

A Systems Approach to Peacebuilding

By Louise Diamond, Ph.D.

*(Note: This article was originally intended to be the first chapter of a book entitled, **Beyond Win-Win**, by Louise Diamond. Though the book was never completed, and this chapter was written originally in 1997, nevertheless it stands on its own today as useful reading.)*

Chapter One

SUSTAINABILITY: THE ECOLOGY OF PEACEBUILDING

"The more we study the major problems of our time, the more we come to realize that they cannot be understood in isolation. They are systemic problems, which means that they are interconnected and interdependent. For example, stabilizing world population will be possible only when poverty is reduced worldwide....Scarcities of resources and environmental degradation combine with rapidly expanding populations to lead to the breakdown of local communities and to the ethnic and tribal violence that has become the main characteristic of the post-cold war era.

Ultimately these problems must be seen as just different facets of one single crisis, which is largely a crisis of perception. It derives from the fact that most of us, and especially our large social institutions, subscribe to the concepts of an outdated worldview, a perception of reality inadequate for dealing with our overpopulated, globally interconnected world."ⁱ

What is Beyond Win/Win?

The win/win approach to problem-solving and conflict resolution has been a huge contribution to our world. The idea that both (or all) parties to a conflict might satisfy their needs and interests with a mutually beneficial resolution has become a credible alternative to the more common zero-sum assumption of "I win, you lose."

Through popular books, conflict resolution programs in the schools, mediation efforts and other such avenues, the win/win notion has gained a large degree of acceptance in the minds and institutions of our society. Those of us in the field of conflict resolution and

peacebuilding wrap much of our work around that core concept, and find infinitely creative ways to introduce, coach, teach, and encourage its use in various settings, from simple interpersonal disputes to complex inter-communal conflicts.

Over the years, I have found that the win/win approach, while necessary, is not sufficient. It does not take into consideration the context, or system, within which the conflict is occurring. Thus I began, early in my career in international peacebuilding, to ask the question: What is beyond win/win?

When I ask this question in seminars and workshops with other peacebuilders, I get a variety of answers. Beyond win/win is:

- love
- reconciliation
- justice
- healing;
- deep changes in assumptions, beliefs, and structures
- transformation
- political will
- lasting peace
- true collaboration
- creative synergy
- partnership
- healthy relationship patterns
- shared power
- "both/and" rather than "either/or" thinking
- "we together" rather than "us or them" thinking
- and so forth.

In other words, beyond the level of resolving the dispute, there must be some attention to changing the relationships and the conditions under which those relationships are shaped. Beyond win/win, then, seems to point in the direction of changes within the larger context, or the system, in which the conflict is embedded.

Transactional and Transformational Peacebuilding

Let's start with some practical definitions. I understand the notion of 'beyond win/win' through a continuum of transactional and transformational work. Transactions, it seems to me, are approaches to resolving conflicts in which the parties interact with each other to solve a problem or reach an agreement. They conduct "business", if you will, or a set of transactions with each other (or through a third party), to reach a desired outcome.

The focus of transactional work is on the problem, the interaction that addresses that problem, and the agreement. It seeks to get solutions, improve working relationships and provide frameworks for ongoing relationship. Mediation, negotiation, alternative dispute resolution, and problem-solving are transactional methods.

Transformational work, on the other hand, seeks not just to resolve the present problem, but to change the dynamics of the relationship and the system of relationships that could, if not addressed, insure future and recurring problems of a similar nature. The more entrenched the conflict is, whether in a family system or an inter-communal system, the more need there is for a transformational approach.

Transformational work looks at underlying patterns of assumption, belief and behavior. It seeks to build relationships that are cooperative and flexible, able to create new forms as needed to address problems as they arise. Reconciliation and healing, visioning, partnering, peacebuilding, and leadership development are examples of transformational methods.

This differentiation is not a set of polarities, but a true non-linear continuum, in which the peacebuilder may mix and match methods depending on the circumstance. That being said, however, it is also true that in the general field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, different practitioners often see themselves as aligned with primarily one approach or the other. This is appropriate, I believe, and fruitful for a field which cherishes as one of its basic values the importance of diversity. As my own work puts more emphasis on the transformational approach, that will be the primary focus of this book.

Systems Thinking: The Ecological View

If we, as peacebuilders, are to think and act transformationally, therefore, we need to be able to think systemically. In fact, I would go further and suggest that the very core of our work needs to be rooted in the systemic or ecological view.

