

Elements of Peacemaking Revolutions

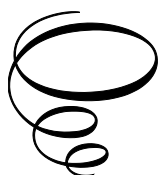
Elements of Peacemaking Revolutions:

Leaders, People and Institutions

By

Sapir Handelman

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To my lovely wife Yael and our daughters,
Avia and Mia, the sunshine of our lives

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PREFACE

Intractable conflict is a protracted, violent and long-time struggle, wherein generation after generation is socially conditioned to continue fighting. To break the chain of destruction, a revolutionary peacemaking process is required. This book serves as an introduction to the study of peacemaking revolutions, which are necessary to build a peaceful and well-functioning society in desperate intractable conflict situations.

The book is written from a contractualist perspective. Contractualism grows out of a major dispute between two classic Peace and Conflict Studies paradigms: realism and pluralism. In a contractualist framework, the challenge of a peacemaking revolution is to turn opposing parties into a peacemaking community. A peacemaking community offers political platforms to involve the different societal elements of the opposing parties – leaders, elites and people – in the struggle for change. It is a consensus building process that approaches the conflict from different sides, dimensions and directions.

This book introduces two complementary models of a peacemaking community – the structural and operational. The structural model describes the building blocks of a peacemaking community – the elements necessary for transforming conflicting parties into a peacemaking community. The operational model describes tools and mechanisms which enable a peacemaking community to function and progress the revolution – diplomatic settings in three dimensions. The book describes and analyzes the peacemaking revolutions in Northern Ireland and South Africa, during the 1990s, in light of these two complementary models.

The book's main goal is to add a fresh perspective to the study of destructive social conflicts, their transformation, and resolution. I hope it will provoke a critical discussion among those who are interested in the new emerging study of peacemaking revolutions.

Portions of Chapter 4 appeared in the *International Journal of Conflict Management*. These parts are incorporated into this manuscript with the permission of the publisher of that journal.

Avia, my daughter, drew the picture for the cover of the book, the smile of Mia, my daughter, was an inspiration, and Yael, my wife, supported us.

Tel-Aviv, Israel
Sapir Handelman, May, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of time, human beings have been struggling to build the foundations of a decent, peaceful and well-functioning society. Unfortunately, we have not yet found the formula to establish a social order that can give all of us the opportunity to live a satisfactory life. Our world faces almost infinite social problems and crises – from proliferation of nuclear weapons to religious fanaticism and ethnic cleansing. The enemy threatening the very existence of any human society is often disguised and constantly changes form.

Our social problems emerge in large part between two extremes: vicious dictatorships (Fascism) and complete chaos (such as civil wars and intrastate conflicts). At the beginning of the 20th century, the most severe social problem was dictatorial regimes – such as Fascism and Nazism – and the devastation that they caused. Toward the beginning of the 21st century, the enemy has changed its appearance and moved to the other end of the spectrum. The problems that have begun to attract more and more attention are civil wars, intrastate struggles and ethnic conflicts, which can be viewed as different forms of social chaos.

This book deals with severe social crises of violent reality that often create chaos, confusion and despair. It concentrates on difficult situations of intractable conflict, a long-time struggle where ordinary citizens, rather than standing armies, have been central to these conflicts and have suffered from them on a daily basis.

The main argument of the book is that in these desperate situations, a revolutionary peacemaking process is required in order to break the chain of destruction. Building the foundations of a peacemaking revolution requires a multifaceted strategy which approaches the conflict from any possible, imaginable and unimaginable dimension.

Intractable Conflict and Peacemaking Revolutions

Intractable conflict is a long-term struggle that appears to be most desperate. In its classical form, generation after generation is born into a reality of fear, intimidation and violence. Intractable conflict can be a power struggle between super powers that can quite easily destroy the world (the Cold War); it can be a religious conflict between different factions about the

proper way to worship the Divine (Catholics versus Protestants); and it can be a bitter struggle for equity, mutual respect and tolerance (the battle against the Apartheid in South Africa). Most cases of intractable conflict are conceived as existential to the conflicting parties.

Intractable conflicts can appear and develop around different issues and values encompassing almost any dimension of our social life. The different types of intractable conflict share one major characteristic – they are long term struggles that resist almost any type of peaceful resolution. In order to break the chain of destruction, a revolutionary peacemaking process that brings “unheard language, another logic, a revaluation of all values” is required.¹ How can we create a peacemaking revolution in these desperate situations? How can we bring the spirit of constructive change to a gloomy situation that often appears to be hopeless? How can we build the foundations of a new peaceful social order in situations where conflict is a central issue?

This book concentrates on situations of intractable conflict where ordinary citizens are at the center of the struggle and are suffering from it, sometimes, on a daily basis. The main argument of the book is that a peacemaking revolution is required to achieve an effective positive change in these tragic situations. It presents a contractualist approach to the study of intractable conflicts and peacemaking revolutions.

According to contractualism, the challenge of a revolutionary peacemaking process is to turn the opposing parties into a peacemaking community. A peacemaking community is a social configuration in which three distinct societal elements – leaders, elites and people – engage specific platforms in the struggle to create a peaceful social order.

