

# Post-conflict peacebuilding

*Social reconstruction and reconciliation through dialogue*

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## 1.0 Introduction

After a study trip to Bosnia Herzegovina and an interesting visit to the Nansen Dialogue Centre in Mostar I was left both curious and interested in the work that where done there and in similar project . Using dialogue as a tool to break down enemy image, reduce prejudice, and misperception intuitively sounded like a reasonable way of working. I was, however, still left with some questions.

First, I wanted to go more in depth, studying how inter and intragroup processes in a post-conflict and war-torn society played out. Second, I wanted to study closer exactly how the dialogue process could reduce and repair negative group relationship.

Thirdly, I wanted to find a way of assessing the impact such dialogue seminars could had on the participants in order to get an idea of the importance of this work.

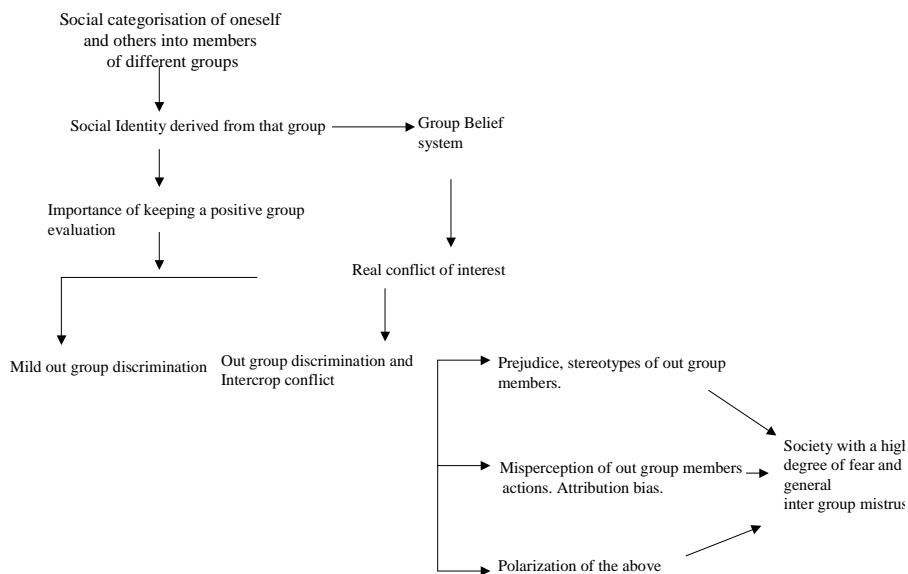
I quite early realised that assessing the impact was difficult, both because of methodological reasons, but also because of the time aspect. Any changes in society due to post-conflict dialogue work will not likely be recognisable in a number of years. And even then I figured it would be hard to track those changes back to those exact projects. Also, much of the evaluation I read was not precise enough and some of it rather vague. Instead of trying to assess the impact in a post-phase I found that it would be reasonable to gain a theoretical understanding of common group processes, because this could provide the project with a validity I chose to call “theoretical validity”. Models and theories based on years of study on inter and intra-group processes should provide the dialogue project with such validity.

It is out of this assumption I write this paper. I am trying to give dialogue work in post-conflict societies a theoretical foundation. Using knowledge of inter and intra-group processes together with some of the experience scholars have gathered in their practice, I will try to illustrate why and how sustained dialogue can be a useful and important tool in post-conflict society. I will also look into how the dialogue process unfolds and what, based on the same theoretical understanding, one should focus on in doing this work.

Even though, as noted, sustained dialogue intuitively seems like a reasonable way of addressing intergroup conflicts in a post-conflict society, I find that it needs a theoretical base. Both to guide the way one should practice it, but also by giving it a theoretical foundation that justify the work. In this paper I will provide such a theoretical foundation of inter and intra-group processes in post-conflict society, and address the question on how dialogue can be important part in the social reconstruction of such a society.

Fig 1.1 below shows a simple and simplified model of the theory that I will use later in this paper. At its heart is the Social Identity Theory, extended with some other theories of intergroup processes.

Fig 1.1



## **1.1 The aim of the paper.**

This paper grew out of fascination and acknowledgement of the variety and size of peace research and conflict resolution. It includes political and non-political actors, at top-political and grass root level. Some scholars focusing on top down approaches, others are taking the other direction, working from the bottom and up. And even as divided, it is all interconnected and mutual interdependent. The peace builder or peacekeeper working on the ground will have a hard time in performing their job, if not at least some political steps are taken at the top level. On the other side, political solutions will lead nowhere if not accompanied by physical and social reconstruction in society. We shall also see that this interdependence might have grown stronger due to changes in the world over last decades, changes in the way we must understand and deal with conflict. Contemporary conflicts, many claim, are a multi facet area requiring many different focuses and working methods.

Former UN Secretary, Boutros Boutros Ghali, most certainly shared this notion in his paper *An Agenda for Peace* pinpointing four major areas in dealing with contemporary conflicts (Lederach, 1997).

The four areas include preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict peace building. All of these are important areas in dealing with conflict. They cover different ground and may operate on different levels, but are often interdependent of each other as exemplified above.

Leaders at top political levels most often play out the preventive diplomacy part. Peace talks between state or intra-state leaders are examples of such, and of course UN meetings and other top level political arenas.

Peacekeeping and peacemaking can be more recognized as direct action in the conflict zones. Humanitarian aid, military intervention and employment of military security forces are common examples.

Peace building can be highly political. Democratization efforts through election or other political and social reforms are methods of peace building in conflicting society. Peace building can also be done non-politically, direct and in the conflict zone. Non Governmental Organisations (NGO`s) are especially known to produce a wide variety of peace building methods, and their importance and impact seems to be increasing with the change of the international community.

This paper will focus on the last of the UN secretary concerns, post-conflict peace building. Post-conflict peace building is a large area of study which includes a number of different tasks and focuses. I will discuss the concept reconciliation in detail as one important feature of post-conflict peace building. The concept, and the way in which I will use it will be clarified and discussed later in the paper. Reconciliation itself is a huge theme and embraces a lot of issues. In its narrowest sense, the focus in this paper will be to discuss how sustained dialogue in civil society can be a tool to foster reconciliation among the members of a conflicting society and building peace.

In his book *Building Peace*<sup>1</sup>, Lederach uses a well known triangle to illustrate different levels of conflict resolution (Lederach, 1997). The upper and most narrow level consist of what he calls top leadership. At this level we find approaches focusing on high level negotiations, diplomacy, military and political solutions. Actors on this level include governments, international organizations, as UN and financial institutions (Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, 2001).

The next two levels, middle range and grass-root, have a different focus, and it's within these levels we find the approaches to peace building that will be the focus here, among other initiatives.

Lederach also states in, the introduction to his book that the nature and characteristics of contemporary conflict suggest a set of concepts and approaches that goes beyond preventive diplomacy and, later, that the people and their relations are the key to successful peace building (Lederach, 1997). Saunders (2001) also highlights that we

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<sup>1</sup> The full title is *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation In Divided Societies*

have to move away from the traditional view of conflict that has been predominant for the last century if we are to understand and deal with some of the contemporary conflicts we find today. I will look into this assumption to see whether it bears any truth and if so, what are these changes and where does this guide the changes in the field of peace research and conflict resolution.

## **1.2 Questions to be answered and a plan for this paper.**

Firstly, I will clarify some important concepts I will use in my paper. I will discuss the concept of reconciliation, intractable conflict and peace building. This is a critical element as they will be important underlying concepts for the paper. When other concepts or terms need to be clarified I will do so in the text.