Fritjof Capra, in the quote above, draws our attention to what he calls an "outdated worldview." He and others from the physical and social sciences have written extensively about the paradigm shift now occurring all around the planet. Discoveries in physics, biology, mathematics, and other sciences during the past century have widely discredited the heretofore prevailing notion of reductionism--that worldview which sees reality as a set of mechanical interactions whose parts can be reduced to, and studied as, separate entities, particles, or phenomenon.

The search for the building blocks of matter, or of life itself, has led to the astounding realizations that matter is energy in motion; that life is process as well as substance; that consciousness is an inherent and critical component of any living system; and that everything is connected through a vast set of interdependent webs or networks.

This revolution in science has led to a shift in thinking as radical as the Copernican discovery of the Sun rather than the Earth as the center of our solar system. It is as big a change for the human family as the Iron Age, the Industrial Revolution and the Age of Information Technology all rolled into one, for it re-orders how we think about the nature of reality itself, of everything in our world and in our lives.

Capra says further:

"The paradigm that is now receding has dominated our culture for several hundred years, during which it has shaped our modern Western society and has significantly influenced the rest of the world. This paradigm consists of a number of entrenched ideas and values, among them the view of the universe as a mechanical system composed of elementary building blocks, the view of the human body as a machine, the view of life in society as a competitive struggle for existence, the belief in unlimited material progress to be achieved through

economic and technological growth, and--last, but not least--the belief that a society in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male is one that follows a basic law of nature. All of these assumptions have been fatefully challenged by recent events. And, indeed, a radical revision of them is now occurring."ⁱⁱⁱ

It does not take much mental effort to see that the political systems we have been living with for the last several hundred years--a polity of nation states run almost entirely by men in which imperialism, racism, sexism, colonialism, and other forms of power relations based on domination and suppression, with increasingly sophisticated weapons of destruction as the tool of enforcement--is a direct outgrowth of this Cartesian world view. If everything is separate, then the door is open for the strongest to rule, and conquest becomes the norm--conquest of our neighbor, of the minority group living among us, of women or the feminine energy, of the frontier, even of nature herself.

Many of the places in the world today in which peacebuilders are needed are places seeking to repair the harm that is the legacy of such force-oriented and polarized systems. Today's conflicts over land, identity, religion, natural resources, and power are still driven by the assumptions of this reductionist world view. Even the recent focus on the global economy and geo-economics as a critical element in world affairs is based on the same set of false premises.

The new paradigm or worldview--called holism or deep ecology or systems thinking-- posits an altogether different set of assumptions and inferences. If reality is all about energy, interconnectedness and consciousness--rather than matter, separation and mechanistic reactions--then we need to frame our lives totally differently: we need to pay attention to how the energy moves throughout those webs of relationship; what patterns are prevalent and how new ones can be created; and the role our consciousness can play in shaping our realities.

In other words, we need to think of the whole as more than the sum of the parts; of the interactions of different phenomenon; of the possibilities and potentialities inherent in the networks; of the context in which any phenomenon occurs. We need to think of the viability of this great web of being, and of our place in it and our responsibility for its well-being.

Furthermore, we need to let this view permeate our values, our beliefs, our assumptions, our perceptions, our structures of society, and our behaviors, for if it is true (and our own sciences seem to be convinced that it is so) that we are all part of a single web of life, then truly, the teaching of our great peace leaders that to cause harm to another is to harm ourselves is a profound wake-up call, not only to environmental action but also to how we establish and maintain all our social, political and economic systems on this planet.

This ecological view, which sees everything--including human interaction--as part of a set of inter-related systems, each within its larger environment, has profound implications for the work of peacebuilding in the world. I would go so far as to suggest that it is the work of peacebuilding in the world: that is, to help people make this change in thinking is to help solve some of the major problems around which humanity has been stuck for a long time. Peacebuilders taking a transformational approach stand squarely astride the evolutionary shift that is occurring now, as humanity begins to realize that the systems it has created and invested its hopes in are crumbling for having been built on the unstable foundation of assumptions not in line with natural truth.

At the very least, taking the ecological view means that the peacebuilder begins to focus on the patterns of relationship, the structures of society that determine those patterns, and the values, perceptions and assumptions held by the parties within their environment in any conflict situation, most especially in those situations in which conflict patterns display overt and recurring violence, are deeply embedded historically and psychologically, and are multi-generational. In short, the peacebuilder needs to focus on the whole system of conflict, not only the immediate dispute itself.

So systems thinking is critical to the peacebuilder involved in conflict transformation in three ways: the work of the peacebuilder is to help people in places of deep-rooted conflict make that paradigm shift; that shift in thinking will, by itself, provide peacebuilders new ways of addressing old problems; and the ecological view provides the peacebuilder with a comprehensive focus for the work.