The Outline of the Book

The book offers guidelines for a revolutionary peacemaking process that has the potential to effectively cope with difficult situations of intractable conflict. Intractable conflict is a protracted, destructive social situation wherein generations are born into the reality of a violent struggle. The phenomenon seems to operate as a destructive, evolutionary mechanism subject to a general rule: every element that benefits the conflict survives, while whatever operates against it becomes extinct. Indeed, almost every attempt to solve conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian struggle creates new problems, which in turn, most of the time, lead to failure and regression.

History shows that there are no simple solutions in these cases. The reason is that intractable conflict, like almost every phenomenon in the social sciences, is a “complex phenomenon.” This means that it is almost

impossible to make specific predictions about future outcomes or to control the chain of events in the causal chain.² To put it another way, intractable conflict is likely to be influenced by so many different factors that it is almost impossible for any human being to direct developments toward one specific solution, since there will always be unintended consequences.³ Good intentions to promote peace and stability, often enough, can cause more harm than benefit.

In the social sciences, we cannot make specific predictions, but we might identify general patterns and tendencies. We can assume that a peacemaking process that approaches the conflict from various sides, directions and dimensions has the potential to start mobilizing the train of change forward. A multifaceted attack on the motivating vehicles of intractable conflict is a peacemaking revolution.

This first chapter describes general patterns that portray the phenomenon of intractable conflict. It focuses on symptoms and characteristics that demonstrate the complexity and the intractability of the situation. The intention is to clarify and support the central claim of the book – a peacemaking revolution, which brings different logic, spirit and perspective, is required to create an effective positive change in situations of intractable conflict. However, “peacemaking revolution” is a controversial term.

Different schools of thought emphasize different aspects of intractable conflict and evaluate the situation from different viewpoints. Naturally, each one of them suggests a different interpretation of the concept ‘peacemaking revolution’ and offers a different strategy to mobilize the revolutionary train forward. The second chapter provides a conceptual framework for the analysis in the book. It presents a contractualist approach to Peace and Conflict Studies, which grows out of the dispute between two dominant paradigms in the field: Realism and Pluralism.

Contractualists analyze the peace and conflict game from a fresh perspective. They suggest looking at the two competitive paradigms – realism versus pluralism – as complementary – realism and pluralism. Contractualism suggests a multidimensional approach to Peace & Conflict Studies that combines insights and ideas from the two classical paradigms.

Contractualists point out that the absence of a peace treaty acceptable to the conflicting parties is a major problem in situations of intractable conflict. They emphasize that there is a broad consensus in the opposing parties that it is impossible to reach a peace agreement and build effective mechanisms to keep it. The classical symptoms of intractable conflict worsen the situation. For example, one of the symptoms of the crisis is that almost any attempt to make progress toward peace tends to increase the level of violence. Radicals and spoilers use aggressive means to crash any

substantial peacemaking initiative. The results, often enough, are despair, regression, and even escalation.

A peacemaking revolution, according to contractualism, is a consensus building process. The challenge is to transform conflicting parties into a peacemaking community that involves the different societal elements of the opposing parties in the struggle for change. A peacemaking community enables all sides to create a major peacemaking coalition that can marginalize the political impact of radicals, extremists and spoilers.

The basis of this new social configuration (peacemaking community) is not a love affair or altruistic motivation but rather a deep understanding of the importance of means of interactive communication – such as, dialogue, critical discussion, public debate and negotiation - as effective instruments to resolve disputes by peaceful means. The opposing parties begin to accept the idea that violence, in the broadest sense of the word, is not an effective way to achieve political goals. A peacemaking community has a structure and operating system.

Chapter 3 presents a structural model of a peacemaking community. It introduces building blocks for transforming conflicting parties into a peacemaking community. Following Samuel Huntington's model of community building, the chapter points out that four elements are necessary to create the transformation: **Common Interest** - Strong desire to resolve the conflict by peaceful means, **Rules** – democratic principles of dialogue, **Peacemaking Institutions** and **Visionary Leaders**. The chapter describes the revolutionary transition of South Africa from Apartheid to Democracy in light of the parameters of the structural model.

Chapter 4 presents an operational model of a peacemaking community. As the complement to the structural model (chapter 3) - which specifies the necessary conditions for transforming opposing parties into a peacemaking community – the operational model focuses on the revolutionary process. It describes the operating system of a peacemaking community, which enables it to initiate, maintain and conclude a peacemaking revolution.

The chapter begins with introducing a contractualist model of the interplay between leaders (policy makers) and people (public opinion) and its impact on the strategy to cope with situations of intractable conflict. It shows that peacemaking revolution is a process of dynamic equilibrium between peacemaking policy and public expectations for change. A revolutionary peacemaking process progresses from one point of equilibrium to the next.

