

New England Journal of Public Policy

Volume 31

Issue 1 *Special Issue: CRIC*

Article 2

5-1-2019

Editor's Note

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Recommended Citation

O'Malley, Padraig (2019) "Editor's Note," *New England Journal of Public Policy*: Vol. 31 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/nejpp/vol31/iss1/2>

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Editor's Note

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The articles in this issue have their origins in presentations at the “Freedom and Fragmentation” conference at the Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict conference at Harris Manchester College Oxford in September 2018.

Three articles address issues relating to Indigenous/First Nation/Aboriginal Peoples. In “Cultural Work in Addressing Conflicts and Violence in Traumatized Communities,” Eugen Koh advances “a psychodynamic model of collective trauma.” Koh draws on his experience with Aboriginal communities in the Central Deserts of Australia who use art (painting) as a means of storytelling to address their traumas of cultural and historical dispossession. He conceptualizes three aspects of the cultural work a community must undertake to deal with community trauma: “making sense of their predicament, linking the past with the present, and adapting to the present reality.”

Kirk Cameron, in “Resolving Conflict between Canada’s Indigenous Peoples and the Crown through Modern Treaties: Yukon Case History,” argues that the modern treaties (comprehensive land claims settlements) and the self-government agreements that eleven of the fourteen Yukon First Nations have entered into brought about a fundamental change in the architecture of conflict experienced in Yukon. Conflict “no longer presents as an indigenous population outside the power elite of the national and subnational governance structure protesting the actions of an uncaring or hostile public government,” he argues. Co-relational governance arrangements, he adds, can be transformative. When they “are designed to reflect visible involvement by all parties (dominant and oppressed), the conflict divide will shift, giving leaders within the oppressed group seats in the institutions of authority that often the oppressed believe to be the instruments of the tyranny they oppose.”

Michele A. Sam is a member of the Ktunaxa Nation, one of Canada’s Indigenous peoples. Her article, “Contextualizing Approaches to Indigenous Peoples’ Experience of Intractable Conflict,” calls to account the biases of western research methodologies, still embedded in colonial assumptions. “The relative newness of the modern Western scientific method,” she points out, “has unwittingly wreaked havoc on Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge systems, generating programming, policy, and practice that perpetuate epistemic violence through attempts to include an ‘aboriginal’ population.” Sam proposes an “Indigenous Peoples’ transformative research framework” as a mechanism for conceptualizing the resolution of intractable conflict as place-based self-development processes. The role of Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge relationships within current Indigenous self-development, both personal and social, she suggests, is an important attribute of a sustainable resolution of intractable conflict. Place-based approaches are integral to resolution in that the story of intractable conflict, as such, has not been shared or contextualized.

Seven years of civil war in Syria has torn the country apart, destroyed the infrastructure, and decimated the economy and the social fabric. Estimates of the number of people killed run up to

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500,000; 5.7 million refugees poured into neighboring countries and Europe, and a further 6 million or more are internally displaced. The suffering is immeasurable and collective trauma pervasive. We witnessed the targeting of civilians and other war crimes and atrocities, including the barrel bombing of Aleppo and the destruction of Palmyra, where the artifacts of an ancient civilization were senselessly destroyed with the explicit intention of obliterating memory of the past. The Internet brought the barbarity close, a mere click on our smart phones to bear witness. In the end, the sheer scale of the horror anesthetized us to the suffering. One moment the iconic image of a little boy—the dust-and-blood-covered face of five-year-old Omran Daqnee dug out of the rubble of Aleppo—captured us in its immediacy, and the next we were overwhelmed with the sense of hopelessness and despair at round-the-clock aerial bombardments targeting defenseless civilians. Syria was a lost cause.

Manas Ghanem looked for and found a different Syria. In Damascus, a group of artists created paintings of startling intensity, rich in texture and bold to the eye, suffused with light and reflecting alternate realities: the resilience of a highly cultured people with a civilization of seven thousand years and a history of survival and reinvention. While the machines of war produced death, amid the blood and terror, the devastation and savagery, these artists produced images of hope and beauty that were brought together in an exhibition held in Athens and other parts of Greece. The paintings that accompany Ghanem’s article, “Stories Untold: Art from Syria,” also the name of the exhibition, allow readers to experience these artists’ works. Their paintings reflect “the life-loving spirit of Syria, reminding us of the legendary phoenix that reinvents and invigorates itself from its ashes.” The images, Ghanem tells us, take us to “mystical realms, where a child symbolizes life, joy and hope for the future and a woman symbolizes home, love, and life-giving force, and where beauty is strength, vigor, and optimism. These eternal symbols bring us together in harmony and peace regardless of our differences to complete the circle of love around us all.”

