

The Communication Imperative in an Era of Globalization: Beyond Conflict-Conditioned Communication

Harry Anastasiou

Introduction

The idea that a nation, an ethnic group, a class, or a society can protect itself or refrain from communicative interactions with other nations, ethnic groups, classes or societies is no longer tenable. The emerging complex conditions of globalization wrought by modern technology are rapidly affecting a global implosion by which historically distinctive people, cultures, values, religions, identities, civilizations and their respective socio-economic and political structures inadvertently come into increasing contact with each other (Ellul, 1980; Falk, 1999; Castells, 2000). Diverse people and cultures are rapidly confronted with the fact or the prospect that they will inevitably encounter, mix, overlap, and conflate at various levels with “the others”, despite their preferences or wishes. Under these conditions, communicating effectively and meaningfully across national, ethnic, religious, cultural, and class lines is no longer a matter of choice but an imperative of life in the emerging post-modern world.

According to Bohm (2004), while the electronic mass media integrate the world’s mass communication networks, the world is confronted with a communication crisis. An essential component of this crisis is that the matrix of on-going international, inter-religious, inter-ethnic, and likely inter-civilization conflicts has effectively eroded the conditions for effective and meaningful communication. The simultaneous and instantaneous electronic transference of information does not suffice for meaningful communication, as communication breakdown occurs despite the high efficiency of the electronic media world. The particular manner in which conflict impacts inter-group communication thus warrants attention.

Conflict as Communication Break-down: The Affect of Conflict Conditioned Relationships on Inter-group Communication

The Slippery Slope: From Dislike to Suspicion to Utter Mistrust

In any international, inter-ethnic or inter-religious interaction the factor that first moves people on the slippery slope of potential and/or actual conflict is *suspicion of the other*.

But suspicion is also the first step toward the erosion of communication across lines of difference. If not managed effectively and early enough it has the potential of moving the communicative exchanges between identity groups from disagreement, to dispute, to rivalry and eventually to communication breakdown.

As mistrust and suspicion begin to affect the communicative process, all information received from and exchanged with the other side is cast and deciphered through a perspective that renders the search for ulterior motives, for tricks and machinations in the other side’s intentions as the primary way of reading, hearing and responding to the other party. This is not to suggest that ulterior motives do not exist in communicative interactions. Though not always, in a number of circumstances they do in fact exist more or less. The significant point however is that as suspicion starts to determine the relationship between the parties the communicative process tends to become increasingly configured in terms of *motives* and less in terms of *content*. Thus the process of communication begins to shift away from genuine exchanges of intended meanings toward exchanges that become incestuously preoccupied with the detection, reaction and attempted destruction of the presumed “minefield” of the other side’s ulterior motives.

The defensive, cautious, and hypersensitive mode of communication that each side resorts to as it suspects the other of ulterior motives tends to initiate and intensify a cyclical interaction by which each side becomes increasingly frustrated and angry, progressively seeing the other as untruthful and lacking in credibility. Suspicion thus deepens to mistrust. And as mistrust begins to condition the communicative process, exchanges become less authentic, less meaningful and increasingly alienating.

Violence and Subjectivism

In any international, inter-ethnic, or inter-cultural dispute, if communication and relational breakdown spills into violence the deterioration of the communicative process becomes even more severe. First and

foremost, the impact of direct or structural violence on nations, ethnic, or religious groups engaged in on-going conflict leads to a gradual yet radical subjectivization of perceptions and interpretations of reality. This is because the pain and suffering experienced during conflict (and thereafter) tends to become the primary reference through which all facts, events and phenomena are processed, filtered and configured (Anastasiou, 2002). As pain and suffering is fundamentally a very personal and thus subjective experience, its determination of perception and interpretation of reality inevitably assumes subjectivist qualities, becoming increasingly biased and myopic. The anguish of violent conflict always tends to move people's perspective further and further away from balanced judgments, and from just and cogent interpretations. The process of subjectivization of perceptions becomes radicalized as protracted violent conflict reaches that critical mass of pain and agony where each side becomes so engrossed in its own suffering that the condition of the other is evaded, ignored, surpassed and denied.

Throughout any history of antagonism and reciprocal pain-inducing incidents of violence, conflict-conditioned interactions between rival groups always lead to divergent perceptions of past history and present reality, and, by projection, to divergent visions of the future. The respective experiences and derivative, existential patterns of meaning by which each side interprets the various facts, events, and behavior – be they their own or the other side's – become configured into frameworks that are not only mutually exclusive but also antithetical to each other (Anastasiou, 2002). Under such conditions the prospect for meaningful communication is minimized if not eliminated altogether.

Separation and Alienation

Be they national, ethnic, religious or international, once belligerent groups become psychologically alienated and eventually physically separated as a result of conflict, the process of inter-group communication becomes profoundly problematic. As each side recoils within its immediate identity community and its overwhelmingly subjective perceptual world, it loses direct touch with the other (Lederach, 2002). Thereby, knowledge that is derived from direct experience of each other diminishes radically. The sole, direct experience that one has of the other amounts to the cumulative occurrences of the other's aggression, attacks and violence. In other words, the only direct knowledge that each of the rival parties has of the other is through their exchange of violence. Each comes to know the other primarily as an aggressor and destroyer of life, as violence itself. This becomes the exclusive way in which each group in conflict ends up knowing the other at the experiential level – as despicable, harm-inflicting and death-dealing people. Inevitably, this condition blocks and discredits any information or knowledge that deviates from this conflict condition perception.