To this I would add a fourth factor: namely, that it is so much easier to work in harmony with natural law than to push against it. If inter-relationship is in fact the nature of reality, then moving with that truth will require less effort than acting as if it weren't

true. This frees up energy for the critical work of building new systems of human society, systems that are aligned with the emerging ecological view.

Understanding Sustainability

Let's step back a moment and revisit a basic premise of our work as peacebuilders, namely our purpose. Looking through the lens of the transformational, systems approach, the goal of peacebuilding can be articulated at several levels of the system. Let us take Bosnia as an example.

The first level of peacebuilding, during the war, was to get an agreement that would stop the fighting and start the re-building process. The Dayton Accords, arrived at through a highly transactional process, fulfilled this objective. As the Accords began to be implemented in Bosnia, however, the international community and local Bosnian peacebuilders began to see the limits of a process that focused on developing physical and political infrastructure. Homes were built or renovated, yet refugees and the displaced were not moving into them. Massive support was given to the development of political parties and election processes, yet the results seemed to reinforce the dynamics of rigid ethnic separation.

It became apparent that something else needed to change, something about relationships--not just the relationships between the major ethnic groups, but between the people and their leaders, their histories, their own sense of empowerment to determine their future; between the people and their region, their access to the resources of the global community, and so on.

In short, a new way to frame the purpose of peacebuilding in Bosnia evolved. Now, the question is: how to create a process that will insure lasting peace in Bosnia and the region? The question now becomes focused on changing the patterns of interaction that have led in the past to recurring cycles of violence, with shifting roles of victim and persecutor. We become concerned more with building an infrastructure for peace that will endure through the generations. Now we are seeing our role as building a sustainable system of peace in the Balkans, realizing that if we fail in this, we condemn ourselves to periodic repeats of cataclysm in that region much as we have seen in the Middle East and elsewhere.

What makes a system healthy and sustainable? Lester Brown, of the Worldwatch Institute, has a definition: "A sustainable society is one that satisfies its needs without diminishing the prospects of future generations."ⁱⁱⁱ

This notion of sustainability has taken hold, for obvious reasons, in the environmental movement and in the field of social and economic development. In both settings, we have lived far too long with the data that quick fixes of one part of the system do not address the underlying problems, and may in fact cause further difficulty or even harm in another part of the system. We have also learned that we cannot keep coming back in to fix the same problem over and over again. Billions of dollars have been poured into development in Africa, yet the continent continues to struggle with issues of poverty, disease, agricultural insufficiency, overpopulation and conflict, not because the donors were not well-intentioned or the recipients incompetent, but because the development approach was piecemeal, not systemic, assuring, and even in some cases exacerbating, repetitive patterns of depletion.

I am suggesting that the same is true for the process of building peace. We must begin thinking about, and putting our resources toward, creating systems of peace that can sustain themselves over time. This is a radical notion, because it puts the peacebuilder decidedly in the category of being an agent of social change. It requires that we hold ourselves accountable to the future in all that we do today, and that we examine how our actions can satisfy the real needs of the people to such an extent that they can give up conflict as a way of life and embrace something different.

I would suggest there are three criteria for the sustainability of a system. One has to do with renew-ability--can it last, will it endure into the future? Will future generations have the same or greater benefit from this system as we do now? This means that the structures and patterns need to be generative, not destructive. There must be resources for recycling, replenishing, and re-creating the various components of the system. If it cannibalizes itself, as do many of our current deep-rooted conflicts, or depends on non-renewable resources, as does our fossil-fuel-reliant energy system, it cannot sustain itself.

Thus an oppressive regime that takes and takes from the people--their land, their taxes, their work, their dignity--and gives back only the barest minimum in the way of governmental services--is not sustainable. The resources will eventually give out,

probably, as in the Congo and elsewhere, with some rebel movement to overthrow and replace the power structure.

Another criteria has to do with internal responsibility. Who within the system will step forward to create the new patterns, and ensure that they develop and continue? Again, to use Bosnia as an example, the international community soon discovered that it wasn't enough to hire local people for international initiatives, but that it was important to help people establish their own organizations and figure out how to keep them going on their own, in preparation for the inevitable pull-out of the international resources. This transfer of responsibility from outside to inside is an essential component of sustainability.

The third element has to do with fulfillment. Can the system meet the needs of all its parts, and can it fulfill its evolutionary purpose? We know from the ethnic conflicts around the world that people will kill and die to assure their basic rights and needs. If one part of the system lives at the expense of another, the part that is not satisfied will not be able to maintain its vital role in the web of the whole, and will begin draining the energy of the system. Thus, as in South Africa, the energy required of the Apartheid regime just to stay on top of the power dynamics, and keep black South Africans in their subservient position, eventually became too great a cost to the system.