Why do peace processes fail? According to Gabrielle Rifkind and Nita Yawanarajah in “Preparing the Psychological Space for Peacemaking,” one of the critical factors is lack of psychological preparedness. Often the atmosphere around a peace table is one of mistrust and suspicion: the traumatic effects of the conflict and the degree of suffering makes the parties likely to be more interested in retribution than accommodation. “This state of mind keeps conflict parties rigidly and emotionally attached to their positions and often psychologically blocked from being able to engage productively in a peace process and achieve outcomes that meet their best interests.” The authors call for “the creation of a safe space, where conflict parties can explore their feelings, internal narratives, and personal motives and understand that these intense emotions may not be serving their best interest.” The aim, they argue, “is to work with the parties to help them abandon their rigid emotional attachments to their positions, modify their expectations, and achieve an improved state of ‘psychological readiness’ that allows them to be in a better state of mind to participate around the peace table.”

During a visit to the Vatican in June 2018, French president Emmanuel Macron declared, “We have, anthropologically, ontologically, and metaphysically, need of religion” (*Nous avons, anthropologiquement, ontologiquement, métaphysiquement, besoin de la religion*). The remark elicited little attention, though it was made by the leader of an avowedly secular country. In “The Crisis of Cultures and the Vitality of Values: A Commentary on Emmanuel Macron’s Declaration of the Need for Religion,” Scott Atran construes Macron’s claim in the context of rising European populism and illiberalism, much of it the result of the unaddressed byproducts and failures of globalization. Interestingly, Macron’s observation was made before the

gilets jaunes (yellow vests) protests convulsed Paris and other major French cities. The mass demonstrations are a leaderless movement of rage and frustration. They began as a working-class protest of a fuel-tax hike and morphed into a populist wave of virulent anti-establishment sentiment accompanied by sporadic outbursts of violence. Though the numbers demonstrating have fallen, the protests show little sign of petering out. Not just in Europe but across the developed world, one of democracy's implicit promises—that successive generations will be better off than the one preceding them—is ringing hollow. “The values of liberal and open democracy,” Atran argues, “appear to be losing ground worldwide to xenophobic ethno-nationalisms and radical religious ideologies.” “The ‘creative destruction’ associated with global markets,” he adds, “has transformed people from the planet's farthest reaches into competitive players seeking progress and fulfillment through material accumulation and its symbols but without a sense of community and common moral purpose.” Furthermore, “the forced gamble of globalization fails especially,” he points out, when “societies lack enough time to adapt to unceasing innovation and change. As their members fall short of aspirations, anxiety, anger, and alienation can erupt into violence along prevailing political, ethnic, and confessional fault lines.”

After defeating the Islamic State fighters at Baghouz, their last enclave on the Euphrates in eastern Syria, the US-backed Syrian Defense Force declared that the “caliphate” had been eliminated. Extremism in all its most virulent forms, however, is still a threat throughout Southeast Asia. Most recently, National Thowheeth Jama'ath, a small, little-known Islamic group in Sri Lanka, carried out the coordinated bombings on Easter Sunday 2019 that killed almost three hundred people and injured a further five hundred. (ISIS also took credit). In “The 4M Way of Combating Violent Extremism: An Analysis,” Kumar Ramakrishna outlines a methodology to deal with the ongoing threat: offering a more attractive narrative to the target audience than the competing vision of violent extremists. The memes that constitute the counter-narrative in social media, he points out, must be “stickier”; the personal credibility of the messenger “should exceed that of extremist ideologues”; and the mechanisms that are employed “to impart messages to the target audience must be more effective.” Furthermore, “we must ensure that the market receptivity of the target audience is promoted —by coordinating whole-of-government policies such that activities within the counter-narrative space are supported and not inadvertently undercut by policy and military missteps in the wider operational space.”