Paradoxically however, inter-group relationships of violence constitute one of the loudest expressions of non-verbal communication by which one warring group tells the other that it has no right to exist! Under the circumstance of mutually lethal exchanges, be they between ethnic, national, religious or international groups, each side, by using violence, loudly asserts that the world is too small for coexistence; that one's survival and sustenance is contingent on the other's demise and annihilation. Eclipsing the ideological rationalizations that each side gives, this profound existential meaning that violence communicates is so absolute, so definitive and so totalitarian that it renders any alternative message or mode of communication discredited, hypocritical and meaningless. Violence is thus an absolute and ultimate form of communication that ends all communication! In each of the belligerents, the fundamental view of the other that oppressively takes hold runs as follows: "In killing us 'the enemy' is clearly telling us that we have no right to exist. In view of this fact, what can the enemy possibly say thereafter that is credible, truthful and believable?" And the reactive answer of course is "Nothing!" – end of all communication!

Construction and Reliance on Assumptions

Inter-group violence is always a defining phenomenon in the breakdown of the communicative process. In protracted conflict, as rival groups become overwhelmingly conditioned by divergent frameworks and inferences, by psychological alienation and physical separation, by skewed knowledge of each other, and finally by the absolute negation of communication that violence definitively infers, they become captive to the compulsion of making more sweeping assumptions about the other.

As psychological alienation and physical separation deepens, with violence as the sole mediator between the belligerent groups, the understanding that each side has of its rival becomes steadily less dependent on direct, experiential knowledge of the other and increasingly reliant on far reaching

assumptions. This is inevitable since as the circumstances of conflict prevent any direct, and hence rich and multifaceted knowledge of the other, the belligerent groups begin generating a plethora of assumptions that tacitly compensate for this knowledge deficit. The assumptions that each belligerent group makes about the other may be partly true, imagined, or a combination of the two. What is certain, however, is that under the weight of protracted conflict, the formulated assumptions about the other take on an absolutely negative form and content. This is due to the fact that the assumptions are exclusively underpinned and shaped by the only direct knowledge of the other that is left, namely the other's violence and aggression towards one's own community. With the passage of time these assumptions come to be held not as relative to and derivative from the alienation of conflict but as absolute and diachronic truths about the enemy.

A crucial consequence of these negative assumptions is how they shape the formation of knowledge about the other. In conflict situations, a prevalent assumption is that the only knowledge and information about the other that is worth seeking is the type of knowledge and information that is useful for undermining, weakening and even destroying the other side. Such an assumption implies that any other type of knowledge about the other side is superfluous, unnecessary and useless. Such logic inevitably restricts one's interest in the other and thereby blocks the degree to which one can, or would want to, know the other. Unavoidably, conflict conditioned assumptions always create a knowledge deficit in each belligerent's perspective of the other: thwarting, distorting and subjecting the communication process to increasing levels of mutual ignorance, tunnel vision and alienation.

Assumptions about the other eventually coalesce and become configured in such a way as to create, sooner or later, a definitive and totalitarian "enemy image". Over time, conflict-conditioned assumptions eventually depict "the other" as the sole aggressor; as the dark and sinister force that alone is to blame for the conflict; as the primitive and the heartless agent of death and destruction, and as the epitome of inhumanity and evil—and nothing more.

With an increasing reliance on negative assumptions and the subsequent creation of the "enemy image", each side demonizes the "enemy other" – viewing it not only as less than human but also as sinister and evil (Barash, 1994). Under these conditions, the process and prospect for genuine inter-group communication becomes not only fundamentally limited and structurally thwarted but is also gradually destroyed. How can one engage in authentic communicative exchanges with sincerity, truthfulness, and a constructive spirit when one's posture toward the other is grounded in the stern belief that the other is the embodiment of evil and inhumanity? This type of communication impasse lies at the heart of all violent conflicts, constituting a key factor of intractability.

Propaganda as "Natural": Self-indulgent Communication

Whether the conflict is ethnic, ideological, civil, religious or international, under the above mentioned conditions the situation becomes ripe for the institutionalization of propaganda within the public culture of each of the rival groups.

Alienation and separation from the other side precludes the possibility of examining and testing the assumptions and related knowledge of the "enemy other." As there is no direct knowledge of the other, there is no way to conduct a reality check to see if the assumptions, beliefs, images and related information disseminated about the enemy are true or not. Once the rival parties become separated, the content of propaganda becomes the sole source of knowing the other side and the reality of the other side. Objective reality thus becomes concealed as the content of propaganda becomes the only "reality".

In all the above mentioned ways, propaganda becomes instated as a natural by-product of conflict-habituated relationships. More so than any clandestine ploy by sinister leaders exercising mind-control over their population, propaganda emerges as a "natural" by-product of conflict driven relationships. In fact the reason why many leaders become capable of controlling public opinion is because propaganda and its power emerge as a socio-cultural condition of conflict (Ellul, 1973). It is precisely for this reason that in times of war or conflict, political leaders tend to generally resort to the power of propaganda, irrespective of whether they are manipulative personalities or not.