The instrument to initiate, mobilize and conclude a peacemaking revolution is Diplomacy in three dimensions – political-elite diplomacy, public diplomacy, and people-to-people diplomacy. Political- elite diplomacy

offers diplomatic channels for leaders to begin a peace process, support it and conclude agreements. Public diplomacy offers instruments to involve the people in the peacemaking efforts, prepare them for a change, and motivate the leaderships to conclude agreements. People-to-people diplomacy provides interaction channels to engage ordinary people of opposing sides in grassroots initiatives. These enterprises are designed to establish peacemaking coalitions, build public support for peacemaking endeavors, and organize peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. The chapter analyzes the revolutionary peacemaking process in Northern Ireland during the 1990s in light of the contractualist model.

The book concludes that a peacemaking revolution is a necessary condition to create an effective positive change in situations of intractable conflict. However, peacemaking revolution does not guarantee perpetual peace. A peace revolution – which includes peacemaking, peacebuilding and peacekeeping measures – is required to create the conditions for a long-lasting peace, where violence is not a viable option anymore.⁴ The evolutionary challenge of peace revolution is to turn opposing parties into a peacemaking community (peacemaking revolution) which is transformed into a peacekeeping community.

This book focuses on models of peacemaking revolution which is only one dimension in the endless struggle to build the foundations of a decent, stable and long-lasting peaceful social order.

Notes

¹ Quoted in Carl Friedrich, ed. *Revolution*. (New York: Atherton Press, 1966).

² For further discussion of the nature of complex phenomena, see Friedrich Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 22-42.

³ A good example is one of the unintended consequences of the dramatic peace initiative of Anwar Sadat, the former president of Egypt. Sadat, the leader of the strongest Arab country and one of the most entrenched enemies of Israel, surprised the world and came to Jerusalem to talk peace in the Israeli parliament (the Knesset) in 1977. The initiative led to negotiations and peace agreements between the two countries. However, there are no free lunches.

The peace treaty between Israel and Egypt contributed to the breaking of the Utopian Pan-Arabism dream – to unite all Arab states. The failure to establish a united Arab nationalism created a vacuum in the Arab world, which enabled the rise of political Islam. Unfortunately, Sadat paid a dear price for his peace initiative – on October 6, 1981, a radical Islamist assassinated him.

For a further discussion on Pan-Arabism see Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler, ed. *Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Modern Egypt*.

(Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004). According to Joseph Agassi Pan-Arabism associates the ethnic identity with the national identity. In contrast, political Islam associates the religious identity with the national identity. See Joseph Agassi, *Liberal Nationalism for Israel: Towards an Israeli National Identity* (Jerusalem and New York: Gefen Pub. House, 1999).

⁴ Compare to Karl, Deutsch, et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press., 1957) and Sapir Handelman, “Peace Revolution as a Three-Dimensional Process – The Israeli-Palestinian Case.” In *Education, Human Rights and Peace*, ed. Maigul Nugmanova, Heimo Mikkola, Alexander Rozanov and Valentina Komleva. (London: IntechOpen, 2019), 1-18.

CHAPTER 1

INTRACTABLE CONFLICT: SYMPTOMS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Intractable conflict is a protracted, violent and long-term struggle, wherein generation after generation is born into a reality of fear, intimidation and aggression. Intractable conflict can appear and develop around various issues and values encompassing almost any dimension of our social life. For example, intractable conflict could be a power struggle between super powers that could quite easily destroy the world (the Cold War). It could be a religious struggle between different factions about the proper way to worship the Divine (Sunnis against Shias). It could be an entrenched struggle between two Peoples over a tiny piece of land that is believed to be holy (the Israeli-Palestinian conflict). And it can be a bitter struggle for equal rights and democracy (the battle against Apartheid in South Africa).

Most intractable conflicts share a major characteristic: they are long-term struggles that resist almost any sort of peaceful resolution. This phenomenon seems to operate as a social mechanism that has a life of its own. It is similar to a painful disease that controls the body without almost any possibility to recover from it. Nevertheless, there are intractable conflicts that eventually have been resolved or, at least, have been transformed by a dramatic change that provided an extended respite from the violent struggle.¹ For example, the last chapter of the violent conflict over the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, the “troubles”, concluded with a power sharing agreement; The struggle against the system of racial segregation in Apartheid South Africa achieved a new democratic system; The Afro-American civil rights struggle in the United States created a social revolution that ended the codification of racism in 1965. These cases indicate the impossibility of forecasting if and how ongoing situations of intractable conflict (such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) will end.

The road to create a change in each one of these cases was different. However, the common denominator is that each intractable conflict was considered a desperate situation. It took a great deal of time and almost

infinite “change making efforts” to reach a settlement. Unfortunately, it is frequently unclear if an intractable conflict has been truly resolved or has simply given the parties a precious break from fighting until a new cycle of violence begins.

This book concentrates on situations of intractable conflict where ordinary people, rather than standing armies, are at the center of the struggle and continually suffering from it. The central claim is that a peacemaking revolution is needed to create an effective positive change in these situations that seem most desperate.

1.1 Intractable Conflict as a Complex Phenomenon

Intractable conflict, like nearly every phenomenon in the social sciences, is a “complex phenomenon.”² This means that it is impossible to make specific predictions about future outcomes and to control the chain of events. Intractable conflict is likely to be influenced by so many different factors that it is impossible for any human being to direct developments toward one specific solution, since there will always be unintended consequences. Any militaristic, political and diplomatic move will create results, developments, and repercussions that cannot be fully anticipated, predicted and controlled.