I will then proceed in discussing how conflicts have changed after the Cold War era and why it is important to bring about or add new concepts for understanding them and new methods in dealing with them. This will lay the further ground for my paper. In my theory part I will discuss the social psychology of deeply divided societies that has, or is, experiencing intractable conflict. In the next part I will use this insight to discuss the main question of this paper. How, and to which degree, can dialogue work to be an efficient tool in reconstructing conflicting society and help to bring about reconciliation. The last part of the paper will include some empirical examples of such work, mainly from former Yugoslavia, but also from other conflicts where that is relevant. My research question for this paper then will be if dialogue can be a useful tool for social reconstruction in post-conflict society, and if so, how should this dialogue process take form?

## **2.0 Concepts that needs to be clarified.**

### **2.1 Reconciliation**

Reconciliation is a concept that has a wide array of meaning and connotations (Skaar, Gloppen and Shurke, 2004). It's an ambiguous term, but the word refers to transforming a conflictual relationship into a peaceful one. In this understanding it seems to be a process, but Lederach (1997) put an emphasis that reconciliation also is a state or locus. As such, reconciliation is found when relationships have been changed from conflictual to friendly. To transform conflictual relationships into peaceful covers a lot of different actions and strategies. It can fit all of the four categories of Boutros Ghali, from preventive diplomacy to post conflict peace building.

Since reconciliation is such a widely and commonly used term, I find it can be difficult to make any discussion about it precise. Michael Walzer, for example, divides between thick and thin reconciliation. The thin version can be found as soon as the conflicting parties have agreed to a cease fire. The "thicker" version, the reconciliation that will be the issue of this paper, deals with more than this. Building mutual trust, visioning a shared future and overcoming conflicting narratives of what caused the war and what happened in the conflict, will lead to what others have termed true reconciliation or Walzers' thick reconciliation (Skaar, Gloppen Shurke, 2004).

Reconciliation can play out on different levels. It can be the return of displaced persons to their original communities. At the same time it will also be processes that enable these people to live a normal life within that community with those people they initially perceived as a big enough threat for them to flee. The many Bosnian communities exemplify this, where minority populations are now returning with the help and affirmative right of the Dayton Peace Agreement and world community, to live together with people that where former perceived as the enemy (Skaar, Gloppen and Shurke, 2004).

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is one example that easily comes to mind when discussing reconciliation. However although it is arguably one of the most famous, it is only an example of one process of reconciliation. In this paper I will look at yet another method for bringing about reconciliation in communities. Just as Lederach, other scholars make the difference between reconciliation as a state and as a process. Weinstein and Stover (2004) writes that reconciliation *is achieved* when citizens are ready to live together in a normal setting of peace, hence a process. This understanding of reconciliation emphasises the citizen's role and the post conflict part of the concept. Also, they find the term too ambiguous and too wide. They introduce the term social reconstruction as a substitute. Thinking of reconciliation as a process, I find this reasonable, and will in this paper use social reconstruction when writing about the process aimed at successfully establish reconciliation. Reconciliation I will then use as the state, the ultimate goal of this social reconstruction.

Forgiveness and truth are terms that connect with reconciliation. In this paper I will focus more on the acknowledgement, affirmation and understanding that I find necessary for reconciliation to occur. This because truth can be hard to find in a society where there exist so many versions of it, and when there is ambiguity who shall forgive and who shall receive forgiveness. Ideally, forgiveness shall be given by all, to all, however at least the first step in such a process needs to be acknowledging, affirming and understanding the opposite side. Forgiveness, with its focus on the past rather than the future, does not alone provide a psychological basis for how people can overcome past events and reconcile (Halpern, Weinstein, 2004). Also, truth seeking commissions, as used in South Africa, and local criminal trials, have sometimes proved to divide small inter-ethnic communities further (Stover and Weinstein, 2004).

## **2.2 Intractable conflict**

Intractable and protracted conflict, are terms which are widely used by scholars. While intractable simply means difficult to deal with or impossible to solve, protracted means that something has been lasting for a long time or are made to last for a long time. Intractable conflicts are ones that remain unresolved for long periods of time and then become stuck at a high level of intensity and destructiveness. They typically involve many parties and concern an intricate set of historical, religious, cultural, political, and economic issues (Lederach, 1997).

The term, intractable conflicts, I will use concerning conflicts that seemingly do not have an acceptable zero-sum solution for the parties, when there are deep rooted human conflict, where the conflicting groups seems to have such a diverse and incompatible view of the source and history of the conflict, and that any mutually acceptable solution seems impossible.

Intractable conflict then are protracted, and I will understand protracted conflict on conflicts has been lasting for a while and will continue to last further, at least on some levels in society, because there are no mutual satisfactory solution to it. I find that the term intractable in many situations will cover for them both, since an intractable conflict often is protracted by its nature.

## **2.3 Post-Conflict Peace Building**

Post-conflict peace building involves a number of different tasks. Both the physical infrastructure and the social fabric need to be repaired (Weinstein and Stover, 2004). Even though the physical reconstruction of a society is an enormous and important task that includes the returning of refugees and displaced persons back to their communities and more (Corkalo et al, 2004), the social reconstruction is a much more complex and challenging task, involving all levels of society (Weinstein and Stover, 2004). By stating that it is complex and challenging, I do not imply that it is more important. Social reconstruction is dependent on physical reconstruction, but our



knowledge on how to do this, is much smaller and more diverse. In this paper I will focus on the social reconstruction in terms of post-conflict peacebuilding, but of course recognizing the physical repair of infra structure as significantly important.

### **3.0 The Nature of Contemporary conflict**

As I wrote in the beginning of this paper, there have been some scholars arguing that contemporary conflict in some way can be distinguished from earlier conflicts on important features. It is a widely held view that many of the emerging conflicts in the 1990's were products of the changing world order and break-up of Soviet Union (Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, 2001). After the Cold War era, it is claimed, the nature of conflict have changed in such a degree that new concepts and theories for understanding these processes need to be built and new methods needs to be considered and developed in order for us to handle these conflicts (Saunders, 2001, Lederach 1997). The typical cold war realist theories, with its emphasis on power relations and state focus, are no longer the only theories for understanding the new and complex social issues of contemporary conflict, as it had almost full hegemony for centuries (Stern, Druckman, 2000). The understanding of conflict has for too long been limited to the top level in Lederach`s triangle. Dealing with contemporary conflicts, one needs to include the two lower levels to a higher degree (Miall, Ramsbotham, and Woodhouse 2001).

It is important to note, that also the actors have changed to a certain degree. NGO's have increased their influence, particularly in interstate conflicts (Stern, Druckman, 2000) and the emphasis is not entirely on diplomats, politicians and other top-level actors (Sorensen, 2002). Others will argue that little have changed and that conflicts still can be understood from the classical realist theory, shaped and fuelled by basic conflict of interests, a game of power being played out at top political level. Others again claim that these changes happened earlier, and that the conflict patterns we see today emerged by the end of the Second World War (Lederach, 1997).

In this part of the paper I will discuss this assumption and, if any, what are these changes and what do they bring to the challenge of understanding conflict and conflict management.

If it is true that the nature of conflict has changed, what is it then that distinguishes the conflicts of the cold war area with those “new” conflicts that society now are facing? And does this change force us to look at new ways for understanding and dealing with conflicts? These are the questions I will address.

One thing that has changed is that whereas during that period we had two superpowers, we are now after the break up of the USSR that brought an end to the cold war, left with only one. The end of the Cold War also opened up for new emerging states, formerly held together by the power of the two blocks. The superpower system that was prevailing during the cold war separated the world into two hemispheres, the eastern and the western. This conflict was salient in many, if not most of the conflicts around the globe (Lederach 1997). The influence of the two superpowers was widespread. With their backing of either side in many conflicts one could always feel the presence of the two superpowers. It is claimed that this situation led to a number of conflicts between client states of the two superpowers, notably in Africa and the developing countries, but also that it put a lid over some potential conflicts, especially in the USSR dominated East-Europe (Lederach, 1997). This can explain why we after the end of the cold war we have seen a lot of conflict arise from within the former blocks. The break up of Yugoslavia will be an example of such.