The fact of the matter is that once conflict becomes the determinant factor shaping inter-group relationships, propaganda becomes not only irresistible but apparently "logical". The reason for this is that its use consolidates group identity, creates and sustains a uniform public mind-set, generates collective morale, clarifies and asserts one's "moral rightness" and defines in unambiguous terms the "evil" nature of the targeted rival group, all of which contribute to the collective effort of defeating and prevailing over the enemy. Propaganda thus appears as a great and useful instrument for fighting the enemy. But it does so at

the enormous expense of objectivity and realism in critically understanding, knowing and perceiving the conflict situation, while immersing each rival group deeper and deeper into the dark side of violent conflict. Indeed, the maxim that “truth is the first casualty of war” is very much to the point! In the final analysis, the thick cloak of propaganda renders each side severely blind to the most striking and objective aspect of reality, namely that what is most problematic about their condition is that the relationship between the two sides has regressed to a destructive primitivism.

The dissemination of conflict conditioned assumptions, perspectives and derivative “knowledge” by the media of mass communication sooner or later institutionalizes propaganda as an integral and dominant feature of public culture. By reason of their broad outreach in society, the media tend to generalize in the public domain stereotypical, polarized notions of “us” versus “them”, thus rendering the “moral” self-image and the “evil” enemy-image increasingly familiar, unquestionable and finally acceptable in and by public opinion. The reductionistic and simplistic binary perspective of propaganda renders each of the belligerent groups incapable of addressing or acknowledging contradictory facts, complexities, paradoxes, inconsistencies, and ethical dilemmas that are intrinsic to any and all prolonged phenomena of inter-group violent conflict.

Under the pressure and influence of protracted conflict, the mass media tend to forgo their public functions of critical inquiry and polyphonic democratic dialogue and instead become the great accomplices of propaganda. Through the mass media, public culture assumes the features of propaganda. Public culture and the opinion it forms becomes structured around half-truths, selective information, the suppression of certain truths and exaggeration of others, as all is filtered through, embedded in and sustained by a framework of conflict conditioned assumptions. Inevitably, the process eventually results in the shutdown of substantive democratic dialogue in the public domain.

Conflict-Habituated Communication as Non-Communication: Severed Mental Worlds

Once the dynamic of propaganda become integrated in public culture, the political and media elite of each belligerent side can essentially say anything about the other and sound believable to their own constituency. And conversely, in participating in a propaganda-habituated culture the public feels that it need not examine the information it is given by its political and media leadership, as such information appears to be aligned with what the public has already been encouraged to think and believe.

Communication between the rival groups thus deteriorates into a meaningless interaction between one self-indulgent, esoteric system of propaganda and another. As the rivals have no direct experience or contact with each other, their interaction becomes primarily and/or exclusively mediated through their competing and mutually undermining propaganda systems. This is a fatalistic condition that habitually overwhelms rival groups embroiled in drawn-out conflict. And the fiercer the conflict becomes the greater the power of this fatalism (Ellul, 1973).

Each of the rival groups becomes immersed in and obsessed by its own monologue within the parameters of its own system of propaganda. Each side is essentially communicating with itself and by itself, as any information that is exchanged with the rival group through the abstract process of the mass media is immediately integrated into, filtered through, and censored by the self-justifying tautological mechanisms intrinsic to propaganda. Thus understood, communication from the propaganda of one belligerent group to the propaganda of the other essentially becomes a hollow interaction between two monologues.

Once propaganda becomes institutionalized in the respective political cultures of the rival groups, the more they speak, argue and address each other the less they communicate with each other. At this stage the very norms that render communicative interaction meaningful are decisively shuttered, even as each of the groups becomes inundated and engrossed by its own chatter, arguments, explanations, disagreements and debates.

Conflict-habituated inter-group communication eventually becomes structured as a profound form of non-communication, as information exchange between the rival groups is conditioned by and interpreted through antagonistic frameworks of meaning that have become fundamentally alien to each other. Under these conditions, the normal process of communicative interaction by which communicating parties create an emergent shared domain of meaning is destroyed, since each group’s terms of reference by which it attributed meaning to reality have become not only completely different but also contradictory to those of the other (Anastasiou, 2002). The apogee of this pattern becomes fully and strikingly revealed at that high point of conflict when one side’s justice becomes the other side’s injustice; when one side’s moral rightness

becomes the other side's hypocrisy; when one side's truth becomes the other side's lie; when one side's glory become the other side's abomination; and when one side's heroes become the other side's villains.

The mental worlds of the belligerents become so divergent and incongruous that they have neither overlaps nor any common point of contact between them. But a minimum point of overlap and/or contact between mental frameworks is the necessary prerequisite for any meaningful communicative interaction (Bohm, 2004; Polanyi, 1964). In the absence of this prerequisite, exchanges between belligerent groups deteriorate to a *meaning-less* process that simply reinforces the protracted dimension of the conflict. In the final analysis, prolonged conflict breeds narcissistically conditioned perspectives, perceptions and knowledge, thus imprisoning each group in its own insulated and esoteric mental world. Only in time, and mostly when it is too late, do leaders and public opinion acknowledge, and possibly strive to transcend, the alienating conditions to which they have become bound as a result of conflict. It may be that only through conflict prevention can societies and groups avoid this tragic eventuality.