In the rest of the book, we will be looking specifically, therefore, at how we can, as peacebuilders, work to create systems of peace that fulfill the needs of all the parties, are self-renewing and self-responsible. For now, let us consider the larger environment or context in which a sustainable peace system is embedded.

The Web of Peace

Peace does not happen in a vacuum; in the international arena it is deeply tied in with issues of development and democratization. War, poverty, and oppression or disempowerment are intimately linked, fueling and feeding off of one another in infinite permutations and combinations.

When people are poor and unable to feed or house themselves, educate their children, hope for a better future, or live with basic dignity, they are susceptible to political manipulation that posits some other group as the enemy. When people have no

experience taking charge of their own destiny, but are reliant on government, authoritarian leaders, or benign despots carefully hidden within the shell of corrupt or rigid bureaucracies or regimes, they are unable to use their inherent wisdom or creative resources for addressing their own needs and challenges. When people are hypnotized by religious or political fervor, or lulled by a culture of acquiescence, or trapped in the injustice of a reign of terror, they are unable to distinguish friend from foe, or rise above the fear to work for the common good.

It is no accident, I believe, that the field of peacebuilding has grown rapidly from the ashes of the devastation of Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo, nor that this growth has taken the shape of a new kind of peacebuilding program, one initiated and managed by democratization or relief and development NGO's. Increasingly their work is overlapping that of the more traditional conflict resolution organizations, for the very reason that this link between development, democracy and peace has become so evident.

What was once called conflict resolution work is now a wider dimension of intervention by various actors, each working in their unique part of the system for social transformation. No sustainable peace can endure if the people are not empowered to take charge of their own lives; no social and economic advancement can occur in countries consumed by warfare; no civil society can develop when the people cannot feed themselves.

For instance, CARE, one of the world's oldest and most credible aid organizations, has peacebuilding projects in Bosnia, Sri Lanka and elsewhere, targeting youth, community leaders and teachers. Catholic Relief Services, another such international NGO, has recently re-examined all its relief and development work through the lens of social justice. National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a U.S. organization devoted to building civil society, has trained facilitators and community mediators in war-torn societies. My own organization, IMTD, is moving into the realm of Leadership Development as a logical next step in peacebuilding.

The implication for the peacebuilder is clear: we need to see how our own particular contribution fits into the larger whole. No one player can do it all; each of us has a role to play in the whole network of associations and activities through which a sustainable peace system may be built. Later, in Chapter Five when we discuss the role of the peacebuilder, we can examine the practical aspects of this premise more carefully. For

now, it is simply important to understand and acknowledge the interconnected and multi-disciplinary nature of our peacebuilding work.

A decade ago, when I wrote the book on Multi-Track Diplomacy with Ambassador John McDonald, it seemed important to name the different sectors of society which had a unique role to play in the peacebuilding process. Now, it's time to go a step further, and probe deeply the nature of how these different sectors can in fact work together for lasting systems change.

The Nature of Conflict-Habituated Systems

The first step in aiming toward sustainable peace systems is to understand our starting point. Many places around the world where peacebuilders are working are what I call "conflict-habituated systems." That is, they are systems where the dynamics associated with the conflict have become so embedded in the structures and activities of everyday life as to be "the way things are." The assumptions arising from the conflict are taken as a given; the adaptive responses employed by the system to survive become normative.

I suggest there are five factors that define and describe a conflict-habituated system.

1. The conflict is protracted, extending over a long period of time, either episodically or continuously.
2. The conflict is intractable, seemingly resistant to change and resolution.
3. The conflict is deep-rooted, affecting society at every level.
4. The conflict is cyclical, with cycles of violence recurring over time-- often inter-generational--punctuated by periods of quiescence.
5. The conflict is normative, with dynamics and effects of the conflict situation being just "how things are."

Conflict-habituated systems come in all sizes, shapes, and colors. This definition would fit for any number of inter-ethnic conflict situations around the world, such as the Middle East, Cyprus, Sri Lanka, India-Pakistan, Sudan, etc. It also fits for society-level situations, like race relations in the U.S. or the abortion issue or other public policy debates. It can also be true for many abusive families or interpersonal relationships. In

this book, we will be talking specifically about inter-group conflicts on an international scale.

While each conflict-habituated system is unique, we can identify several common characteristics in a general way. In IMTD's work with the Cyprus Consortium on the subject of intractability^{iv}, we posited four areas within the system where the conflict-habituation was most evident: structure, resources, psychology, and system dynamics. Let us look more closely at each.