Also the conflicts in Africa and central Asia, fought by client states backed by the two superpowers, did not come to an end when the cold war was resolved. One could say that the vacuum of power left by the superpower system now is a source for conflict (Lederach, 1997). In such one cannot look away from the role of power and territory that the realist theories encourage us to do.

Statistics can give us an idea about the changing nature of conflicts. Lederach shows us that even though the number of conflicts has remained stable since the cold war, the trend seems to be that the conflicts tend to be intrastate rather than interstate. There has also been an increase of minor armed conflicts (Lederach, 1997). The Uppsala

University data used by SPIRE <sup>2</sup> shows a decline of major armed conflicts. Others, such as Wallenstein and Axell, also show a trend towards more intrastate wars, secession movements and groups challenging the existing state authority (Lederach, 1997, Miall, Ramsbotham, Woodhouse 2001). Wallenstein and Axell in accordance with Lederach, reports the total number at war remained stable in their 1995 report, but that the type of conflict has changed since the end of the Cold War (Miall, Ramsbotham, Woodhouse 2001). The reported statistics seems to conclude that the nature of conflicts changed in the years following the end of the cold war. Decrease in interstate conflicts and a growth in the number of intrastate conflicts. As noted, some dates these changes to the end of the Second World War, and claim that scholars did not react to these changes before the end of the cold war due to the emphasis on the superpower system that predominantly was explained by traditional classical realist theory.

Some reports also indicate that in the very recent years there has been a decline in such conflicts one has believed to have grown out of the end of the Cold War era (Darby, Mac Ginty, 2003, Miall, Ramsbotham, Woodhouse 2001). Research from Minorities at Risk Program suggest that more ethno national conflicts over autonomy and independence were ending than starting (Miall, Ramsbotham, Woodhouse 2001). This is a positive trend of course, but it also highlights that post-conflict peace building as Boutros Ghali stated, will be one of the main concerns in the time to come.

So contemporary conflicts often seems to be internal rather than between separate states. They are also often based on ethnic or religious groups, seeking sovereignty secession and separation from their bigger unit, as in the many wars within former USSR and in African countries. This, Saunders (2001) says, makes important for us to reshape some of our concepts such as state, power, politics, conflicts and interest. Also these conflicts, with the proximity of the conflicting parties create deep rooted human conflicts at community level that are not easily resolved by thinking of it in old terms.

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<sup>2</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

One should remember that part of the conflict in some aspects live on within the community between the antagonistic groups even after some sort of agreement or peace has been reached

Conflicts between sharply divided identity groups within states need to be resolved with other methods than only state politics or international law, because they are located outside the reach for world community and state sovereignty and in issues that the state government can not easily and exclusively resolve (Lederach 1997).

Intractable conflicts like these need additional theories and methods for resolving them, and emphasis must be put on rebuilding war torn societies to avoid relapse into conflict patterns that might, and most often, will be present in the community.

In this paper, as already noted, post-conflict peace building in communities experiencing or that have experienced intractable conflicts will be the focus. An example will be Bosnia, where the conflicting sides now live side by side in their small communities, as is the case of Mostar and a number of other cities and communities. Even though the Dayton Agreement is signed and in effect, the widespread mistrust and fear of each other are prevalent in the communities around the country, and members of the opposing sides and the citizens have to live with that conflict in their community on a daily basis.

This means that even though recent statistics have indicated that the increase of such conflicts after the Cold War era now are declining, and because many of these wars have come to and end, it is important to focus on how to reconstruct society and prevent former conflicts to recur.

This calls for reconciliation through means of public reconstruction that need theories and actions in addition to state diplomacy, peacekeeping assignments, free election, power-sharing agreements and the usual power play of politics. It's a matter of making it possible for normal people to live a normal neighbouring life in their community, with their neighbours. These are issues that involve the relationship between human

beings and sharply divided identity groups (Lederach, 1997). Hopes and fear of the future, personal security, historical understanding and identity issues are not easily negotiated, at least not at state level. These issues are bound to personal and identity group level. The citizens' perception of the situation and their relationship needs to be changed in order for the deep-rooted conflicts to be resolved (Lederach, 1997).

I will conclude this section with the assumption that even though traditional theories of conflict and conflict management still hold an important role in understanding these issues, some contemporary conflicts needs additional lenses in witch to be understood and dealt with. Especially when it comes to peace building within a state and between groups that live in close proximity, These are conflicts which have increased in number since the end of the cold war, or at least after the second world war. The importance of such community level peace building, often carried out by some of the new actors in the field, does not diminish the importance efforts on global and state level, but adds to the understanding and resolving of conflicts as they have changed in some degree over the last decades. Upon this assumption the paper will base its following chapters.

#### **4.0 A social psychological theory of the nature of deeply divided society.**

Particularly after the cold war a new conflict pattern seem to have emerged, as discussed earlier. These contemporary conflicts have been labelled as ethnic, cultural, religious, racial, regional, and historic conflicts (Saunders 2001, Lederach, 1997). What they have in common is that they tend to emerge between groups located within states, and as Lederach notes, identity lines in contemporary conflicts tends to form within increasingly narrower lines than those that encompass national citizenship (Lederach 1997: 12). In this paper I will refer to such conflicts as identity conflicts, a term found reasonable by a number of scholars (Saunders 2001, Lederach 1997.) The paper now will turn to investigate and understand how these “identity groups” develop such conflictual relationship?

I will look into some social psychological and inter/intra group theories to explain how groups can develop a conflictual relationship with mistrust, stereotyping, polarization of such and wrongful attribution of the other side’s action. I will use the social identity theory as a base, and with the use of related theories, extend it and build a framework to explain some of the dynamics that are central to these conflicts. This framework is simplified and shown as a model in fig 1.1.

I want to show how some inter and intra group dynamics can make these difficult to resolve. I will also show why, even after some means of “peaceful relationships” have been reached, these dynamics still can be a latent reality in those societies, and remain an obstacle to development of that society and in worst case, cause a relapse into conflict.

There are several examples on how groups living peacefully side-by-side end up in a competitive, conflictual and violent relationship. Bosnia, after the break-up of Yugoslavia, will stand as an example of such. How do groups divide and form within these societies, creating such conflictual relationships? Can this be explained by

history? Can it be better explained by the struggle over scarce resources as the traditional realist theory and the Realistic Group Conflict Theory<sup>3</sup> claim?

Of course any conflict will often have a combination of causes. I will now as an introduction to the following discussion on social identity theory, refer to a number of studies on what's often referred to as the minimal group paradigm. These studies suggest that simply being a member of a group can produce discrimination and produce action in favour of the group one belongs to (Otten and Mummendy, 2000, Fisher, 1990). The categorization of oneself and others into one separate group and others again into different groups, can produce a perception of group competition and mild group conflict amongst the participants of these groups (Fisher, 1990).

In the typical experiment participants are assigned to groups on a random allocation, the groups getting an arbitrary name, such as group x and group y. The participants are told what group they belong to, but importantly, are never introduced to either ones own or other group's member. They are now asked to allocate money to a member of their own groups as well as a member of the other group, based on a set of rules given to them as a set of options like the matrix shown below.<sup>4</sup>

Table 4.1

25	23	21	19	17	15	13	11	9	7	5	3	1	<b>Member of group x</b>
19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	10	9	8	7	6	<b>Member of group y</b>

The study then shows that participants favour their own group over the other group by allocating more money to their in-group members than the out-group members.