Summary Chart

The Impact of Conflict Escalation on Inter-group Communication

| Conflict-conditioned factor of influence | Resulting communication outcome |
|--|--|
| Suspicion of the other | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preoccupation with "hidden" ulterior motives of the other |
| Mistrust and frustration over the other side's intentions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on motives at the expense of content of communication • The communicated messages of the other side viewed as untruthful and lacking in credibility |
| Polarization and estrangement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The other side's communicated messages are viewed as always intending to distort and undermine the truth no matter what the other side actually says. |
| Inter-group violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of reality starts to become radically subjective due to increasing conditioning by pain and suffering. • The reality of the other falls under a blind spot. • Violence becomes established as the loudest form of non-verbal communication by which each side asserts to the other "you have no right to exist". • An absolute form of inter-group communication that ends all communication. |
| Physical separation and radical psychological alienation from the other | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No direct knowledge of the other. • Increasing reliance on constructed assumptions about the other. • Assumptions assume negative content forming the "enemy image". • Propaganda "naturally" emerges in public culture. • Content of the mass media assumes the form of self-indulgent intra-group communication. |
| Institutionalization of propaganda in public culture as a "useful" and "necessary" instrument of fighting the enemy. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-group communication deteriorates to interactions between antagonistic propaganda systems. • Inter-group communication becomes a hollow interaction between monologues. • The mental world of each of the rival parties becomes fundamentally severed from and out of touch with the mental world of the other. • The two mental worlds have no common point of contact for communication to take place. • Communication breakdown becomes total. |

Dialogue as Communicative Engagement: Exit Path from Conflicted Cultures of Non-Communication

The Will to Communicate: Starting Point of All Conciliatory Communication

No protracted conflict, with or without third-party mediation, can be resolved unless both sides generate and sustain the political will to address each other's pain, anguish and loss; each other's grievances and expectations; and each other's political perspectives. They must also be willing to jointly struggle in the restructuring of their future relationship in terms of conciliatory values, actions, policies, perspectives and agreements that will eventually become integral to the public institutions and political cultures of the parties concerned. It is often forgotten however, that *the political will* to embark on such a venture must always be accompanied by *the will to communicate* with the "other," indeed the "enemy other".

Understanding the stages by which conflict-conditioned non-communication may move to peace-enhancing, restored communication is thus an imperative. How exactly conflict-prone paradigms shift to peace-enhancing paradigms we will never know exhaustively as the process is mediated by the profundity of human nature. However, what we do know is that paradigms do change from those fostering conflict to those fostering peace. And we also know much of what occurs through the transformations that shift the perspectives of former foes in the direction of conflict resolution, reconciliation and peace-building.

Dialogue across Conflict Lines: Socio-Political Discourse in the Interest of Peace

Engagement through dialogue across conflict lines may be pursued on multiple levels and with different agents depending on circumstance, opportunity and, above all, on the political will and creative imagination of the groups concerned – ethnic, religious, social, national or international. The agents may be politicians, grass roots leaders, ordinary citizens, academics, business persons, artists, religious leaders or journalists. Dialogic engagements may be pursued on the level of formal politics of track one, of influential opinion formers on the so-called track one-and-a-half, or on the level of citizen-based initiatives on track two. Depending on the situation, dialogue across conflict lines may be initiated by any, a combination of, or all of the above mentioned agents and levels.

If successful, any small initial steps may furnish the ground and rationale for broadening dialogic engagements at multiple levels, involving multiple agents, around a plethora of political and civil society issues, projects, partnerships and institutions. Such processes may begin from the search for better understanding; for clarifying issues, fears and concerns; to acknowledging difficulties and facing the alienating entrapments of the conflict; to co-inquiry on priorities; to gradual cooperation around simple actionable steps and projects leading to more complex and elaborate ones; to eventually building constructive and revitalized relationships while forging and institutionalizing agreements at both the low and high level of politics. Upon reaching a critical mass and strengthened momentum, such processes alone have the capacity to induce non-violent change and conflict transformation in the direction of new, more viable and democratic restructuring of power relations (Lederach, 2002). Post-war Europe was led out of its historical malaise by a handful of people who were willing to start and sustain a dialogical process with their historical enemies – a process that eventually expanded, against all odds, to a broad, cross-ethnic, cross-national, cross-societal engagement, eventually giving rise to an expanded form of democracy serving the interest of peace and security, namely European integration.

Dialogue as a Means of Expanding Knowledge and Information

Despite insurmountable obstacles, sustained dialogue across dispute lines is imperative if communicative interaction is to move in the direction of meaningful restoration. Sustained dialogue across conflict lines has the propensity for deepening engagement that goes beyond the façade of positional formalisms and the belligerent strategies and tactics of outsmarting or entrapping the other. Persistent dialogue has the potential of gradually making each side's involvement with the other more genuine: not only with respect to each side's wants and needs but also to each side's fears and concerns, which under conflict conditions are unknown, suppressed or discarded as irrelevant or insincere.

Even if no initial consensus is reached, the parties would at least gain greater clarity as to what the issues of contention are and how each side perceives them. This underscores the fact that dialogic

engagement across conflict lines introduces a vital source of new information and new knowledge about the nature of the rivalry and the respective understandings of it – a development that puts things in a new light with the prospect of curbing the degree of inter-group alienation and the extent of each side's ignorance or skewed perception of the other that normally characterizes long-time belligerents.

