamieson would call engaging in moralistic thinking.

To help the couple reach an agreement on this issue, a mediator could introduce the concept of impartiality. For example, the mediator could ask, "If you did not know how the results of the custody decision would affect you, what would you recommend as a fair outcome for all parties involved?" Or, "If we were talking about someone else's child, and the decision were not going to affect either of you at all, what do you think

would be best for the child?” In this scenario, the mediator introduces the concept of impartiality to help the parties shift from a moralistic point of view, in which each uses moral values to justify his or her own position, to a moral point of view, in which the parties seek an outcome that can be considered fair from all sides’ perspectives.

Use Narratological Analysis and Psychodrama to Address Embedded Conflict Narratives. Information provided by the media in the form of print, television, and web-based journalism, by political leaders in the form of public speeches, written documents and campaign advertisements, and through educational sources such as curricula and textbooks all shape how the public perceives certain issues, including large-scale conflict situations. In particular, according to Rothbart, the metaphorical perspectives communicated through such information have the power to define the conflict, and to determine a moral order in a society, in which the writer’s/leader’s/speaker’s own group is referred to as moral, fair and just, and another group is depicted as evil, bad and wrong. When these stories become embedded in the societal structure in which the conflict takes place, the situation can become entrenched and intractable. For example, as the war in Iraq was approaching in 2003, Rothbart noted,

*Well, there's been a lot of analysis about the metaphors with George Bush talking about the enemy in the Iraq war. These metaphors are very powerful about his conception of not only what should be done against Sadaam Hussein but also his sense of identifying what America is and what the American identity is in relationship to the evils of Iraq. He uses these terms oftentimes: the civilized world as opposed to uncivilized, a sense of crusader, the crusade against forces of evil, darkness, lightness and so on. It's a clear example of something that goes on a lot with respect to protracted social conflict. So many of them involve an identity through religious myths and identity of the group that's given through these religious story lines. There's no shortage of examples. And, again, what's important here is that for Bush and for those people committed to these religious narratives, it is what gives coherence to their own identity in relation to the other, to the enemy or the forces of evil. And it's a whole worldview. And what's fascinating about some of these speeches and some of the narratological analysis*

*of conversation and speeches is that these words kind of sneak in and they seem rather innocent and, in some cases, rather innocuous. But really they project a moral order...an entire worldview in some cases.*

According to Rothbart, one practice for preventing the intractability of conflict situations is to use a process called narratological analysis to raise the public's level of awareness about the presence of metaphors in political speeches, media reports, educational textbooks, etc. and the power they have to influence our views about the conflict and the parties involved. Narratological analysis is designed to examine the ways that "narrative structures our perception of both cultural artifacts and the world around us" (Introductory Guide to Critical Theory website, 2004). Rothbart discusses how narratological analysis can be applied to work with intractable conflicts:

*Methods...that have been developed in great detail for understanding small-scale conflicts, you know, in therapeutic contexts and in conflicts among individuals, family dynamics and those settings, those methods can be extended, I think, for understanding protracted social conflicts at a broader scale. And in particular what's valuable about the narrative is that the narrative basically provides or forces a question about the fundamental metaphors that are used by the group for their own identity... The challenge in a narratological analysis is to look at the way in which words are used; how the words assume certain moral standing within a group and between one group and another group, and how those categories of identity basically project a whole order, whose set of moral prescriptions about how we should live our lives, obligations and rights and all of that.*

Formal and informal educational programs could incorporate narratological analysis methods to teach children and adults to think more critically about the messages they receive from the media and educational sources. For example, high school social studies curricula could teach students how to identify the ways in which the writer/speaker/leader uses language to put forth his or her own views on an issue and to prescribe how he or she would like us to respond to the issue. This kind of educational initiative could raise awareness about the ways in which media, political and educational

sources affect the public's behavior in conflict situations. Raising people's awareness about these issues could help prevent the issues from becoming polarized, and in doing so, could prevent conflicts from becoming intractable.