Interestingly this is done even though it means that the net profit is lower for the in-

<sup>3</sup> A theory that postulates that real conflict of interest causes inter group conflict. Based on studies in sociology, social psychology and anthropology, as a rejection and alternative theory to more psychological and individualistic explanations.

<sup>4</sup> The participants were given a number of different matrix, here is one showed as an example.



group member than it could have been picking another option of allocation. In his matrix that will be for a member of group y to choose either the box 13-13 or the box 11-12. Giving his in-group member the same or more, vis a vis the out-group member. He could have given his in-group member 19, which is a higher sum, but that would result in out-group member receiving 25, he would then would have allocated more to an out-group member than to his in-group member.

The member of the different group does not share a common history, and there has not been a history of conflict that can explain this positive discrimination (Fisher, 1990). Furthermore, competition over scarce resources can not fully explain the outcome, since one have the option to allocate a higher sum, though this means one has to allocate an even higher sum to ones out-group member (Fisher, 1990). Such a positive group discrimination then needs additional theories for explanation, and its here I will turn to social identity theory. The discrimination is mild, and the finding has been criticised, but even if they are mild they are always a little more in favour of the in-group, and that finding is consistent (Brown, 2001)

#### **4.1 Categorization, comparison and social identity.**

After seeing that the mere membership of a group can lead to some positive discrimination of out-group, researchers started to form what has been named social identity theory, consist of three basic concepts, social identity, social categorisation, and social comparison. It developed in the early 70's and throughout the 80's as a response to the existing field of social psychology and an attempt to make a more "social" social psychology. These researchers attacked the reductionism approaches that were holding ground at the time, arguing that one could not overlook the social dimension in understanding people's behaviour (Bennet and Sani, 2004, Suleiman, 2002). As an example, social psychological theories on conflict at that time where most often explained with individual and reductionist theories, psychoanalytic understanding of the individual, the frustration aggression hypothesis and other (Suleimann, 2002).

Having provided useful insight it was still important with a shift in the field of social psychology in order to better understand the complex issues of inter group conflict. Or as one of the pioneers of the social identity approach puts it: “In contrast, “social psychological” theories stress the need to take into account the fact that group behaviour- and even more so inter group behaviour- is displayed in situations in which we are not dealing with random collections of individuals who somehow come to act in unison because they all happen to be in a similar psychological state” (Tajfel, 1981, p.403). I will now discuss Tajfels theory and the Social identity approach in detail.

Categorizations of objects into groups are a common and important task for a human (Augustinos and Walker, 1995). It is a necessary operation in order to make sense and manage the huge amount of information one receives. Such categorizations are also made about people, and it helps in structure the reality around one. It also places you as an individual within groups and in society, according to other groups and other people (Van Avermat, 2001 Moghaddam, 1998). To make distinct and manageable categories there is a tendency to exaggerate the real difference between them, this of course enables you to have an easier task in making the decisions about the reality around one and to decide on the appropriate behaviour (Brown 2001)

Self-categorization theory holds that these groups or categories are an important base for the identity of its members. It's from its social groups where people get their social identity, as one has hypothesised is a huge part of any person's identity besides the personal identity. Social Identity is that part of a persons identity that are derived from those social categories that he or she belongs to, and the value and emotional significance attached to his belonging to these (Bennet and Sani, 2004). This makes social categorization an important part of the development of social identity. The group help people shape and express their identity, and is an important base for securing and conforming this identity. It also provides its members with support and safety (Opotow, 2002, Worchel, 1998).

Having a positive self-image is of major importance for humans (Brown, 2001, Giddens, 2001, Moghaddam, 1998.) Social identity theory holds that in order to keep a positive self-image one is likely to hold a positive view of the groups one belongs to (Deschamps and Devos, 1998, Bar-Tal, 1990). This is especially true for those groups that are of most importance to us, as they provide us with a large part of our identity (Suleiman, 2002, Wellen, Hogg and Terry, 1998). Such important identity groups include national, ethnic, religious groups, and conflict among such groups is what I referred to as identity conflict. These are conflicts that I earlier discussed as being central in the emerging pattern of international conflicts and have increased in the last decades.

It is by comparison with other groups that one can provide this positive evaluation, by holding one's own group as more positive than another on important aspects (Brown, 2000, Bar-Tal, 1990). By doing so one is establishing the group's positive distinctiveness as Tajfel called it (Brown, 2000, Fisher, 1990). This can lead to out-group discrimination, as in the minimal group paradigm, when group members strive to maintain a positive distinctiveness over other groups in order to raise their self-image through their membership of that positive distinct group ( Otten and Mummendy, 2000, Abrahams and Hogg, 1990, Fisher, 1990). Their action and behaviour will be guided towards this goal.

Since identifying with our in-groups is of importance for us, holding similar attitudes, norms and worldviews will be an important base for group membership. Attitudes, norms, group goals, worldviews and such can be referred to as group belief or group belief system. They are important for the group and central for the group's identity, therefore also central and important for the individual's social identity (Bar-Tal, 1990). Even though the members that constitute a group have an influence on how the group develops its identity, the group itself will engage in a struggle to keep a distinct identity with its members and in contrast to other groups (Worchel, 1998). Much of the group identity are often shaped and present before its members and will outlive them, examples are customs, symbols, laws, myths, narratives and other important traits of

the group identity, and building blocks in the groups belief system (Worchel, 1998). This will be especially true for some ethnic, religious and national identity groups. Just think of some religious groups with a strong belief that they are the chosen people, or ethnic groups where the expression and claim of the right to an own state are a central part to their group identity.

Thinking and acting in accordance with the group belief system will be of importance for the individual member. For the group and its future it is important that the individual members hold this as important for their identity as their self-identity or other social identities (Worchel, 1998). Here we can see that the group will provide their members with a unique set of ideas, attitudes norms and such, which will shape and reshape the group identity, as its members strive to be in accordance with these (Worchel, 1998). This dynamic process, the reciprocal relationship between the group and its members help keep the group identity in the future and serve as an important base for group cohesion (Van Avermat, 2001).

Social identity theory in short, claims that people get much of their identity from the groups in which they belong to. The importance of having a positive self-image is crucial for humans and by comparing ones own group with other groups, this goal is reached by evaluating ones in-group more favourable than the out-group on important issues. By holding similar beliefs and sharing the groups own belief system be a part of that favourable group (Brown, 2000).

## **4.2 Group Belief System and Identity**

I will briefly discuss what I earlier referred to as group belief system and their role in group identity and intergroup conflict. Several scholars have used different terms for those beliefs that are shared by identity groups and make up some of the core beliefs of a group. Societal beliefs, group belief system, social schemata, collective narratives, collective memories and others are all terms that emphasises the shared conviction by group members about the world around them and events that take place. These are to a

large degree an important part in the social identity of different groups (Bar-Tal, 2003). They may include, as noted, the positive distinctiveness of in-group over other groups, self-image and images of the others, but will also include myths, narratives, historical view and commemoration. They will concern group goals and aspiration, religious and political orientation or ideology (Bar-Tal, 2003, 1998) When groups are in conflict they will include a understanding of the origin for this conflict, the nature of the conflict, the nature and beliefs of the other side, the reasons for the difficulty in finding a solution to the conflict and a historical belief of the events that has taken place in the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2003). Different identity groups will express quite different views and explanations for events that occurred during the conflict as some field studies have reported (Corkola, 2004). This can be a challenge in the dialogue process, and will be discussed later.

These beliefs will be considered group beliefs and shape a group's social identity when it is brought to the group member's attention that they are a) defining the group, and b) shared by the other members (Bar- Tal 2003, 1998). They will be produced and reproduced within that group in a reciprocal matter, taught by the members in a socializing process. Group beliefs can also be a source and escalate a conflict. Conflicting group beliefs can be consider as serious threats to the groups social identity, and this might lead to some negative group dynamics as discussed below.