Sustained and persistent dialogue opens a path for rival sides to begin differentiating negative ulterior motives from, what may be, genuine and legitimate concerns of the other side. Furthermore, it is an opportunity to differentiate habitual mistrust from what may be of mutual interest and benefit. For example, the overcoming of apartheid in South Africa and the enormous progress made in Northern Ireland were only possible because the leaders of the various stakeholders at both political and civil society levels persevered in willful dialogic engagement with the other side, sieving and differentiating the legitimate concerns of each of the parties from deeply rooted prejudices, obstructive ideologies and destructive old habits.

One of the greatest obstacles to restoring meaningful communicative interaction between belligerents is the cumulative residue of past violence which polarizes the perceptions of "us" and "them" into victims and culprits, sufferers and villains respectively. For this reason, one of the greatest challenges in pursuing dialogue with the "enemy" is to transcend the impasse of past violations and destructive encounters. One of the effects of sustained dialogue across conflict lines is that sooner or later it leads each side to confront the realization that the "other" side has had its measure of pain and suffering resulting from the conflict and that it has its own particular concerns about issues that impinge its security and wellbeing too. Such an encounter – one that only comes by engaging the other side in dialogue – has the capacity to open the communicative process as interaction becomes increasingly susceptible to what each side views as vitally important.

In a number of cases, communication has opened up and deepened through the courage of former enemies to directly encounter and acknowledge the suffering of the other. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have provided a model for this more direct way of transcending the stalling impact of past violence. Such processes whether verbal or symbolic remove the first weighty obstacle to communication between rival groups – be they ethnic, national, ideological, or religious in nature.

Communication is restored in this process (through the addressing of all violations and injury, by either side), because it de-subjectivizes the pain, releasing it from partisan monopolies and victim-culprit polarizations. By so doing, it affirms basic respect and acknowledgement of each side's losses – losses of the most fundamental kind, namely human life. With such essential acknowledgements being made, anything can then be the subject of dialogue and anything can be addressed.

The turning point in establishing meaningful inter-group communication in the face of histories of violence lies in accessing and gaining knowledge of the other – not merely as the culprit and aggressor, but also as a victim and sufferer. Communication that gets to know and thus acknowledges the other side's suffering is communication that begins to transcend each side's past cruelty and violence while restoring each side's humanity. When painful truths are allowed to enter the communicative exchanges, the process, among other things, becomes cathartic. The pain of truthfulness eventually purges and liberates the parties from the alienating and meaningless pain of violent conflict.

Bohm's (2004) analysis on "dialogue" underscores the fact that even under normal conditions the knowledge that different persons or groups have and generate is fragmented, partial and tentative. Under conflict conditions the challenge is far greater as the knowledge that each of the rival groups has, or generates, and employs, is partisan, skewed, adversarial and contradictory to that of the other. Hence, while dialogue in response to normal conditions is necessary for conjoining, expanding and deepening knowledge, dialogue in response to conflict conditions is imperative for transcending contradictory configurations of knowledge, superseding misunderstandings, clarifying the issues of contention, and identifying all the matters of concern to be addressed. All of these are prerequisites for enabling the disputants to proceed to a cooperative search for resolutions.

Shifting Assumptions: Suspending the Old and Generating the New

The increase in knowledge and information that naturally results from dialogic engagement with the other – involving any and all types of contact around issues, projects and problems of common interest – modifies, among other things, the conflicted patterns of each side's assumptions as well as each side's excessive dependence on assumptions that resulted from their prolonged separation and alienation.

It is generally the case that when conflict is superseded through dialogue, leading to political rapprochement, inter-group reconnection and eventually to progressive reconciliation and peace, a definite shift occurs away from the assumptions that formerly grounded the knowledge, perceptions and beliefs of each of the parties concerned. The assumption that the conflict was always the other side's fault is replaced with the realization that all sides had a measure of responsibility for the terrible past, and that the causes and factors that perpetuated the conflict were far more complex and ambiguous than originally assumed; that the suffering and historical grievances concerning violations of human rights are not the exclusive prerogative of one side in the protracted conflict. Assumptions shift to the realization that each side has been both perpetrator and victim, albeit at different times and in reference to different historical events.

Abandoning antagonistic and partisan assumptions in the face of new realizations restores the communicative process because it deepens the capacity of each side to integrate new information, facts and perspectives toward non-adversarial ends. The process entails a progression that expands knowledge and awareness beyond narcissistic perceptions and selective filtrations of conflict conditioned knowledge. This results in the restoration of the complexity, richness and polyphony of reality, especially of the historical past. In and through this process the understanding of each party engaged in dialogue is induced toward an outlook of greater objectivity and balance while reconfiguring awareness in terms of expanded new frameworks and assumptions. This has been the professed experience of all peace-seeking groups and persons who dared to psychologically and politically cross the conflict lines in order to speak with and engage in communicative interaction with the enemy.

In the context of Greek-Turkish rapprochement exchanges of academics and of personnel from the respective Foreign Ministries, a participant stated that his visit to the enemy country led him to the stunning realization that for the first time he truly understood the age-long conflict between Greeks and Turks as he was able to simultaneously grasp the two peoples' divergent perceptions and interpretations of past and current issues. He further expressed the conviction that he was now in a better position to seek and develop positive and constructive policy suggestions. This new knowledge of the other and of oneself that begins and continues with engaged dialogue was integral to the process that led to the innumerable peace-enhancing bilateral agreements achieved between Greece and Turkey since 1999.