Dramatic initiatives of political leaders, who believe they can shape the sociopolitical construction of an intractable conflict according to their preferences and world-views, help to demonstrate the complexity of such conflicts and the phenomenon of unintended consequences.³ For example, in the 1980s, the South-African white ruling elites began to understand that a major political change in the governmental system of the country is inevitable. President P.W. Botha, who came to power in 1978, initiated liberal reforms in the Apartheid system. However, he did not intend to end white domination and revolutionize the system.⁴ The reforms stimulated intensified demands from the black population for full democracy. The good intentions to establish a more liberal country led to violence and instability. Order was restored by military force. Unfortunately, as the political scientist Samuel Huntington noted, “Botha the reformer was widely viewed as having become Botha the repressor.”⁵

In situations of “complex phenomena” – in contrast to Newtonian physics – it is almost impossible to predict specific developments and to direct the chain of events toward one explicit, well-defined goal.⁶ However, we might be able to identify certain tendencies or general patterns that are likely to emerge under certain conditions and constraints. We can assume, or more precisely hope, that a comprehensive approach to peacemaking –

which approaches an intractable conflict from various directions, sides and dimensions – will create an environment conducive to an effective peacemaking process. This is the challenge of peacemaking revolution.⁷

1.2 Intractable Conflict: between Reality and Psychology

Protracted violent conflicts often begin with “real problems” – not everything is psychology. “Real problems” are problems that in principle can be identified, quantified and in an ideal world of rational human beings could be resolved or, at least, could be managed by various methods of negotiation and dialogue.⁸ Examples of “real problems” include territorial claims, disputes over allocation of resources and demographic complications. However, in our real human world the interplay between the subjective dimension (the mental sphere) and the objective one (the physical dimension) can complicate the situation beyond imagination.

People involved in intractable conflicts have the propensity to believe that fundamental matters – such as basic needs, core interests, and essential values – are at stake. They are motivated by the fear that those issues, which are so important to them, cannot be achieved and/or maintained by peaceful means. Human needs theorists and practitioners, such as John Burton and Herbert Kelman, have demonstrated and emphasized that intractable conflicts are driven by the struggle to satisfy basic needs, including material needs, “such as food, shelter, physical safety, and physical well-being” and psychological needs, “such as identity, security, recognition, autonomy, self-esteem, and a sense of justice.”⁹

The lack of political means to resolve the conflict and guarantee that fundamental matters could be achieved and maintained by peaceful means create certain psychological conditions that fuel the struggle. For example, people involved in protracted conflicts have an inclination to cling to entrenched beliefs, develop animosity and build up prejudices that manifest in well-known psychological symptoms. Let me demonstrate the impact of psychology on the situation by bringing three well-known characteristics:

1. War for Survival- Each side believes that existential issues are at stake.

People involved in protracted conflicts tend to believe that the struggle is about fundamental and even existential matters. For example, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, most Israelis believe that security is a main issue in the struggle, while Palestinians believe that they are struggling for freedom and liberty. The fear that these fundamental issues cannot be achieved through peaceful means contributes to the entrenched convention that the conflict cannot be resolved.

The opposing parties are unwilling, or more precisely afraid, to explore creative and innovative solutions that are badly needed in these difficult situations. Moreover, they are often unwilling to consider the possibility that there may be more than one way to resolve fundamental issues that are at the core of the conflict. In South Africa, for example, during the final stage of the Apartheid regime, when an effective change making process finally was set in motion, it took about eight years of extensive negotiations on multiple levels to reach an agreement that enabled the transition to Democracy.¹⁰ Tragically, even now – about 27 years since the first democratic elections – there are still people who believe that the resolution was a disaster.¹¹

2. *Mirror image – Each side believes that the rival is not interested in peace.*

The ‘mirror image’ phenomenon was discovered by the American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, who was intrigued that American and Russian negative images of each other, during the cold war, were symmetrical: “slowly and painfully, it forced itself upon me that the Russian’s distorted picture of us was curiously similar to our view of them – a mirror image.”¹² Observations show that a mirroring distortion appears in almost any intractable conflict. It leads to a tragic situation where each opponent believes that there are no human beings on the other side who understand the meaning of peace. The mirror image phenomenon primes the ground for extremists and spoilers to shape a policy that is destructive for both sides.