### **4.3 Comparison, polarization and attribution**

Holding beliefs, attitudes and views that are central to the group identify, are of importance for the individuals constituting it. Expressing them and acting in accordance with such, can bring social acceptance, increase a member's social status and heighten his positive self-evaluation. Group members compare their in-group members with those of the out-group, and evaluate them in somewhat more favourable light. Social comparison theory point out that this is also true within the group boundaries. The theory fits perfectly with the social identity theory when it highlights the strife for maintaining positive self-evaluation.

Social comparison theory holds that one compare oneself with similar and significant others, in-group members, in order to reach a positive self-evaluation (Brown, 2001, Van Avermat, 2001). Evaluating oneself as more in accordance with the group norms and belief system is a strategy for reaching this. This often biased comparison follow the attribution theory which states that people often make incorrect assumptions of their own and others' reasons for behaviour and expression of attitudes (Hewstone, 1983). When observing others one has a tendency to overestimate the situational factor of the behaviour so in contrast when explaining own behaviour and expression of group beliefs as internally based (or "true"), one can make a positive comparison of oneself as more a "true" member of the group.

To hold, express, and behave in accordance with the group beliefs will be a way of securing ones identity within the group and this strengthens the group cohesion. Sometimes this can lead to a polarization of the group belief system. Positive value attached to being in accordance with the group can make people overestimate the strength of how much they hold this belief system and exaggerate their expression of these. This can start a polarization and strengthening of the groups initial views, attitudes, norms and other aspect of their identity, and result in a stronger positive evaluation of own group and negative evaluation of out -group (Van Avermat, 2001). Cognitive dissonance theory strengthens this assumption, when it emphasis the importance of people to have a consistence in attitudes held and the expression of such (Mogghaddam, 1997). The positive value of sharing the group belief system, the expression of these in order to gain positive evaluation of oneself and keep a consistence in attitudes and behaviour can cause discriminating, negative and even violent behaviour toward other groups and out-group members.

I earlier mentioned attribution theory. The study of attribution is an enormous area in social psychology (Hewstone, 1983). Here I will just briefly address some aspects of it as I see it as interestingly connected to some of the other theories mentioned here.

Attribution is concerned with how people make sense out of others and their own behaviour and explain events (Hewstone, 1983). It is a novel, common sense explanation we often rely on, and just as categorisation they can be considered a cognitive tool for us to easily create an understanding of a situation or action and prepare our behaviour to it. Because of its novelty it can make us fall short of getting the correct explanation or judgement for behaviour and events.

I find that one can consider attribution as expectations about the underlying causes for the behaviour of people, based on our understanding and experience with them.

I will connect this to what I earlier wrote about belief system and claim that attributions are often made with the group belief system as guidance. A certain group belief about the nature of other groups can create a tendency to attribute the action of this group or its members in accordance with this. Simplified, a group belief like “we rightfully deserve a state of our own, but other groups are opposed to that because they want the land for themselves” can provide an attribution pattern where the out-group members' actions are only considered based on that belief.

Attributions can also be an effective tool for making comparisons and reach positive evaluation of their in-group, one of the important aspects of social identity theory, as illustrated with the fundamental attribution error earlier described and the ultimate attribution error described below.

The fundamental attribution error states that when one is observing the behaviour of another there is a tendency for overestimating the situational factor and downplays the dispositional factor for that behaviour. Further the ultimate attribution error states that when observing behaviour of own and in-group members, positive behaviour and attitudes are considered as based on internal traits while negative behaviour and attitudes as based in external matters outside one's control. Judging others this will be the other way around, positive traits having an external base and negative being an internal matter (Hewstone, 1983). Here we can see the linkage to social identity theory, because attributing this way will give a positive distinctive group identity.

Exemplified this simplified this will be: “We do good because we are good and choose to do good, unlike the others who do good because they had to” and “When one of us do wrong its because he was forced to, but the others do wrong because its in their nature”. This kind of attribution style will clearly have the possibility to create misperception and prejudice and a biased or stereotyped image of the other group’s members.

#### **4.4 Realistic Conflict Theory, Re-categorisation and Contact**

Social identity theory with the assistance of related theories can provide us with useful insight about how inter-group and intra- group processes can lead to out-group discrimination, out-group stereotyping, biased attribution of out-group member’s behaviour and intentions, and at worst, establish and escalate a conflict. I find this interesting and relevant, but one should remember that these processes do not necessarily lead to conflict. This is evident by all the groups living side by side that do not experience such conflict. I will now turn to some additional theories to provide a better understanding of the conditions that can increase the risk for these processes to take a hostile and conflicting path and explain why some groups will develop a conflictual relationship.

I wrote in the beginning of the chapter on Social Identity Theory that the theory was a part of a shift in the social psychology, trying to emphasise the social and inter/intra group relationship in order to understand conflict as an example. I will propose another theory that also have attracted much interest and gained massive support.

I will not discuss these as competitive theories, but as additional and interrelated theories. They are important pieces of the puzzle when trying to understand why some groups do, and some don’t, develop a conflictual relationship.

Realistic group conflict theory, RCT, states that there need to be some real conflict of interest in order to produce an intergroup conflict (Fisher, 1990). Based on studies in a number of areas the RCT holds that



1. real conflict of interest and real threat cause a perception of threat,
2. that real threat causes hostility to the source of threat,
3. that real threat causes in-group solidarity and awareness of in-group identity,
4. that real threat increases ethnocentrism (Fisher, 1990: 24).

Some of the studies that this assumption grew out of are some of the more well known studies within the career of social psychology. Sheriffs Robbers Cave study has had an enormous impact since it was published some 50 years ago, and Zimbardos Stanford Prison Experiment have even been made into a movie.

Both studies are compatible with the RCT in that they conclude that real conflict of interest escalates and bring forward a conflict (Fisher, 1990).

In the Robbers Cave study, young boys participating in a summer camp are put into different groups, the Rattlers and the Eagles. Unaware of each other the groups form intergroup friendship, develops group structure and in-group identity. The groups are then informed of each others existence and later placed in a situation of group competition where the winner are promised a nice reward, the group that loses receiving nothing. This creates a conflict of interest as the struggle to receive the prize begins. Sherif and his colleagues observed that the introduction of a real conflict of interest intensify the hostility between the two groups, at one point actually escalating into physical violence (Brown, 2000).

The Stanford Prison experiment can show some similar results, where participants are randomly allocated into being either guards or prisoners in a kind of role-play of a prison setting. The two groups soon develop a conflictual relationship, as the guards have access to the use of power over the prisoners and the situation. The prisoners in and attempt to establish a more “fair” situation engage in a revolt that are immediately crushed by the guards defending their dominate position. The situation gets out of control as the guards are developing an increases aggressive behaviour towards the prisoners, getting to a point where the experiment simply needs to be ended. A high degree of stereotyping, in-group/out-group suspicion and hostility was evident in the

intergroup relationship, following the pattern of the Robbers Cave study (Fisher, 1990).

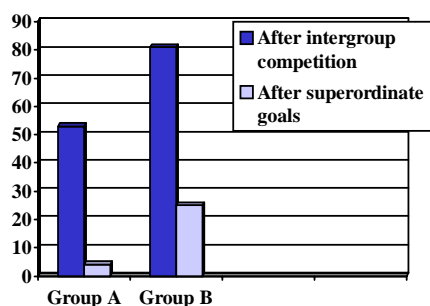
Several other studies have produced similar result, that real conflict of group interest can intensify and escalate conflict (Brown 2000, Fisher 1990). It is interesting however, to point out that at least in the summer camp studies, discrimination of out-group members and positive evaluation of in-group members were evident even prior to the insert of the incompatible goal. This follows the minimal group experiment, which states that just the mere membership will bring about some discrimination of in-group members over out-group-members. This is further intensified, group members becoming more hostile to out-group members and more positive to in-group members with the introduction of a real conflict of interest.