1. Structure

In a conflict-habituated system, the conflict dynamics have become incorporated into the major structures and institutions of society. While this varies from place to place, in general we can often find four major structural components of the system contributing to a perpetuation of the attitudes, assumptions and behaviors associated with the conflict. These are: the education system, the media, the legal/political structure, and the economic system.

The education system may perpetuate stereotypes (at best) or outright hatred (at worst) about whichever group is defined as the "other" or the "historical enemy." It may present its unique version of history as "the truth," thus denying its students any opportunity to understand the complexity or multi-dimensionality of the situation. It may glorify its own group's activities in moments of historical significance, in order to heighten either its own sense of mission or worthiness, or, perversely, victimhood.

The educational system may also organize its resources in such a way as to ensure that the subordinate group in society has less access to educational quality and opportunity than the dominant group. When the subordinate group then displays lower achievement levels, the dominant group uses that to prove that the "other" is less intelligent and therefore less deserving.

The media (television, radio, the press) will contribute in a similar way, sensationalizing events, demonizing the "other," or portraying them in consistently, if often subtle, derogatory ways, thus reinforcing negative stereotypes. The media may choose to report certain events to the advantage of the group it represents, and might ignore other events altogether, compounding the skew of information that the public receives.

In addition, the organs of the media are often owned by powerful elites in the dominant society, who have a vested interest in presenting information in such a way as to insure their own interests. They may have the political or financial clout to mute any opposition press. They may also not be journalists at all, but business leaders whose main goal is to make money off their media outlets, which could mean simply doing whatever it takes to sell papers (or advertising, or airtime), using sensational journalism, if necessary, to accomplish this.

The legal/political structures of society include the legislative, police, and justice systems and also the election processes. In conflict-habituated systems, once again, these functions may stack the deck for those in power and against their opponents, or "the other." This can range from the subtle to the crude: from harassment at the voting booth to rigged elections; from racial profiling to extralegal assassinations or disappearances; from disproportionate representation of one group as lawyers and judges to secret military courts; from laws that create inconvenient obstacles to equality, to laws that criminalize the attempt to gain equal rights.

In short, the legal and political structures are likely to be manipulated to insure that one group prospers while another suffers. When injustice is institutionalized in this way, the violence is structural, and the urge for righting the wrongs, seeking justice, or even turning the tables and taking revenge will be intense, guaranteeing a perpetuation of the conflict indefinitely.

The economic institutions of society in a conflict-habituated system are another place that favors the "in" group and presents barriers to the "other." Job training and employment opportunities will not be made available in equal measure to all people; the tax system may be used to insure dominance and subordination; economic policy and business law may be structured to further divisiveness and to shore up the "haves" against the "have nots."

Conflict-habituated systems are uninviting to outside investment opportunities, because the economic picture is risky, the regulations stifling, the laws are exclusive, or the view of the elite is short-sightedly more interested in holding back their opponents than in expanding the whole economic pie.

In sum, the structural or institutional dynamics of a conflict-habituated system perpetuate a goal of winning against the "other," holding a felt advantage, or resisting the rise of the opponent. This becomes a self-fulfilling cycle, where the institutions of society actually foster greater conflict rather than serve as possible venues for reconciliation and peacebuilding.

2. Resources

Power, money, and natural resources (land, water, diamonds, etc.)--separately and together--are the resources most central to conflict-habituated systems. Indeed, the fighting in these systems is usually about access to and control of these items--who has it, who wants it, what those who have it are doing to guarantee that no one else gets it, and what those who want it are doing to get it.

Many conflicts around the world that are considered to be ethnic or identity conflicts are often cases where leaders exacerbate (or even create) ethnic tensions in order to further the struggle for control of these resources. Even when there are truly ideological or compelling identity issues at stake in the original conflict, as the dynamics play out over time, they become less about the original motive for fighting and more about control of these valued resources.

The dynamics concerning these resources in conflict-habituated systems vary with each situation. However, generally speaking, we can look at this from two perspectives: what is visible and what is behind-the-scenes.

What is visible is usually an individual or a group in power that wants to stay on top. They benefit from the status quo, financially and politically. To make a sustainable peace would threaten their privileged position. They have access to many resources for maintaining their power, including vehicles of coercion such as police, military, para-military, and security forces. They can influence or control, directly or through cronies, the media, the major economic and political institutions, and the military.

The stronger the opposition to their privilege and rule, the more likely they are to justify the use of force against their opponents, often casting that in the light of self-defense or security. Indeed, much of their energy goes into holding back "the barbarians at the gate."