The root of the mirror image, at least in the moderate majority, is ignorance of the other side’s difficulties and aspirations. Each side is entrenched in its own position without realizing that its strategy for coping with the difficulties only deteriorates the relationships. Each side interprets any act of violence, even for self-defense, as an additional proof of the inhumanity of the rival. Senator Mitchell describes this symptom, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in his report of the 2001 Sharm el-Sheik Fact-Finding Committee:

“Despite their long history and close proximity, some Israelis and Palestinians seem not to fully appreciate each other’s problems and concerns. Some Israelis appear not to comprehend the humiliation and frustration that Palestinians must endure every day as a result of living with the continuing effects of occupation, sustained by the presence of Israeli military forces and settlements in their midst, or the determination of the Palestinians to achieve independence and genuine self-determination. Some Palestinians appear not to comprehend the extent to which terrorism creates fear among the Israeli people and undermines their belief in the possibility of co-

existence...Fear, hate, anger and frustration have risen on both sides. The greatest danger of all is that the culture of peace, nurtured over the previous decade, is being shattered. In its place there is a growing sense of futility and despair, and a growing resort to violence.”¹³

Unfortunately, the mirror image effect facilitates a sad situation wherein the strategy of violence replaces the culture of peace. This conviction – the entrenched idea that it is impossible to develop peaceful relationships with the other side – has to be broken in order to build the foundations for a peaceful social order.

3. *Victimhood – Each side believes that they are the victim in the current situation or, at least, going to be the victim in a new social order.*

The feeling of victimhood, or at least the fear of future victimhood, is based on the belief that the conflict is a justified struggle for fundamental needs, such as security, freedom, equity, and self-respect. The opposing sides believe that these basic needs are not fulfilled in the current situation or are likely going to be deprived in a future arrangement. The situation can be worse when victimhood is an integral part of the rival factions’ identity. Chronic feelings of victimhood appear in situations where “chosen trauma” is taking a central place in the tradition, folklore and mentality of a group.

The term “chosen trauma” relates to “the shared mental representation of a massive trauma that the group’s ancestors suffered at the hand of an enemy.”¹⁴ A society in which a major part of the culture and tradition is based on traumas naturally tends to be a fortified society. To put it differently, people who are always worried in the back of their minds about their very survival will not readily take chances on issues concerning their safety and well-being.

In the Israeli-Palestinian situation, for example, “chosen trauma” is a central motif. On the Jewish-Israeli side, it is the fresh and fairly recent experience of endless pogroms culminating in the Holocaust along with the ancient, ingrained, and painful memory of the destruction of the Second Temple around 70 CE.¹⁵ The Palestinians, from their side, believe that they do not have to pay the price for the tragic and traumatic history of the Jewish people. For them, the “chosen trauma” is the establishment of the independent state of Israel. Unfortunately, the happiest date for Jewish Israelis is marked as a traumatic event on the Palestinian calendar. The anniversary day of independence for Israelis became the day of the catastrophe (the Nakba day) for Palestinians.

Ironically, as the famous Israeli author Amos Oz describes, Jews and Arabs suffered from the same oppressor: “Europe, which colonized the Arab world, exploited it, humiliated it, trampled upon its culture...is the

same Europe which discriminated against the Jews, persecuted them, harassed them, and finally, mass-murdered them...” Tragically, “each one of the parties looks at the other and sees in the other the image of their past oppressors.”¹⁶

The result of these psychological symptoms is the absence of a serious public debate among members of the opposing parties on fundamental issues that relate to the very essence of the conflict. For example, in the Israeli-Palestinian situation there is no serious public discussion on primary issues, such as the fate of Jerusalem and the refugees’ problem. Unfortunately, without addressing these fundamental issues there is not going to be a resolution to the conflict.

Interestingly, these symptoms, which contribute so much to the continuation of the struggle, have important functionality for the people in the opposing parties. It allows them to withstand, both physically and mentally, a desperate situation that they are unsure how to change.

The above-mentioned psychological symptoms (struggle for survival, mirror image, and feeling of victimhood) function much like psychological defense mechanisms. On the one hand, they enable the continuation of the conflict. On the other hand, they help society members to mentally and physically cope “successfully” with a situation of unending conflict.¹⁷ The result is that dominant societal elements on both sides view aggressive means of communication as acceptable instruments for self-defense. As Thomas Schelling, the Nobel Prize laureate, noted, nuclear deterrence kept the two superpowers from destroying the world during the Cold War.¹⁸

There is no doubt that the interplay between difficult objective situations (“real” problems) and complicated psychological conditions (the subjective dimension) is a major obstacle for peacemaking. Unfortunately, this destructive interplay, which makes the situation so complicated, is only part of the story of intractable conflicts.¹⁹

1.3 The Classical Symptoms

There is consensus among social experts upon general broad characteristics of intractable conflict that could demonstrate the severity and intractability of the crisis. These characteristics support the central argument of this book – a peacemaking revolution is needed in order to create an effective change. Here are four classic features of intractable conflict.²⁰

Protracted

Intractable conflict is a long-term struggle wherein generations after generation are born into a reality of fear, violence and intimidation. In contrast to other types of struggles, which usually last less than a generation,²¹ intractable conflicts have self-perpetuating dynamics that constantly feed the conflict and extend its duration for decades.²² The phenomenon seems to work as a destructive evolutionary mechanism, subject to a general principle: almost every element that benefits the conflict survives, while whatever operates against it becomes extinct.

Indeed, almost every attempt to resolve intractable conflicts creates new problems that in turn lead to failure, regression and collapse. Intractable conflicts that eventually have been resolved (or transformed) were once considered to be desperate situations.