Such a conflict of interest can also be seen as compatible with identity theory. When the identity of the group, the group beliefs and the chances for successfully reaching the group goals are threatened by the existence of another group, conflict level will increase. In short, when the bargaining over these issues is considered as a zero-sum game, identity can be considered a real interest of conflict. As earlier noted, conflicting group-belief system can be a threat to group's social identity. Conflict over identity can be just as much a conflict over real interests as conflict over land, water and power - groups wanting to defend their belief system and secure their identity, which are of such importance for them.

Robbers cave study showed how a conflictual relationship could develop when there was a conflict of interest between the groups. But the Robbers cave study went further in order to see if there was possible to reduce the intergroup conflict and bring the groups into a friendly relationship. By introducing tasks that could only be solved with the cooperation of both groups, the researcher slowly got two bring the conflict situation in the other direction. The hypotheses were that superordinate goals could reduce the prejudice and intergroup hatred (Brown, 2001, Fisher, 1990).

The decline in unfavourable ratings (shown as percentage on the left) is remarkable, as the illustration below shows (Brown, 2001).

Table 4.2



These findings, that superordinate goals can reduce intergroup conflict, have guided some of the contemporary conflict resolution efforts. Other theories, such as contact theory and re-categorisation theory can also help explain Sherif's result.

The contact hypothesis has a core assumption that contact will reduce intergroup tension and hostilities because contact will reveal a similarity between the groups that will be evident for the group members and change their hostile attitudes and negative beliefs towards the other group (Bramel, 2004, Forbes, 2004). In sharp contrast to this is the observation by some scholars that as a result of increased contact between different identity groups there is an increase of intergroup conflict (Forbes, 2004). In the Robbers cave study we could see the same, when the boys first got in contact with each other through the competition there were an increase of group hostility, in contrast to the decline that was found when the contact had the nature of reaching superordinate goal. Also field studies in conflict societies don't find an automatic connection between contact and decline in hostilities (Halpern and Weinstein, 2004).

The nature of the contact then, might explain why contact is both hypothesized to lead to conflict as well as conflict reduction (Forbes, 2004). Contact needs to be designed in away that can reduce intergroup conflict and prejudice (Forbes, 2004). Also studies

showed that if the groups fail to reach the superordinate goals, negative stereotyping of out-group members would increase (Brown, 2001). When contact situation can help in reaching superordinate goals, the contact might reduce conflict.

Also a theory of re-categorization can offer an explanation on why hostile group can transform a relationship from conflicting to peaceful, as in the Robbers Cave study. This thinking emphasise not the superordinate goal as the factor, but following the categorization theory a re-categorization occurs, making one big in-group out of the former separated groups. This can explain the rather mild, but still existing, discrimination we found in the minimal group paradigm, because the participants might feel some “above category” as not only a member of group x or y, but as a participants in that study. This group, “the participants” will include both members from x and y.

The unrealistic nature of laboratory studies like the minimal group paradigm is a problem for many of the studies on re-categorisation. The setting of the study, create an unreal situation that might make it easier for successful re -categorisation to occur (Brown, 2001). The investment in real groups outside the laboratory setting in keeping a distinct category is probably higher, the group beliefs more socialized and groups more cohesive. Also one shall not forget that real conflict of interest, some that one can not easily reproduce in a laboratory setting will be a powerful incentives in keeping a distinct group and avoid re-categorisation.

In real life setting, it may be better to combine this re-categorisation with some techniques that allow the group and group members to maintain distinctive identity, but still emphasise a re-categorization above this again (Brown, 2001, Drigotas, Insko, Schopler, 1998). One idea is to cross categories. When doing so you find new categories that criss-cross two or more different categories. Ethnic categories like Serb and Croat can be crossed with categories as man or woman. Keeping the distinct identity or category as a Bosniac or Serb then is still possible, but a new category “woman” can be created, making it possible for Serb and Croat women to find some sympathy and “sameness” with each other, as Halpern and Weinsteins’ study report

(2004), since they are part of that category. This is without them losing their ethnic identity. Some peace building efforts have used this criss-cross categorisation in peace initiatives. Examples can be a joint effort by religious leaders in the Muslim-Christian Dialogue Project in Nigeria (Wuje and Ashafa, 2005)<sup>5</sup>. Or maybe the Nansen Dialogue Network and its emphasis on young people and their need to look forward (Bryn, 2005).<sup>6</sup>

Contact in a planned and suitable setting can therefore reduce intergroup conflict. With the use of superordinate goals and some form of re-categorisation, one can expect the contact between conflicting parties to have a better chance of success in reducing the tension and de-escalate the conflict. It is from this angle I know will continue the paper and focus on dialogue and the use of intergroup dialogue work as a tool for social reconstruction.

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<sup>5</sup> Forming categories that emphasizes regional similarity over religious identity

<sup>6</sup> Emphasizing the membership of generation and local belonging over ethnic identity.

## **5.0 Peace building through dialogue. Can sustained dialogue help in bringing reconciliation in deeply divided societies?**

So back to the main question for this paper, can dialogue be a useful tool for social reconstruction in societies torn by conflict? Contemporary conflict lines are to be found within states, between identity groups living in close proximity of each other holding incompatible beliefs and goals. Dealing with these contemporary conflicts demand the use of different understanding and ways of handling them, in addition to traditional theories on conflict management. Post-conflict peace building, as Boutros Boutros Ghali stated, must receive increased attention in the contemporary world, making it possible for former enemies to live peacefully together in safety within the community, to avoid a relapse into conflict (Saunders, 2001). Doing so successfully demands that one engage in different peace building efforts. Both on a physical, social and psychological level. Reconstruction of social society in order to bring about reconciliation between former enemies within communities will be one of these important tasks, as of course reconstruction of a society's political environment and infra-structure are other important aspects of post conflict peace building.

Dialogue has been used as a tool for changing conflictual relationship on several levels and in different phases of a conflict (Saunders, 2001). It can be used as a preventive tool, as track two negotiations or as post conflict activities (Kaufman, 2005). In this paper I will only address dialogue as a tool for social reconstruction on grass and middle range levels in post conflict societies, or as some project have emphasised, not as a tool for reaching a breakthrough in diplomatic negotiations, manage or resolve a conflict (Smith and Skjælsbek, 2000). I will leave out the use of dialogue as a tool for finding negotiation space to help diplomatic negotiation between top level representatives, known from Herbert Kelman's, diplomacy and others, work on track two. This paper is focusing on reconciliation and social reconstruction in a post conflict society level, so I find it useful to focus on dialogue work in smaller communities and how that can help to reduce intergroup tension and hatred in a post conflict society. Typically, members of conflicting identity groups coming together in

a professional setting to explore and express each others beliefs and thoughts in order to break down enemy image, negative stereotyping, prejudice and wrongfully attribution.

Sustained dialogue is in the heart of the reconciliation process, Saunders writes (2001: 12). It's the citizen's tool for changing a relationship of conflict, he continues, and emphasizes the need to explore new and additional concepts in dealing with conflict. He focus on relationships, stating that they can only be changed by those that make them up, and that peoples reality comes from their relationships with others and not only from government (Saunders, 2001). Reconciliation is a very important part in his conception of peace building. Also Lederach (1997) has building of relationship as central to his understanding of reconciliation, as do many of the other scholars writing within this field (Weinstein, Stover 2004, Corkola et al, 2004, Adjukovic and Corkola, 2004, Bar-Tal, 2000).