While this description sounds like an autocratic despot, it is important to realize that this function can be filled by a legitimate, elected, relatively democratic government, or by one ethnic or communal group dominant over another by virtue of holding the reins of power. The dominant group may or may not be the majority in terms of population.

Behind the scenes there will likely be more tangential players who benefit from the conflict through either legitimate or criminal activity. Conflict-habituated systems are especially susceptible to manipulation by those who benefit from such enterprises as: black market economy; money laundering; arms sales; the drug trade; the sex trade; gambling; the retrieval of gems or fossil fuels, etc. Though not direct parties to the conflict, these actors have a stake in the continuation of the violence, as it provides them the opportunities to expand, or to hide, their often illegitimate endeavors.

This is the shadow side of conflict-habituated systems that everyone know is present, but few will talk about, because, in my view, we feel so helpless in dealing with it. The players who are visible at least have a name, a face, a physical presence. Those who operate in the shadows are faceless--we know they exist and we can experience the effects of their behavior, but they are essentially untouchable.

In sum, power and wealth define the game, and it's a hard game to win, because all the energy in the system goes into trying to get on top and staying there. Rarely will those in power, especially if they have wielded power for any length of time, willingly surrender that power to others. They are even less likely to turn over their productive avenues of income to their opponents. Because conflict-habituated systems are operating on an "either/or" mindset, the assumption is that either "we" have the power over "them," or "they" will have it over "us."

3. Psychology.

The psychological dynamics of a conflict-habituated system are in many ways the most difficult to deal with, and the least addressed. These systems are characterized by violence--loss, injury, death, abuse--in short, by pain and suffering on a large scale. The emotional legacy of such experience can be devastating to the individual; at the collective level, it is horrific.

Unfortunately, one of the ways that conflicts are sustained over time is by denying the people the opportunities to work through the difficult feelings associated with the

traumatic events. Thus refugees are worked up about their right to return, making the process of mourning and grieving the loss impossible. The trauma associated with violence is used to mobilize the people for revenge, thus keeping wounds open long after the time when healing--difficult in the best of circumstances after large-scale violence--would be possible.

By subsuming the psychological needs of the population to the political imperatives of the conflict situation, the system suffers long-term damage far in excess of the original wounding. We have very little research data to describe the long-range effects of this on a whole population. We do have some anecdotal evidence and experience that, even fifty years out, the wounds of war, genocide, and mass violence remain a festering sore in the body politic of a people, and directly contribute to the habituation patterns of the conflict.

Typical to conflict-habituated systems are some of the following psychological syndromes:

- Victimhood--the victims of suffering are honored; their suffering is noble; the amount of suffering that one side experiences is measured against another's, with competition for who suffered most and therefore deserves more sympathy and recompense; victimhood is elevated to a revered national characteristic.
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder--large numbers of people exhibit traumatic stress symptoms long after the fact of the trauma, including anxiety, recurring memories or dreams, flashbacks, re-stimulation through symbols or memory points, inability to recall events, irritability, depression, guilt, sleep and eating disorders, dizziness, night sweats, headaches, etc.
- Reactivity--a rigidity of thinking encourages reactive responses to every minor event and makes it difficult to be pro-active and creative in problem-solving; simple gestures, words, actions are reacted to with vehemence far out of proportion to the actual event.
- Distrust--people are unable to trust the motives, intentions, overtures, or positive behaviors of the "other," or of outsiders who may be offering to help; groups close ranks around a strong leader and place all their trust in him,

irrationally; or, the flip side--people trust no one, least of all their leaders, and are apathetic.

- Rigid Inter-Group Perceptions--each group carries a view of the "other" that is negative, prejudicial and stereotypical; information that would challenge this view is ignored or modified to fit the existing formulas; perceptions are accepted as truth; avenues for meeting the other as they truly are tend to be limited, ignored, de-valued, and in some cases, criminalized.
- Dehumanization--the "other" is portrayed as less than human, as barbarians incapable of feeling, thinking, or acting as "we" do (i.e., as 'normal' human beings); the "other" is demonized, seen as the embodiment of all evil and at fault for the conflict.
- Mass Hypnosis--the people act as if hypnotized by leaders' rhetoric; become lethargic, resigned, unquestioning; are unable to generate or consider creative or pro-active options, to challenge their leaders, or to engage in empowered activity.
- Hopelessness--people are filled with a sense of hopelessness, believing that nothing will change, that nothing can help.
- Mythologizing--loss and pain are rolled into story, legend, or myth to make them acceptable; the myths become inter-generational reality and act as a potent force for social control and against change.
- "Either/Or" - "Us/Them" Thinking--people are caught in a simplistic, dualistic mindset, seeing few possibilities; assume a zero/sum situation, where if one wins the other loses; are unable to get "out of the box" to consider new options; are trapped in an eternal struggle against the 'enemy.'
- Blame--people are engaged with blaming the "other" for starting and for continuing the conflict; are unable to acknowledge their own role in the situation or to acknowledge personal or collective responsibility for any harm they might have caused; blame becomes the chosen response to peacemaking

efforts, in attempts to de-legitimize the "other" (or the third party) in world opinion.