As dialogue clarifies issues, perspectives and problems, assumptions about what the challenge is also change, raising questions about what constitutes relevant information and what type of knowledge is deemed useful. Perceptions and approaches can gradually shift away from their previous grounding in adversarial assumptions. The old search for the type of knowledge that was useful for undermining and harming the rival party is superseded by the search for a type of knowledge that is useful for solving problems and creating new options, possibilities and choices that are inclusive and compatible for the parties concerned. The conflict-prone preoccupation with ulterior motives gives way to a quest for creativity in addressing problems and finding solutions.

Dialogue thus introduces the capacity to free the communicative process from the underlying assumptions of competing conflict oriented perspectives and creates the conditions for the emergence of new truths, facts and more inclusive frameworks as products of mutual, communicative engagement (Anastasiou, 2002). In the final analysis, the process of restored communication through dialogue creates a growing consciousness of the fact that cooperative and conciliatory modes of thinking and doing amplify possibilities and options for both the present and the future in regard to paths toward mutual security, economic benefits and sustainable peace. This consciousness finally emerges in sharp contrast to the regressive deadlocks, alienation, stagnation, and insecurity that previous confrontational approaches perennially resulted in.

One of the most significant shifts in assumptions resulting from on-going democratic dialogue lies at the very foundation of the EU. European dialogue in search for peace led to the great shift from the nationalist assumption that national sovereignty and ethno-national identity are absolute and invariable to the assumption that national sovereignty and ethno-national identity can be shared and pooled for the common good – a change that meant the difference between a Europe of wars and a Europe of peace.

Another fundamental truth that European dialogue for peace brought to the fore (which the conflict conditioned cultures of old Europe suppressed and denied) was that under globalizing trends, nationalist politics of polarizing power plays, unilateralism, isolationism, intransigence, and introversion are untenable and detrimental to the national interests of the states and societies concerned; and that the shrinking of the world through increasing economic and technological interdependence posed new political challenges and adaptation requirements that are best managed through peace-enhancing collaborative and consensual approaches in international, inter-ethnic, and inter societal relations.

Beyond Propaganda: Restoring Inter-group Communication

Direct knowledge of the other through dialogue, interaction and mutual involvement, reduces the power and sociological function of propaganda. Particularly when maintained over time, direct knowledge and direct experience of other societies, ethnic groups, or nations – through negotiated agreements, civil society contacts, joint economic ventures and projects – tends to be less susceptible to propaganda. This is so because direct knowledge of the other enables concerned groups to test and re-examine the validity of propaganda concepts, assumptions and stereotypes, both in regard to the propaganda of one's own group and that of the other. Direct engagement with the other initiates a process that helps to defuse the content of propaganda and to dismantle the socio-psychological conditions under which propaganda thrives.

Increased contact means increased dialogue, increased exchange of information and an increased understanding of differences and similarities in perspective. Sooner or later, such a process begins to bridge the chasm of psycho-political separation and alienation that constitutes the primary condition under which propaganda grows and takes hold. Direct dialogic engagement around rapprochement-promoting projects, strategies, agreements and actions gives rise to new experiences of each other, and hence to reliable new knowledge. The process eventually leads to the establishment of a credible new way of encountering the other that is free from the propaganda-empowering need to be told what the other is like.

Under such conditions, the mass media cease to be nationalistically univocal, ethnocentric and monopolistic in outlook. Rather, they undergo a shift, becoming increasingly oriented to polycentric and multi-vocal approaches thus rendering inter-ethnic, international, and inter-state democratic dialogue part of the public sphere (Rüsen, 2004). By so doing the media of mass communication become facilitators for expanding inter-group communication and dialogue in the public realm. The other is gradually perceived in a disaggregated way as awareness develops that the other side is not the monolith portrayed in stereotypes but rather another community of diverse colorations and opinions.

At a higher level of development, the mass media may facilitate inter-group communication that directly serves the interest of peace, coexistence and relationship building. Galtung rightly contrasted peace journalism to belligerent journalism. The former is oriented toward exploring all aspect and all sides of a conflict in the perspective of win-win resolutions, whereas the latter is oriented toward exploring selectively partisan aspects of the conflict from the perspective of win-lose resolutions. For Galtung the former is truth and people oriented while the latter is propaganda and elite oriented; the former is solution oriented with peace as the goal, whereas the latter is victory oriented with preeminence as the goal (Galtung, 2006).

Enlarging the World: The Communicative Fusion of Different Worlds

Any genuine dialogic engagement through political rapprochement, projects, agreements and programs across lines of difference or conflict, affects a tacit suspension of assumptions that opens up new horizons of meaning and interpretation. The dialogue process inadvertently and/or deliberately fuses perspectives, expands knowledge, synthesizes hitherto scattered and disjointed facts, and conjoins through interaction and exchanges the life-worlds of all parties concerned (Habermas, 1985; Broome, 1993).