Dialogue within communities, between members of the conflicting parties have been one attempt at reconstructing social community and relations between conflicting groups in several post-conflict peace building efforts the last decades. The Nansen Dialogue Centre, a project started in Lillehammer and partly funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, now operating in nine towns within former Yugoslavia, is one example. Hello Peace Project in Israel and Palestine will be another, and one will find similar projects in other places that has or are experiencing conflict. Through sustained dialogue within communities in post-war societies, hopes are to reduce tension, stereotyping, out-group discrimination, negative attribution and create a positive relationship with adversary side, in short: reconciliation.

Knowledge about inter and intra-group process, identity, the ways beliefs are formed and have impact on both the group members and inter group relationship can help us to better structure this dialogue work with a positive expectation of success. In my opinion it also provides us with a "theoretical" validity for the importance of such project. Evaluating such projects and their effect is a difficult task, but with a

theoretical validity we can, to higher degree, confirm its importance and measure its impact.

I find that those theories of inter and intra-group processes discussed in this paper, with social identity theory as its core, are important and interesting contribution when trying to understand sustained dialogue and its role in social reconstruction.

### **5.1 Contact through dialogue**

The first important feature that dialogue initiatives provide is a place for the people to meet. Several scholars have acknowledged this as a very important aspect (Bryn, 2005, Saunders, 2001, Smith and Skjelsbæk, 2000). Many field studies have recognised this as they report that people express a lack places for intergroup communication.

Adunkovic and Corkola's (2004) findings suggest that the people in the community they studied needed some program that could encourage and provide them with a psychological safe space to meet. Fear toward the other group, or toward members of their own group and their reaction to such a contact, was simply holding people back (Adunkovic and Corkola 2004). Several of their informants report they have had close relationship with members of the opposite group, now experiencing fear of meeting them again but also a wish that it shall actually happen. They report of a social pressure that one shall not cross ethnic lines, but also a present wish and hope from participants in their study to do so, if a safe and secure place where present.

In such societies places should be provided where contact can occur, without people feeling uneasy or that they betray their own group. It is both a need (Kaufman 2005) and a wish (Adunkovic and Corkola's 2004), but often not a reality (Corkola et al) because of intergroup scepticisms and social pressure. The in-group cohesion has grown too strong, and social pressure from group is present to keep group boundaries tight. Interestingly, some reports that the social in-group contact in some community has declined following the decline of social intergroup contact. People's social



network is increasingly their own family and closest friends (Corkola, 2004). This might be an effect of general social fear and uncertainty in these societies.

NGO's might be the best organisations to create such safe environments for contact. They can represent objectivity and hold a position that can be difficult for a state government. In the contemporary world we increasingly see how NGO's are able work within fields that state actors can't reach (Saunders, 2001, Lederach, 1997).

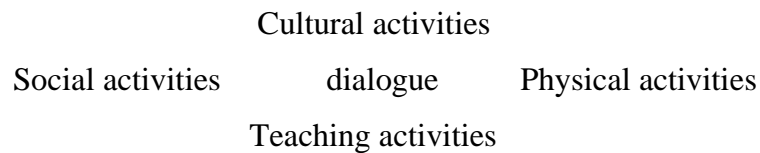
Social reconstruction is just not as easy as to provide space for contact and communication. As we saw when considering the contact hypothesis, contact does not necessarily provide a decline in intergroup conflict. Contact and dialogue process need to be carefully designed in order to have expectations of a positive outcome (Kaufman, 2005, Saunders, 2001).

Abu-Nimer lists a number of conditions that he has found in his fieldwork to be basic requirements in order to expect positive outcome (1999: 3-4). They include among others:

- a) Positive perception of the other group as a result of the interaction
- b) Contact situation that includes cooperation, not competition.
- c) Contact situation involves interdependence activities, superordinate goals, or separate goals that can be achieved only by cooperation
- d) Intimate, not casual, contact
- e) A pleasant and rewarding contact
- f) An equal status between the parties

Smith and Skjelsbæk (2000) emphasize some of the same features when discussing how their dialogue seminar aimed at producing a nice atmosphere for contact, emphasising social, cultural and physical and teaching activities in addition to dialogue. This will also provide an intimate contact as well as cooperative atmosphere. Their model for a seminar held for Serb and Albanians held in Albania 1999 are illustrated on the next page.

Fig 5.1



Tajfel, one of the pioneers on social identity, criticised the contact hypothesis on the ground that it did not provide a theoretical understanding on how contact can lead to a decline in intergroup hostility (Abu-Nimer, 1999: 2). Taking what I earlier discussed on social identity theory, contact should be arranged in a way where the participants do not feel a threat to the group's identity. Contact formed so that it can produce a re-categorisation will be beneficial for reaching the first of the above condition, positive perception of the other group. I find Smith and Skjælsbæk's model as promising to succeed in this. Through their effort in providing a nice atmosphere and activities that help the participants meet in different setting makes it more likely for to create a positive evaluation of the adversary.

The use of techniques that cross over categories, as discussed earlier, can successfully establish an in-group feeling among the participants. Following the social categorization and SIT model this can lead to a decline of the former ingroup/outgroup discrimination, because the re-categorisation might produce group cohesion and a feeling of togetherness for the members of this new category.

Minimal group paradigm suggests that just mere membership can produce a positive perception of those in-group members. It becomes important that one focus on the participant as members of a social group. As an example, this new category can be something like "citizens who wants to make a better future". It is important that one does not challenge the importance of those pre-existing and distinct identity groups, because they are important for the participants as they make up a crucial part of their social identity. A feeling of threat to that identity can reverse the effect of contact,

following the realistic conflict theory. Peoples do not want to negotiate about their identity, hopes, fears or belief- system (Saunders, 2001:22).

Re-categorisation can also help in provide a perception of equal status between the parties, because it gives the participants a possibility to perceive each other as sharing some common goals, hopes and fears.

Contact situation should focus on cooperation and interdependence activities, superordinate goals, or separate goals that can be achieved only by cooperation, Abu-Nimer writes. As I stated earlier, discussing superordinate goals, a success in reaching those goals are crucial in determining the outcome of the contact to be positive or not. This can be seen in light with Abu-Nimer's emphasis on a positive and rewarding contact. The dialogue should foster cooperation and the reach of superordinate goals. One must be realistic in deciding on such goals. If they are not reached it can have a negative impact on the dialogue and the relationship between the different identity groups participating.

I have so far concentrated on the contact situation in where the dialogue takes place. I will now discuss what dialogue should be and how dialogue can facilitate reconciliation. Its aim is to reduce intergroup misperception, increase intergroup understanding, and give people a chance to express their hopes, fears and goals as well as experience those of the adversary. Dialogue should also give the participants a possibility to exchange and explore ways to deal with difficult issue in the relationship and find mutual ground for reconstruction of social society. Learning about the adversary and their belief system can have positive impact on group polarization because it can create a critical mass that can halt that process.

Saunders (2001: 81) calls the dialogue process an interactive process that is designed to change relationship over time. His emphasize is that it needs to be sustained dialogue, not an on-off encounter. Dialogue in this sense should be considered

different than discussion, negotiations and mediation. It is not a matter of right or wrong nor is it about to win or lose (Kaufman, 2004, Saunders, 2001).

The dialogue process should be one of cooperation and not competition, following what Abu-Nimer put forward as conditions for contact that could reduce intergroup conflict. While discussion and negotiation have elements of competition, the ideas of sustained dialogue is to express and listen to experiences, thoughts and ideas and together deepen and extend those (Saunders, 2001). The attempt should be to analyse the relationship in depth, without having the participants feel they have to change their social identity. Without having to give up their social identity, people should through listening, experiencing, and understanding have the possibility to change some of those group beliefs that are destructive to the intergroup relationship.