- Unresolved Grief--loss of homes and villages, land, family members, body parts, or a sense of security remains unmourned; peoples' loss is used for political advantage; the grieving process is not allowed to come to completion.
- Pervasive Fear--people operate on an assumption (often unconscious or semi-conscious) that what happened before could happen again; they displace their fear onto symbolic actions and events, so that events relatively inconsequential in themselves trigger a disproportionately fearful response.
- Projection--people distance themselves, individually and collectively, from their own harmful qualities, thoughts, and actions, projecting them onto the "other;" all the good is associated with "our" side, all the bad is displayed by "them."
- Escalating Rage--when people have been abused and oppressed, and their needs continue to go unmet, their frustration and anger finds expression in increasingly louder and more attention-getting formats, escalating into terrorism or other forms of violence, sometimes directed against themselves.

These are not isolated factors, but feed upon and reinforce each other, creating an intricate web of accommodation or habituation (even addiction) to enmity and conflict that appears extremely resistant to change.

4. System Dynamics

Conflict-habituated systems develop patterns of behavior and interaction that operate throughout the whole system--within each side and between the parties in conflict--to define and constrain relationships. Systems dynamics are themselves unrelated to the content of the dispute; however, they are overlaid on that content in such a way that the two seem inseparable.

These dynamics are ways of relating, perceiving, and acting. Ultimately, they are ways of being in the conflict system. Like many psychological patterns, these dynamics

become like games, where they take on a life of their own with predictable roles, behaviors, and outcomes.

Some common systems dynamics often found in conflict-habituated systems include:

- **Strong Default Settings**--the system's range of activity is limited by strongly accepted assumptions and views, and whenever any part of the system operates too far beyond that norm, or when the system is challenged by any perceived threat, it reverts quickly and forcefully to those familiar default settings.
- **Loaded Symbols**--certain words or symbolic actions come to stand for a whole complex set of events, beliefs, and feelings, and their use triggers a predictable and intense response from the other side, far out of proportion to the actual words or deeds; the people read every action for its symbolic meaning.
- **Resistance to Change**--one of the strongest default settings is the status quo; "the devil you know is better than the devil you don't know" guides the resistance; pushing against this resistance leads to increasing intransigence.
- **Fight Leadership**--leadership for peace is demonized as traitorous; leadership to maintain the status quo and sustain the conflict is considered patriotic; the leadership will use its power and resources to keep the people in a state of fight-readiness and reactivity.
- **Violence as a Tool**--the system resorts to violence as the accepted tool for change, coercion, and repression, without considering other, non-violent, options first; structural violence is used provocatively to induce a violent response, which will then justify a stronger violent crackdown on "the other."
- **Blame as a Goal**--the parties act as though their mission is not to fix the problem but to blame the other party for the failure of any peace initiative; parties behave in such a way as to guarantee that the other side will not be able to agree to changes, and are exposed to condemnation by outside influentials, the international community in particular.

- Fixes that Backfire^v--attempts are made to fix a specific problem without taking into consideration either the relationship of that problem to a larger set of issues or the ramifications of the proposed solutions; then people act surprised when those solutions do not fix the situation but, in many cases, actually make it worse.
- Missed Opportunities--parties are so attached to positional thinking that creative options for positive change are missed; invitational signals are misinterpreted, unnoticed, or deliberately misconstrued; the fear of change sabotages those situations where the window of opportunity is truly open.
- Come Close, Go Away--one party extends some invitation to come together, then seasons the invitation with some element that will guarantee that the other side will not be able to accept; conversely, parties consistently abuse and demonize the "other," then act surprised when the "opponent" shows no interest or trust in pursuing some invitation for confidence-building.
- Impossible Demands--parties set impossible demands for negotiation or reconciliation, often as pre-conditions for talks, knowing that the other side will not be able to meet those demands; parties insist their own needs be satisfied, then make it impossible for others to meet those demands.
- Divide and Conquer--ruling parties attempt to divide their opponents, thus weakening them as a viable force of opposition.
- Blame the Victim--the victim of oppression or abuse is blamed for that very abuse; situations are arranged such that, when the victims react, the party in power justifies its severe and often violent response, and the pain of the victim is considered their own fault--"they asked for it."
- Drama Triangle--parties will identify themselves with archetypal roles of victim, persecutor, and rescuer; those roles will shift between the players, with rescuers (third parties, in many cases) then becoming viewed as the persecutors and the original persecutor as the victim, leaving the original victim to play the role of rescuer.