Irresolvable

Members of the opposing parties believe that the conflict cannot be resolved. Senator Mitchell, the independent chairman of the peace process in Northern Ireland during the 1990s, has so powerfully described it:

“Later, when I became well known in Northern Ireland, I was often stopped by strangers, on the street, in the airport, in restaurants. They almost always offered words of gratitude and encouragements: ‘Thank you, Senator.’ ‘God bless you.’ ‘We appreciate what you’re doing.’ And then, always the fear: ‘But you’re wasting your time. We’ve been killing each other for centuries and we’re doomed to go on killing each other forever.’”²³

The belief that the conflict cannot be resolved is based on a mixture of objective factors and psychological variables. This interplay (“real” problems and psychological barriers) exacerbates the difficulties and perpetuates the conflict.

Most intractable conflicts involve major “real” objective problems – such as allocation of limited resources, clash between different cultures, and refugees – which are very difficult to resolve even for an impartial spectator who is working in a peacemaking laboratory. In addition, there are psychological problems – such as lack of trust, negative image of the rival, and fear – which prevent the conflicting parties from searching together for creative solutions.

The desperation to make a substantial peacemaking change leads central elements in the opposing parties to search for methods, strategies and instruments to reduce the intensity of a continuous struggle that, according

to their beliefs, cannot be resolved in the near future. For example, the disappointing results of a significant number of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians have led more and more scholars and practitioners to believe that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be resolved in a reasonable time frame. According to this view, the two societies are simply not prepared to engage in an effective peace process that can lead the two peoples to accept necessary compromises. Analysts, especially Israeli analysts, have begun to focus upon developing techniques to manage the Israeli-Palestinian conflict instead of investing in what they believe to be futile efforts in suggesting creative strategies to resolve it. The center of attention shifted from conflict-resolution – a set of diplomatic interactions which are intended to help resolve the conflict – to conflict-management, which means improving the domestic and foreign position of each side in order to reduce the intensity of the irresolvable struggle.²⁴

Existential

The rival parties believe that fundamental issues, which are perceived as necessary for living a decent and satisfactory life, are at the center of the conflict. These fundamental issues include: basic needs, such as security, food and shelter; essential values, such as liberty, equity, and social justice; and vital aspirations, such as recognition, statehood and development. The belief that these fundamental issues are absent, or going to be lost in a new social order, fuel the conflict to the extent that it is perceived as a struggle for survival.²⁵ For example, the competing parties in the struggle against the Apartheid system in South Africa believed that their conflict was existential. Even in the last phase of the Apartheid regime, during the 1990s, when it was clear to almost everyone that change was inevitable, the opposing parties came to the negotiating table with maximalist demands without any intention to compromise. The ruling white Afrikaners supported a transition to Democracy that is based on power sharing between different ethnic groups living in South Africa. The non-white population saw this position as a manipulative tactic to preserve the Apartheid system under a different disguise. They argued for majority rule (one-person, one-vote) without being willing to compromise. Needless to say the white camp saw in the rival's demand (majority rule) a grave threat to their survival, at least as equal members in the South African society. It took almost eight years of extensive negotiations on multiple levels in the midst of major crises, such as ongoing violent episodes, to convince the two sides that compromise was in their best interest.²⁶

Central

Intractable conflicts affect both the private and public lives of the opposing parties. Its centrality is reflected in any possible dimension, including security problems, economic complications, political crises, and extensive media coverage on a daily basis. This multidimensional burden creates an urgent necessity to learn how to live in a situation of ongoing conflict.

Communities that are involved in intractable conflicts tend to develop physical and mental mechanisms that help society members to “adapt” to the situation. These mechanisms include: *Security measures*, such as separation barriers (for example security fences and walls in Congo and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict);²⁷ *Informal social institutions* that provide basic needs such as shelter, education and even hope to the people (for example, the political and social activities of the black church during the African American civil rights struggle);²⁸ *Symbols and folklore* that intend to demonstrate who is right and who is wrong, who is the devil and who is the saint (for example, the elegant funerals of victims of violent incidents in Northern Ireland).²⁹

These adaptive mechanisms operate in two different directions. On the one hand, they are built to provide some logic to an abnormal situation. On the other hand, the same mechanisms perpetuate the conflict in a way that it becomes an integral part of the identity of the people. Ironically, often enough, it looks like people of opposing parties are programmed to live in a situation of ongoing conflict.

The centrality of the conflict prevents the opposing parties from embracing a new social order, even in situations where, finally, the struggle for change is gaining momentum. For example, political leaders are so occupied with the conflict and the emerging peacemaking process that they do not pay much attention to major difficulties within their own communities. These internal problems can be a major obstacle for peace and stability in a new social order.³⁰ In South Africa, for example, the transition from Apartheid to Democracy created new tensions between different societal elements. The leadership had not promoted necessary domestic reforms and the people did not have sufficient instruments to cope with major new problems that nearly led to social collapse.³¹

The centrality of the conflict tends to distract attention from Karl Popper’s insight that “all life is problem solving.”³² In our context, the meaning is that peace has to be made, built and kept (peacemaking, peacebuilding and peacekeeping).³³ Negotiating partners, often enough, are inclined to forget that peacemaking is only one part in a complicated struggle for change.