These group beliefs are as we have seen, a large part of the participants social identity. Conflict between the group's beliefs, especially their understanding of the conflict, will lead to intense and critical moments in the dialogue process. The willingness to give up or change these beliefs can be very low, remembering that these are beliefs that to a certain degree are the understanding of the world for the participants and a very important part of their identity. These beliefs are brought to the dialogue as truth, some of these what Volkan has described as "chosen traumas" and "chosen glories" (Saunders, 2001). Often the conflicting groups have different understanding about these truths and even believe the adversary to try and hide the "real truth". In the field study undertaken by Adjunkovic and Corkola (2004), Corkola et al, (2004), Smith and Skjælsbæk (2000), several of the participants articulates this view. The general understanding that there is one version and the assumption the adversaries also know this truth, can lead to frustration when that adversary present a different version. One example is the belief that ones own group is the victim in the conflict. In Corkola study (2004) several participants express the view of their own group as the greatest victim, experiencing war crimes committed by the other side in the conflict. Many also refused that members of their own group had committed such crimes. This of course can be seen in connection with the attributional pattern that is usual for in-group out-

group discrimination. Attribution bias judging own group and out group members are common, and probably even more so consider the impact this can have on the social identity and positive evaluation of own group.

This can lead to an affirmation of the negative stereotype, because it confirms the negative view of the out-group members; they lie and deceive, and are not open for reconciliation. Such conflicting group beliefs are the biggest threat to the dialogue process, as it is a source of reaffirmation of negative stereotypes about the other side. Remembering what was earlier discussed about Social Identity Theory and group-beliefs, this come as no surprise. Rather than having a discussion about the truth, my understanding is that dialogue should help to gain knowledge and understanding of the different truths and the validity of these.

Saunders introduces personal story telling as one way of dealing with this issue. Personal storytelling at appropriate time can prove effective in giving a vivid and convincing account for what has happened. Dialogue should help the identity groups to learn, experience and acknowledge that both groups are victims of the conflict and have experienced loss. This is also highlighted by Halpern and Weinstein (2004), and they emphasis the role of empathy and sympathy in order to reach reconciliation. Personal storytelling can bring about empathy and sympathy with the storyteller. Also this individualizes members of the opposing group, and challenges the dehumanization of their behaviour and nature (Halpern and Weinstein, 2004). They find in their field study that empathy and sympathy was closely connected with the willingness to meet the other side and enter a dialogue with them. Some projects have tried out a similar but different technique where the participants are asked to take view of the other side and give an account for their understanding of the conflict. Others again have used similar conflicts in other areas of the world and introduced this as a focus for dialogue, thereby making participants go deeper into the problem without touching difficult issues in their own relationship. The similarity with their own situation on the other hand, can provide some interesting insight for the participants, when they later return to talk about their own society (Smith and Skjælsbek, 2000).

Dialogue must be seen as a process and not a destination, some scholars argue. It's important that dialogue does not get stuck as just talks with now destination (Kaufman, 2004, Saunders, 2001). Its destination is to change relationships in the larger community, Saunders (2001:81) writes, or following Kaufman (2004:476), constructing learning communities with the development of understanding of each other's realities. There is a chance that the dialogue process can get stuck, when dialogue becomes a substitute for action or when the importance of being a part of the seminar group becomes so important for the participants that they create a feeling of being elite and develop an unwillingness to share access or widening the circles (Kaufman, 2004).

In the introduction I mentioned the problem of assessing the impact of dialogue projects. Through theories of inter and intra group processes this paper have shown that we can have a positive expectation that sustained dialogue can reduce intergroup tension and help in reconstruct social society. But one can not expect, or even have the capacity, for every member of society to be participants of such a program. In order for the program to have an impact beyond the people participating and in the society at large, hopes are to develop a critical mass that can challenge stereotypes, prejudice and out-group hatred within their respective identity groups. Therefore some programs, even though allowing everyone to participates, especially look for important and respected people in society from both groups (Saunders, 2001, Bryn, 2005). Youth politicians, leaders of organisations, journalist among others that are believed to have an impact on society and that are expected to take leading roles in future society are of special interest to have participating in sustained dialogue. These people will be a powerful critical mass, as their impact gives them huge possibilities to share their experience and influence the members of their society.

Also it is important that participants have a willingness to change the relationship between the conflicting groups in that society. Willingness to listen and openness to adversary position is important characteristics of the individual participants that will help the dialogue process in moving forward. This will most often rule out fanatic and

extremist participants, but their point of view is still important to take into account (Saunders, 2001: 102).

In figure 5.1 we can see that Smith and Skjælsbek (2000) introduce teaching in their model for a dialogue process, as do Kaufman, 2005. I find it reasonable that lectures on similar conflict in general, the specific conflict in question, and on group processes can give useful insight for the participants in order to understand their relationship. Saunders (2001) has also introduced this idea. Such insight will provide the participants with an understanding of the complexity of the situation and the relationship.

## **6.0 Conclusion.**

This paper set out in order to show how reconciliation through social reconstruction in post-conflict societies could be achieved through the use of sustained dialogue. First it focused on how conflict lines had changed since the Second World War and further at the end of the Cold War. It seems that contemporary conflicts are increasingly to be found within states, between identity groups living in close proximity. This makes it important for us to consider the use of new theories, new concepts and new strategies in order to understand and deal with conflict in contemporary society. This should not be understood as a substitute of already existing knowledge and practice, but in addition to, so that one better can understand and handle such conflicts. These changes also call for recognition of the actors in field, typically NGO's and other organizations that can contribute where the state and international organisations come short.

Post-conflict peace building is one very important part of contemporary conflict management, as stated by Boutros Boutros Ghali. Social reconstruction is an important part of this post- conflict peace building, as it aims at restoring relationships between people in civil society. Social reconstruction comes in addition to physical repair, political reforms and are equally important in rebuilding war-torn society.

Theories on inter and intra-group processes was discussed in this paper, in order to create a picture of how relationships in post- conflict society can be understood. The knowledge of these processes creates a theoretical model in which one can understand and analyse such relationship of mistrust, misperception and prejudice which is likely to be found in such societies. This understanding gives theoretical validity to the dialogue process as an important contribution in social reconstruction of civil society. It also provides a theoretical background and information on how one should precede a process of sustained dialogue.

The paper then continued in exploring how sustained dialogue could help in this social reconstruction in order to change conflictual relationship. With the use of the



theoretical insight earlier discussed in the paper, and empirical material different field studies, the paper shows how sustained dialogue can be used in order to change relationship between groups in conflict. It provides insight on important aspects of the process and why one should engage in such projects.

A total assessment of the impact of such project is hard to provide, but the theoretical model presented here, with its background in several important and well known theories on inter and intra-group processes support the use of sustained dialogue in social reconstruction.

This paper emphasises that the dialogue process needs to be qualitatively different than negotiation and discussion. In providing a safe place for encounters and through planned contact with the use of different techniques, dialogue should be able to create a space for people to understand, acknowledge and explore each others different beliefs, hopes, fears and goals. Also, dialogue should aim at foster collective efforts in finding ways to reconstruct social society together.

If successfully achieved, this social reconstruction can provide what some have termed true reconciliation, which is important if society should have a fruitful development. It will also help decrease the chance of relapse into conflict

Much work can be done in establishing a better assessment of the impact of such projects on the society as a whole, as well as on the different condition that increase the positive expectations of success in changing conflictual relationship. Studies on such project in different post-conflict society around the world, and further studies on general inter and intra-group processes will be of importance for increased knowledge on the impact as well as how to run such projects with a positive expectations of changing conflictual relationships between identity groups.

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