- Me First--parties seek to get their own needs satisfied first, and become blind to how doing so may hurt the other side and escalate the conflict; they resist understanding how their needs can be met to the degree they are willing to meet the needs and interests of the other side.

Clearly, these 'games'--and many others like them--do not exist in isolation. They feed and support each other. For instance, Divide and Conquer may easily be a fix that backfires. As one example, the Israeli government supported the growth of Hamas in its earliest years, seeing it as a potential counterforce to the power of Fatah among the Palestinian community. This supposed "fix" to one problem in the system led to another problem, as Hamas then grew strong enough to pose its own independent threat to Israeli security and to the peace process.

Interventions for Building Sustainable Peace Systems

Peter Senge^{vi} says that the tension between the vision and the current reality is what gives a system the energy to change and learn. If a sustainable peace system is the vision, and a conflict-habituated system is the current reality, then the question becomes, How can we use the tension in that gap to move the process forward?

An immediate response to that question is to help people become aware of both the vision and the current reality; help them feel that tension for themselves, and describe it in their own words and ways of understanding. This level of understanding requires a deep attentiveness to the patterns of the system, and a strong capacity for systems analysis. Peacebuilders can help various sectors of the system develop this shared wisdom. Being able to look in both directions, from what is to what could be, and weave back and forth between the two, is a potent resource for systems change, and an important skill that provides a strong foundation from which to take action.

Beyond that, all the patterns named here are possible areas of intervention. By bringing a sustained focus on any of the conflict-habituated dynamics and looking to see how to change that particular dynamic, the peacebuilder is making an input that will affect the whole system, for we know about living systems that changes in one part of the system affect the whole.

Since there are so many dynamics to deal with, there are many points of intervention for building sustainable peace systems. This speaks to the need for multi-track, multi-disciplinary approaches, and for coordination and communication among the various peacebuilding parties. If "it takes a village to raise a child," it takes a large community of peacebuilding players to build a peace system.

Ultimately, the work of transforming a conflict-habituated system into a sustainable peace system requires creating a whole new set of patterns around beliefs, assumptions, behavior, and relationships, and doing so in a way that gives energy to the system to step out of the familiar and risk new ways of being. What is new and possible must be attractive enough to empower and enhance this risk-taking. This effort also takes time, patience, and skill, and the assistance of many players from inside and outside the system.

While some attention can legitimately be paid to confronting old patterns, that approach can actually give more energy to the entrenched ways, and can boost the resistance to change. Another method would be to work diligently to create new systems dynamics, and to literally surround the old system with a new structure, so that the old ways dissolve or collapse of their own dead weight over time.

The particular challenge is how to create a set of system dynamics built on the premise of partnership and co-creativity within and around a system dedicated to dominance and power, since most conflict-habituated systems have that issue at their core. If that shift could be made, much would follow.

This challenge is philosophical, metaphysical, psychological, cultural and ideological, as well as very practical. Riane Eisler^{vii} describes this shift from societies based on dominance to those based on partnership as the evolutionary task of humanity in these times. The methodology for accomplishing this goes back to the basic message of this chapter, which is the need for an ecological worldview. When the work of peacebuilding--whatever form it may take--introduces and supports systemic or holistic thinking, it is inevitably building new pathways for partnership mode. As these pathways widen and then converge, the hundredth monkey phenomenon of a critical mass shift in consciousness becomes inevitable. That shift is essential to building sustainable peace systems, and constitutes the core work of the peacebuilder.

ⁱ Capra, Fritjof, *The Web of Life*, Anchor Books, New York, 1996, pp. 3-4.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p. 6

ⁱⁱⁱ Brown, Lester, *State of the World*, a series of annual reports; Washington, DC.

^{iv} IMTD and Conflict Management Group, working together as the Cyprus Consortium, undertook a study of intractability in conflicts, looking specifically at Cyprus, during the years 1997-98.

^v "Fixes that Backfire" is a term used in systems thinking. See Senge, Peter, et al, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, Doubleday, New York, 1994.

^{vi} Senge, Peter, "The Leader's New Work: Building Learning Organizations," Sloan Management Review Reprint Series, Vol. 32, Number 1, 1990, p. 9.

^{vii} Eisler, Riane, *The Chalice and the Blade*, Harper, San Francisco, 1988.