Dialogic interactions have the capacity for fusing different worlds, particularly mental worlds, thus expanding and creating a new world in which the different ethnic, national or religious groups may co-exist and increase their collaboration on multiple levels. Through long term dialogic engagement across conflict lines the communicative process moves in the direction of likely restoration while facilitating peace-building. The mental and political world that restored communication creates is always far bigger, far more tolerant and far more diverse than the belligerent worlds of former rivals. Conflict habituated communication always results in an endless process of non-communication, shutting down one's mental and political state of being to an esoteric, narcissistic and defensively barricaded world. By contrast, dialogically sustained, peace-enhancing engagements restore the communicative process, opening up one's mental and physical state of being to an expanding, outward-looking world in which all can be co-participants. Over time, such a process and orientation translates into a new open-ended world in which the various communities' past pains, present actions and future hopes have been so reformatted as to jointly and cooperatively fit.

The most stunning example is the contrast in the state of European societies before 1945 and thereafter. Since the end of World War II and following the collapse of the Soviet bloc, European societies

have steadily moved from nationalistically introverted, conflict-prone communication to a regional system of inter-ethnic, international and trans-national democratic decision-making. The expanded regime of democracy, human rights, peace and stability brought about with the emergence of the EU was the direct result of decades of relentless inter-ethnic and inter-national dialogic and communicative engagements across former conflict lines that were once thought impervious.

Democracy as Dialogic Communication

The apogee of meaningful, dialogic communication lies at the heart of democracy. Without meaningful dialogue there is no democracy. Relying merely on the formal and institutional mechanisms of democracy, and/or an ideology of democracy is never enough to guarantee democracy. To have functional and sustainable democracies, institutions of democracy must be complemented by a culture of democratic dialogue. Democracy is neither an ideology nor merely a formal mechanism of decision-making, but rather a relational mode of communication with others, capable of facilitating relationship building in and through an increasingly expanded life-world of shared meaning, norms and references (Habermas, 1985; Saunders, 2005).

For example, the establishment of EU law as a regional human rights regime has been one of the supreme products of institutionalized, on-going democratic dialogue and relationship-building between Europe's nations. In this sense, the issue of meaningful dialogic communication goes far beyond a multiparty system within societies and far beyond formal diplomacy between states. It concerns a communicative process that is free from coercion and one that proceeds on the basis of reciprocity, mutuality, openness, and consensus building despite the differentials in raw power (Habermas, 1985; Jones, 2005). The essence of democratic dialogue is to minimize, restructure and supersede power asymmetries between political identity groups.

Culture of Peace as Culture of Meaningful Communication

Finally, the relationship between on-going dialogic engagement and democracy also discloses a close affinity between on-going dialogic engagement and the culture of peace. The pursuit of meaningful communication across conflict lines in the quest for shared meanings and the creation of common ground – including the mutual establishment of socio-political norms and institutions – is not only central to democracy but also to seeking and building peace. From this perspective refusing to engage in dialogue across conflict lines is both anti-democratic and peace-eroding precisely because it exposes and subjugates inter-group relationships to the condition of suspicion, separation, alienation, propaganda, and all the other factors mentioned above – the great catalysts of conflict escalation and communicative breakdown. It is thus not surprising that some have suggested that communicating with “the other” ought to be viewed and identified as a human right (D'Arcy, 1979).

Non-violent solutions to disputes and complex political problems have always been the outcome of cross-conflict co-inquiry, brainstorming, explorations, negotiations and final commitments reflected in short and long term agreements (Fisher & Ury, 1991). The most sustainable of these efforts have been those accompanied by broad based and multi-level relationship building, ranging from civil society, to inter-group, to national and inter-national involvement and participation. Dialogic engagement across lines of difference and conflict gives rise to a *third culture* that transcends the original, belligerent partisan ones (Broome, 1993). It gives rise to the on-going quest for a culture of poly-ethnic, poly-national and multilateral meaning; to a culture of empathy, understanding and solidarity as the prerequisites for peace and security. However, none of these are possible without the will to communicate across conflict lines; without sustained efforts at communicative engagement; without the persistent quest for meaningful and creative dialogue; without the unrelenting commitment to the clear but often suppressed truth that democratic dialogue alone is the midwife and nurturer of peace and security between ethnic, religious, political, national or civilization-based identity groups, particularly in an era where globalizing processes are shrinking the world into an all for all neighborhood.

Summary Chart

The Impact of Inter-group Dialogic Engagement on Restored Communication and Peace building