Another practice, called psychodrama, founded by Dr. Jacob. L. Moreno, is a method of psychotherapy in which individuals enact events in their lives through dramatization, role playing and dramatic self-presentation. Both verbal and non-verbal communications are utilized, and many psychotherapeutic techniques are employed, such as role reversal, doubling, and soliloquy (Kellermann, 1992). Psychodrama can be used by facilitators in small group settings to deal with intractable conflict situations. Use of psychodrama in such situations transforms narrative on two levels: from the public to the personal, and from the "heard" to the "seen". The narrative that has been communicated publicly through the media, and other formal and informal education systems can be transformed by a personal acting out of the story.

Using psychodrama techniques, a facilitator helps each group member tell the stories that he or she brings to the group. Group members take turns being the protagonist and serve as observers and actors for one another's stories. Once the protagonist briefly describes his or her story, the story is then acted out using a variety of psychotherapeutic techniques (such as role reversal, doubling, and soliloquy) to help the protagonist and other group members see the story from the protagonist's perspective, and/or in a reinvented, alternative way. For example, protagonists can change the story so that it reflects how they would ideally like to have handled a situation by using verbal and non-verbal language that is unfamiliar to them, and by trying out new roles and ways of interacting. Or, they can watch themselves being played by another group member on

stage, thereby maintaining some physical distance from the story and viewing the interpersonal dynamics present in the story from a new perspective. Through these and other techniques, protagonists have the opportunity to, in a sense, re-live their personal story. In addition to helping the protagonist, psychodrama also enables group members to gain a better understanding of the protagonist's perspective, and thus to develop a heightened sense of empathy for her or him.

Fisher describes a time when she used psychodrama to help a group of Israeli and Palestinian high school students deal with the larger conflict as it was reflected in their interpersonal relationships. She describes a scenario in which Rina,<sup>2</sup> a female Israeli student, is not happy with the behavior of Forsan, a male Palestinian student. Rina does not like that Forsan laughs and makes fun during serious, troubling moments regarding the conflict in their group. Following is a description of Fisher's intervention in this small group situation:

*I asked Forsan, "Do you ever remember a time where something was serious but you were laughing?" He said, "No, not really." And then...he came back fairly quickly and said, "Actually no, you know what, I do remember a time." And so we set out that time...He was with his family in Nablus, I believe, and...there was bombing going on right by his house, and he had been very frightened, and his family was very frightened. His little sister was screaming, his father was trying to be brave, his mother was huddled in a corner. And he was acting like – hey, I wanna see the helicopters. He was trying to blow it off like this is no big deal. And so we saw that. We had people playing members of his family, people from the group. And then I asked to sculpt how he would want it, because he had picked two people to play him. There was a sort of care-free, inauthentic Forsan, and the Forsan inside who was actually quite frightened and concerned about his mother and little sister. I had him do most of it from outside rather than being in the scene again, because it was pretty traumatic. So he was watching this. And I had him sort of resculpt how he would have wanted the moment to be, and what he did was, he put his family together instead of being in different parts of the room...He had them all touching. He had them lined up kind of like in a family portrait where they were all together. And Rina, who had initially had the complaint...it helped. It put a completely different context around [Forsan's]*

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<sup>2</sup> Names and places in this story have been changed

*behavior. And then, you know, their conflict was completely transformed into another level. [Rina] no longer had that complaint about [Forsan]. She understood where it was coming from, and she was very gratified about his story.*

As the above anecdote suggests, observing personal stories using psychodrama techniques makes it difficult to deny an individual's personal experience. In the context of an intractable conflict, psychodrama can help individuals find ways to reconcile the conflict stories they have learned through the media and other public sources with personal stories of the Other. Ultimately, a main goal of using psychodrama in conflict situations is to enable participants to experience the accumulation of the different perspectives as part of one complex conflict story. Fisher says,