In situations of intractable conflicts, the road to perpetual peace is a multidimensional process that has to evade multiple traps. As I am going to show at the end of the book, the evolutionary progressions of change should move from peacemaking revolution to peace revolution.

1.4 Beyond the Classical Symptoms

The classical symptoms (protracted, irresolvable, existential, and central) demonstrate quite effectively that intractable conflict is a severe social crisis. However, there are other major characteristics that grow out of the classical symptoms and appear especially in situations where ordinary citizens are in the middle of the struggle (the focus of this book). These symptoms show clearly that coping with such difficult situations often seems like an impossible mission:

Promoting Peace Increases Violence

The history of intractable conflicts shows that almost any substantial progression toward peace is likely to increase the level of violence. There are two major reasons for this somewhat counter-intuitive phenomenon. The first is that spoilers, radicals and extremists increase efforts to sabotage any progress toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict through aggressive means. The second is that any progress toward peace between the opposing parties tends to create, expose and increase tensions within each one of them. This is a critical element of a fragile social order, like the one in developing societies, which lacks effective socio-political mechanisms to peacefully cope with internal tensions and disputes. Let me elaborate on these two issues:

a. Spoilers, radicals and extremists

“Professional” spoilers are societal elements that oppose almost any peaceful negotiations between representatives of the opposing societies and make all efforts to stop them. They could be religious extremists, individuals who see any peace process as a national suicide, and political groups for whom the conflict is a central motif in their identity. The most zealous of the spoilers cannot, or are not willing to, make any transition and transformation in their opposition.

The phenomenon of spoilers, who are motivated to increase violence in order to disrupt the peacemaking process, appears in almost any intractable conflict where ordinary citizens are at the center of the struggle. For example, violence, in many shapes, forms and versions, carried out by the

enemies of the peace process, appeared during the all-party negotiations in Northern Ireland and the multi-party talks in South Africa. Senator Mitchell, the independent chairman of the peace process in Northern Ireland, expressed his frustration from the situation again and again: “Oh God, this is so difficult! Every time we’re on the verge of progress, a bomb goes off or someone is shot. Will we ever be able to work it out?”³⁴

b. Promoting peace increases tensions within each of the opposing societies

Each society is a composite of different societal elements: individuals, political parties, religious factions, ethnic groups, etc. These various social entities do not necessarily share the same viewpoints, priorities, preferences and political agenda. Intractable conflict can unite opposing groups under the same banner.

Adversaries may join forces to fight a joint enemy or collaborate in order to change a miserable situation that is considered as a threat for their existence, identity, and dignity. However, as soon as there is substantial progress towards a resolution of the struggle, tensions within each society appear and start playing a dominant role: Is the peacemaking process a positive change or an existential threat? What will the feature, shape and structure of our future socio-political system be – democracy, religious autocracy, power sharing, or any other option? Who will be our allies: the Arab countries, the U.S.A., the European Union, or maybe China?

Any progress toward a beneficial change in the socio-political order has side effects that can damage the whole process. For example, Apartheid in South Africa had united the non-white populations and made the struggle look like “a black-versus-white” struggle. However, the progress toward a new social order exposed the diversity within the non-white population and led to violent clashes between different factions in the “black” camp.³⁵

Transition and transformation from one structure to another require adequate socio-political mechanisms that can help a society to survive the shock of this change. The unilateral withdrawal of the Israeli forces from Gaza, which was led by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2005, demonstrates the difficulties and the obstacles of transition from occupation to (semi) independence. The developments were quite different from what one might expect. The events which followed the withdrawal were a bloody civil war within the Palestinian society and the *coup d'état* of Hamas in Gaza. Since then, the Palestinian society has remained politically divided. The radical Islamic movement, Hamas, controls Gaza, while the secular nationalist movement, Fatah, administers parts of the West Bank. Gaza is under blockade by Israel and Egypt, and there are ongoing violent clashes

between Israel and Islamist groups in Gaza. Sharon did not take into account that the Palestinian Authority is a developing entity lacking the instruments to cope with social crises that can follow a drastic transition from one political order to another.³⁶

Transitional periods in developing countries (countries that lack effective mechanisms to maintain law and order) are triggers that can lead to social crises, catastrophes and collapse. The short history of the Palestinian Authority resembles the political evolution of the modernizing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America after World War II. As described by Samuel Huntington:

“increasing ethnic and class conflict, recurring rioting and mob violence, frequent military coups d’état, the dominance of unstable personalistic leaders who often pursued disastrous economic and social policies, widespread and blatant corruption among cabinet ministers and civil servants, arbitrary infringement of the rights and liberties of citizens, declining standards of bureaucratic efficiency and performance, the pervasive alienation of urban political groups, the loss of authority by legislatures and courts, and the fragmentation and at times complete disintegration of broadly based political parties.”³⁷

Transformation periods in situations of asymmetrical intractable conflict can be challenging, especially for modernizing societies. A major change, such as transition from occupation to independence, without the necessary preparation, can quite easily deteriorate into chaos. The lack of constructive means to stabilize the new situation tends to strengthen the dark forces in a society that can unite suffering people by means of hate and incitement. This internal collapse can complicate an external conflict, such as the crisis within the Palestinian society and its destructive influence upon the relationship with Israel.