| Conflict-transcending factors of influence | Resulting communication outcome in the interest of peace |
|---|---|
| Political will to resolve conflict implies <i>the will to communicate</i> with "the enemy" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging the other side in dialogue. • Dialogue established across conflict lines. |
| First cross-conflict steps at addressing problems on any political and/or civil society level, on any issue of concern to the rival parties. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However small or big, any initial success in addressing any aspect of inter-group conflict empowers further communication across conflict lines. |
| Broadening dialogic engagement between the rival groups around increasing number of issues, projects, programs, on any or multiple number of political and/or civil society levels. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues, fears, concerns, difficulties become increasingly clarified. • Deeper understanding of differences in perspective and perception of reality and of issues deemed central to addressing the conflict. • Greater sense of where the challenges lie for overcoming problems and for restructuring inter-group relationships. |
| Sustained inter-group dialogue across conflict lines despite differences and obstacle. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepening engagement beyond formalisms and belligerent strategies. • Dialogic engagement becomes more difficult and more genuine. • Increasing new knowledge, information and facts about the nature of the conflict are gained. • Differentiating ulterior motives from what may be each side's genuine and legitimate concerns that need to be addressed. |
| Accepting the challenge and willingness to address the residue of past violence and the loss and injury each party incurred. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain, loss and suffering are mutually recognized tacitly or explicitly. • Inter-group communication opens up to all grievances and to what each side considers vital. • Inter-group communication moves beyond the impasse of "us" the victim versus "them" the culprit polarization. • Irrespective of sides, all violations and their possible reparations may become part of the communicative process. • Inter-group dialogue incorporates hard truths and the prospect for mutual acknowledgement and reconciliation. |
| Long term dialogic engagement across conflict lines that address and seeks solutions to each side's most simple to most complex fundamental concerns, grievances and hard truths of past injuries. Sustained and broadened rapprochement with increasing, multi-level inter-group engagements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-group communication may reach a critical mass that gradually leads to: • Re-conceptualizing the nature of the conflict and its likely solutions. • Inter-group communication starts shifting away from old conflict-conditioned, adversarial assumptions to new solution-seeking assumptions. • Communicative frameworks and assumptions expand to incorporate complexity, ambiguity, polyphony and thus increasing objectivity. • Greater and more realistic awareness of the range of where the resolution may lie. • Inducing creativity and quest for new type of knowledge conducive to the search for resolutions and sustainable peace. |
| Increasing density of inter-group dialogue, contact and joint involvement in rapprochement efforts and projects giving rise to new awareness, understanding, knowledge of self and other. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct knowledge and engagement with the other reduces and power and function of propaganda. • Direct contact with the other enables each group to test the validity of assumptions and stereotypes of the propaganda systems that the mass media and political elites were accustomed to projecting into public culture. • The mass media become less ethno-centric and more polyphonic and multi-vocal. • The mass media become a venue for democratic inter- |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>group dialogue in the public realm.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mass media become a facilitator for expanded inter-group communication and on-going dialogue in the public realm. • The mass media move from belligerent journalism to peace journalism. |
| Opening up dialogue in the broader public domain around rapprochement projects, agreements, programs, exchanges, joint ventures. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadening and deepening inter-group communication enables the increasing fusion of the life-worlds of the parties concern. • New common and open-ended life-world emerges in which the lives of diverse groups can peacefully and cooperatively find cohabitation. |
| Culture of democratic dialogue between different groups emerges as integral aspect of democracy and its institutions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democracy evolves to dialogic communication between groups (ethnic, national, religious, etc.). • Democratic dialogue facilitating relationship-building and expanded life-world of shared meaning, norms and references. |
| Democracy as relationship building through democratic dialogue and expanded life-world of norms and references. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture of democratic dialogue extends to and coincides with culture of peace. • Culture of peace as culture of inter-group meaningful communication in the direction of polyphonic, poly-ethnic, poly-national, poly-religious empathy and solidarity. |

Harry Anastasiou holds a Ph.D. in the Political Sociology of Peace and Conflict from the Union Institute & University, Cincinnati, Ohio, and a Doctorandus Degree from the Free University of Amsterdam, Holland. He is a long-standing academic in inter-ethnic and international Peace and Conflict Studies, and an experienced practitioner of conflict-resolution. At present, he is a core faculty member of the Conflict Resolution Graduate Program and an affiliate of the International Studies Program at Portland State University. For over a decade he has been playing a leading role in the development and growth of a citizen-based peace movement in the ethnically divided island of Cyprus and in Greek-Turkish relations. He has also been a participating member of "The Harvard Study Group", a bi-communal think tank comprised of policy leaders and academics working on ideas and approaches for the peaceful resolution of the Cyprus problem. As an academic, he has published numerous works on peace and conflict issues, focusing in particular on Cyprus, Nationalism, Peace building and the European Union.

References

- Anastasiou, H. (2002). Communication across conflict lines. *Journal of Peace Research*, 39(5), 581-596.
- Barash, D. P. (1994). *Beloved enemies: Our need for opponents*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books.
- Bohm, D. (2004). *On dialogue*. New York: Routledge.
- Broome, B. J. (1993). Managing differences in conflict resolution: The role of relational empathy. In D. J.D. Sandole & H. Van Der Merwe (Eds.). *Conflict resolution theory and practice: Integration and application* (pp. 95-111). Manchester: University Press.
- Castells, M. (2000). *The rise of the network society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- D'Arcy, J. (1979). *The right to communicate*. Interim report of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems. Paris: UNESCO.
- Ellul, J. (1973). *Propaganda: The formation of men's attitudes*. New York: Vintage.
- Ellul, J. (1980). *The technological system*. New York: Continuum.
- Falk, R. (1999). *Predatory globalization: A critique*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fisher, R., & Ury, W. (1991). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Jones, D. M. (2005). Peace through conversation. *The National Interest*, Spring, 93-100.
- Galtung, J. (2006). Peace journalism as an ethical challenge. *Global Media Journal: Mediterranean Edition*, 1(2), 1-5.
- Habermas, J. (1985). *The theory of communicative action*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Lederach, J. P. (2002). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.

- Polanyi, M. (1964). *Personal knowledge*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Rüsen, J. (2004). How to overcome ethnocentrism: Approaches to a culture of recognition by history in the Twenty-First Century. *History and Theory*, Theme Issue 43, 118-129.
- Saunders, H. H. (2005). *Politics is about relationship: A blueprint for the citizens' Century*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.