*That's what I meant by point counterpoint. It's a conversation of, "This is what it's like for me." "Oh, this is what it's like for me." And the nice thing about this is it's not about, "Well, your story isn't valid because my story proves it wrong." No story is wrong... You just keep building layers, and layers, and layers of context which help people hold all the different poles of the story, of the total conflict story. So people are telling the story and you can see how destruction and violence has imposed something on their lives.*

Psychodrama helps transform the embedded conflict narrative that is present in so many intractable conflict situations. It is a unique method for personalizing and validating the complexity of existing personal stories. Psychodrama is uniquely positioned to help those on all sides of a conflict to experience and empathize with one another's personal narratives. In addition, while psychodrama is ultimately employed at the interpersonal level, it can be used to address situations that have taken place at varying levels and in diverse contexts—from family conflicts at the interpersonal level to ethnic conflicts at the international level.

Work With "Cold Cases". Intractable conflicts are often the result of accumulated stereotyping, selective perception, and cognitive rigidity. These processes



can fuel dehumanization of the enemy, which can lead to moral disengagement (Bandura, 1982), whereby people develop rigid moral boundaries that justify a hostile cessation of contact and communication with out-group members (Coleman, 2003). In this context, it can seem impossible to bring conflicting groups together to help the conflict become more tractable. Jamieson describes a practice in which he and some colleagues were able to overcome this problem. They engaged a joint working group comprised of business people and environmentalists to dialogue about environmental/development cases that had already been decided at some point in the past. The group referred to these cases as “cold cases” since they had already been decided, and thus did not hold the same potential for heated or “hot” problematic debate as some similar yet more current cases did.

Below, Jamieson notes some of the factors that contributed to the success of the work between the business executives and the environmentalists. However, he observes that the most difficult part of the process was getting the opposing parties to sit down at the table together in the first place.

*I'll tell you the hardest thing. Actually, it wasn't very hard to get this to happen once you got people together. You did all the kind of usual things. You gave them confidentiality, you gave them food, you flattered them, you created a kind of camaraderie within the group. I mean, I think we did do some role playing and side switching. But mainly we kind of set this up as a collaborative problem solving enterprise...Also the people we were dealing with were all really extraordinary people. I mean, they were people who were leaders, and were aggressive in the sense of once they took something on they wanted to make something happen. The hardest part was to get people to agree to do this in the first place.*

Jamieson describes the encounter that took place once he and his colleagues had gathered the group:

*We got these sort of intractable business types together with these intractable environmentalists, who basically were the people who would be wringing each other's necks and suing each other. And what we did is we took some old conflicts, what we called cold cases, rather than hot cases, and we essentially got them to work over cold cases together. And the thing that was really kind of amazing is when it came to analyzing and understanding the cold cases, they turned out to have a lot in common. I mean, they would come to some—consensus might be too strong—but, you know sometimes they would even switch sides on the cold cases...*

Jamieson continues to describe how working with the cold cases enabled some members of both parties to not only begin to see the situation from the other sides' perspective, but actually in some cases to become so persuaded by the reasoning of the other side's perspective, that they publicly changed their point of view on the subject at hand.

*They would actually switch. I mean, looking back, analyzing, seeing what happened, looking at the facts in a less charged way, and so on and so forth, sometimes one side who you have thought of as being anti-Green would end up saying that they thought a more green response was the right one, and someone who was on the green side...*

Publicly switching one's point of view on a subject that holds deep symbolic meaning and is linked with one's identity tends to be a very difficult and rare activity for parties in intractable conflict. Jamieson suggests that working with cold cases may enable parties embroiled in ideological conflict to switch sides more easily for a couple of reasons. First, working with cold cases helps them to see the complexity of the situation more clearly. Because the discussions focus on situations that have already been decided at some point in the past, there is less tangibly at stake, and the issues become less emotionally charged. This provides an environment in which the parties can feel safe viewing the situation from alternative perspectives. Second, the ability to perceive the situation as more complex and nuanced motivates them to demonstrate that they are

rational, fair-minded human beings who are open to being persuaded by compelling arguments that they may not have previously considered. Jamieson says,