Hardliners dictate conditions for the rest of the people

The physical and psychological conditions in times of intractable conflict set the stage for societal elements that will object to almost any peaceful resolution to dictating conditions for the rest of the people. This phenomenon is manifest in two dimensions:

a. Hardliner politicians gaining popularity:

The entrenched convention that there is no peaceful resolution to the conflict increases the popularity of hardliners who “know” how to handle the situation. The result is that, often, an iron fist strategy replaces the culture of peace. The Bisho massacre of September 7, 1992, during the

negotiations between the Apartheid government of South Africa and the African National Congress (ANC), demonstrates this issue. The massacre followed the ANC's decision to organize a protest march against the system of racial segregation in Bisho, the capital of Ciskei (a self-governing homeland in South Africa). The ANC leaders demanded the resignation of the military leader Brigadier Joshua Oupa Gqozo. In contrast, the Brigadier was determined to prevent the march. When the protestors tried to enter Bisho, the Ciskei Defense Force opened fire, killing 28 marchers and injuring more than 200.³⁸

Hardliners in situations of intractable conflict also have an impact on the perception of peace and the possibilities to accomplish it. The irony of fate is that there is a growing convention in the opposing parties that only hardliners, who usually reject and object to any compromise, can make peace, if there is any hope to achieve it whatsoever. This convention is based on both psychological needs and empirical evidence. In 1979, for example, it was the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, a right-wing hardliner, who signed a peace treaty with Egypt. Following the peace agreement, Israel turned over the Sinai desert to Egypt – including oil fields and Israeli air bases (for civilian purposes) – and evacuated Jewish settlers. These political and military moves were certainly not in tune with the traditional agenda of Begin and his supporters. In 2005, it was Ariel Sharon, another Israeli Prime Minister with the reputation of being a hardliner, who led a historic unilateral Israeli move in order to shape the geopolitical situation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sharon, who devoted a major part of his life to build, expand, and strengthen Jewish settlements in the disputed territories, led a historical “one-sided withdrawal” from Gaza and a small area in the West Bank. True, for quite a long time the Israeli public had seen the control of Gaza as an unnecessary burden. However, it was a hardline prime minister, that operated against the political agenda of his traditional supporters, who evacuated the area.

b. Spoilers increase efforts to crash any peacemaking initiative

Extremists and “professional” spoilers from the opposing sides will make all efforts to destroy any serious peaceful attempt to create a new reality. The violent episodes during the Oslo accords of the 1990s, which was a serious attempt to find a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, demonstrate the ability of spoilers to destroy almost any similar peacemaking enterprise. During the implementation of the initiative, suicide bombers frequently blew themselves up inside Israel; the Israeli right-wing's opposition to the accord launched a harsh public opinion campaign against

the government of Israel; and Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli Prime Minister, was assassinated by a Jewish extremist.³⁹

The continuation of the Jewish settlement project in what are considered to be Palestinian territories and Palestinians' ongoing violent attacks against Israeli civilians only exacerbated the mutual suspicion between the two peoples. These tactics, carried out by extremists, demonstrated to each side that the beginning of a new peacemaking chapter in the bloody history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was no more than an imaginary fantasy of hallucinating leaders. This effect strengthens the popularity of the hardliners in both societies. In 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu, a right-wing leader who opposed the Oslo peace process, won the Israeli general elections and became the Prime Minister of Israel.⁴⁰ The militant Islamist movement Hamas gained more and more popularity in the Palestinian streets and, eventually, won the 2006 Palestinian legislative election.

Conflict fatigue

A major portion of the people involved in an intractable struggle becomes exhausted, tired, and about to lose their patience. The climax of 'conflict fatigue' is a breaking point. The breaking point can lead to a resolution or an escalation and transformation. For example, the Omagh bombing in August 15 1998, where almost 220 people were injured and twenty-nine people were killed, is considered the event that concluded the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland. The people in Northern Ireland stopped letting extremists dictate conditions for them.⁴¹ In contrast, a car accident in December 9, 1987 was the fuse that lit the first Intifada, the spontaneous uprising of the Palestinian people in the disputed territories.⁴² It was the beginning of a new chapter in the bloody history of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle: Gaza and the West Bank became the focal point of the struggle,⁴³ and the radical Islamist movement Hamas, a militant outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood, was born.⁴⁴

It is almost impossible to predict future developments even when intractable conflict is getting close to, or has already reached, a breaking point. The direction of progress depends on many variables and factors that cannot be summarized in a set of mathematical equations. Among the elements that determine the outcomes are: the preparation of the opposing societies for a new social order, the availability of peacemaking and peace-building strategies, the impact of political leaders, the influence of international players, and the functioning of political institutions.