*[Discussing cases that had already been decided] enabled [the participants] to see that the cases tended to be very complicated and have all sorts of unpredictable aspects. I think that most people, even people who are really pretty ideologically driven are...they don't see themselves as these automatons who are just doing logical deductions from some grand principle. I mean, they see themselves as being responsive to the way the world is...So when it's a cold case and things come out looking a way that would look very surprising, in a way that just shows their fair-mindedness.*

The parties' willingness to become persuaded by the other side's arguments in the context of discussing cold cases was representative of one of the positive outcomes of the experience, which was both parties' willingness to recognize the humanity of the other side and to restore dignity to the other side.

*...The biggest lesson substantively about these cases was that there was really no single right answer, and how complex the cases were...So in a way, almost more than anything, I feel like what the cases showed—what happened between people and process was enormously important, and the other thing that was so important was the kind of humility that it engendered. And that was more important than sort of overt side-switching, if you will...By working through these cold cases with the enemy, it also gave them some trust that the enemy wasn't just an ideological monster, but was someone who was actually sensitive to a variety of values and nuances.*

If using cold cases encourages parties to publicly display more “fair-minded” behavior and enables parties to recognize the dignity and humanity of the other side, this bodes well for the potential this practice may have to help parties build relationships that will make it possible to work together on current cases in the future. If so, this model seems worth replicating on a broader scale. For example, practitioners working with groups divided along the abortion rights issue, or in religiously-based or other ideologically-based conflicts could bring leaders from all sides together to discuss cold

cases as a way to build relationships between the parties while engaging in a frank discussion of the issues.

### Study Limitations and Methodological Recommendations

There is an inherent tension in conducting elicitive research. On the one hand, we seek to be as elicitive as possible by asking participants to tell us what was important to them. On the other hand, we direct participants to shed light on a specific problem in which we are interested. Perhaps as a result of directing participants' answers more than we should have, despite broad diversity in disciplinary backgrounds and nationalities among the participants in this study, many of their perspectives and approaches to intractable conflict were similar to others interviewed, and to others currently working in the field. This data leads us to the following methodological recommendations for future similar studies in this area: 1) Refrain from using specific words or catch phrases that might bias participants to think about the phenomenon in a specific or narrow way. We would use a cover story in order to elicit ideas and insights on the general phenomenon of "unsolvable problems" rather than specifically on intractable social conflict. 2) Create and communicate a more specific profile of the ideal interviewee. We would seek specifically to interview experts in the basic sciences, medicine, engineering, architecture and the visual arts. 3) Do not send participants materials regarding our understanding of intractable conflict. Instead, ask participants to send us references and/or background information on their work prior to conducting the interviews. Gaining some familiarity with the participants' professional backgrounds would enable us to enter the interviews with a basic understanding of the participants' fields, and thus to focus more directly on the "unsolvable problems" in each interviewee's content area of expertise. While this

method would invariably bring up its own set of challenges, such as the researcher's need to integrate large amounts of new and unfamiliar information, the benefits would likely outweigh the costs in this case.

### Conclusion

This project was developed as a study examining metaphors, approaches to, and practices for engaging with intractable social conflict from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. We hope the summary of ideas put forth in this paper inspires readers to use the ideas highlighted in this paper and to continue to uncover new information about understanding and dealing with “unsolvable problems” in a variety of disciplines. While conducting such out-of-discipline research studies can be methodologically challenging, it seems especially worthy for scholars to embark on this type of research in the domain of intractable conflict. Given the persistent and troubling events unfolding around the world today, there is great power in generating ideas from across disciplines towards understanding, and dealing effectively with, the highly complex phenomenon of intractable social conflict.

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