

Building Trust for Collaboration

Keynote Address

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Caux Dialogue on Land and Security 2015

July 13, 2015

My theme today is the uses of political psychology in dealing with relationship questions in land and security issues, but my background in diplomacy at the state and international levels is the basis for my ideas. Nevertheless the human dimensions for healing memory, building trust, and creating strong relationships holds from the most exalted political arenas down to the village.

I'll begin with some basic theory.

Identity is defined in political psychology as the accumulation of individual and large group or national memory. In other words, identity—who we are and what we feel—is composed of the memory of what has happened to us as individuals and as identity groups, for example as Irish Catholics, Shia Muslims, European Jews, or nations.

I am a supporter of the increased application of the art and science of political psychology, which embraces our definition of identity within policy and academic communities, as well as in conversations with the concerned lay public, so that we may be better equipped to make sense of the disorder and violence that surrounds us. Political psychology helps us predict and explain the instincts toward violence by individuals, large groups, and nations with memories of traumatic loss. More importantly, political psychology explains how to promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Now to relate this thinking to something we heard at this conference on Saturday, there was the violence in the Tigray region in Ethiopia generated when lowland farmers were deprived of water by highland farmers. In order to survive, the lowland people moved up the mountain and fought with people there over access to land and water. Even if the villages or tribes had no previous history of violent conflict, once they fought, they acquired a memory that undermined the trust necessary to build relationships they need to cooperate in sharing land and water. In other words they needed a healing process.

Understanding Human Needs

There is a general understanding on the range of human needs. There are basic survival needs, which have been the subjects of many of the cases in this conference. These include food, shelter, clothing, health, and safety from attack from wild animals or other humans.

Next are relational or social needs for affection and connection to a nuclear family and wider identity group. These are followed by the psychologically complex needs for self-esteem and the esteem of others. In other words we need to be able to respect ourselves and win the respect of others—to have dignity. This is essential for us to have a basic sense of safety and security.

Social and economic justice needs are central to a sense of well-being for the vast majority of humankind and the deprivation of these needs can lead to a sense of powerlessness. The lack of fulfilment of identity and esteem needs for some individuals and nations makes them particularly vulnerable to political violence and aggression.

Traumatic loss dominates the historical memories of many tribes and nations. The enduring sense of injustice makes peacebuilding so difficult for traditional diplomats and political leaders. For example it took strenuous efforts and extraordinary patience by former U.S. Senator George Mitchell to overcome the hostility between Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants when negotiating the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

U.S. president Jimmy Carter won praise for his persistence and spiritual strength in negotiating the Egypt-Israel peace agreement at Camp David in rural Maryland for over thirteen days in 1978.

But in neither case did these mediation efforts truly enhance genuine trust among the parties which requires profound social and psychological transformation in the relationships. Nevertheless, the world is grateful that the agreements have endured.

The psychology of victimhood is an automatic product of aggression and the traumatic loss it inflicts on individuals and peoples. It is defined by an overwhelming sense of injustice resulting from the refusal of aggressors to acknowledge the pain of the harm they inflicted on their victims and show remorse—that is to say they are sorry. The victims' collective sense of security in their identity, their basic dignity, and a future for their children has been dealt a devastating blow. This makes them highly suspicious and puts them in a state of permanent alert for future acts of aggression and violence, as well as resistant to peace before the aggressors have acknowledged the hurts they have caused and, ideally, asked forgiveness. As with individual victims of trauma, peoples, tribes and nations need complex healing processes so that they can move beyond their psychological fears and become full partners in reconciliation and cooperation.

For example, Lawrence Wright's book published in 2014, *Thirteen Days in September: Carter, Begin and Sadat at Camp David*, shows that the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement was nothing short of a miracle, seeing that President Anwar Sadat and Prime Minister Begin could not bear to be in the same room together at Camp David.

The Nazis had murdered Begin's mother in her hospital bed in Ukraine and drowned his father in the local river. Sadat, who had fought against the British in Egypt during World War II and was imprisoned, had a strong sense of his self-importance as an historic leader.

Each brought memories to the Maryland countryside that hindered their ability to listen to each other. The summit had been resigned to failure after twelve days until Jimmy Carter brought photos of the Camp David principals addressed to each of Begin's grandchildren by name and he said how sad it was that the leaders could not succeed for the sake of their grandchildren.

This exchange in Begin's cabin apparently moved the Israeli prime minister to extricate himself psychologically from his traumatized past to think about his duty to the future, and he finally agreed to sign the peace agreement with Egypt. Incidentally, President Sadat shocked his staff by saying he would sign any document Jimmy Carter put before him without reading it.

A political psychologist might imagine how the negotiations could have been much easier had Sadat sat down quietly with Begin at the outset to acknowledge and mourn the murder of his parents by the Nazis and if Begin had acknowledged how tragic it was for the Arabs of Palestine to be expelled from their homes in 1948.

China's Memory

The case of China's humiliation with regard to its dignity and security is very pronounced in the country's modern history. This is a brief analysis of the Chinese-American relationship and the role of a deeply negative historical memory.

Peter Loewenberg, an emeritus professor of history and the University of California at Los Angeles, and a psychoanalyst, played a major role in modeling a healing process for the relationship of the two continental great powers. He was the principal organizer of the first conference of the International Psychoanalytic Association in Beijing in October of 2010. In his paper entitled *Face in Chinese Culture and in Sino-American Diplomacy*, he focused on the history of Chinese humiliation at the hands of Western powers and Japan.

In the 1839 Opium War, Britain punished China for its refusal to buy opium by forcing it to cede Hong Kong in 1841. In the Second Opium War of 1860, British and French forces combined to invade China and occupy Beijing. Lord Elgin ordered the Old Summer Palace, the royal estate that was the depository of some 3,500 years of cultural treasures, to be sacked and burned. In 1900, an eight-power Allied coalition plundered and burned the remaining buildings of the Summer Palace. Japan, Russia, and Germany, competitors in the age of imperialism, all joined in the attack on the defenseless Chinese state. Perhaps the greatest traumatic wound and most profound insult came from Japan's occupation of all of eastern and much of northern, central, and southern China until 1945.

In the evolving theory and practice of psychologically sensitive conflict-resolution and peacebuilding, acknowledgement by aggressors to peoples and nations who feel victimized followed by expressions of remorse and contrition—though the latter is not always politically easy—can transform intergroup and

international relationships. In Beijing, Peter Loewenberg spoke of the May, 1999 bombing by the U.S. Air Force of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, for which President Clinton apologized profusely, calling it a “tragic mistake.” The Chinese ruefully accepted the apology, but many never believed that the bombing was a mistake. The case demonstrates the enduring power of wounded memory and rage as affronts to the collective sense of self—of national dignity.

Loewenberg cites a *People’s Daily* editorial saying, “This is not 1899 China. This is not...the age when people can barge about the world just by sending a few gunboats...It is not the age in which Western powers plundered the Imperial Palace at will, destroyed the Old Summer Palace, and seized Hong Kong and Macao...China is a China that has stood up.” In other words, the Belgrade bombing immediately evoked the memory of nineteenth century attacks by Britain, other European states and Japan. Nations do not forget.

Today, China is expanding its naval perimeter to enforce claims to clusters of rock and islands in the South China Sea. Potentially significant oil and gas deposits are a factor. Anxiety is increasing over possible competing claims with Japan which is amending its post-World War II constitution to provide for a more robust defense infrastructure. In an interview in 2014 in the *Washington Post*, a senior U.S. Air Force officer in the Pacific said that China is becoming more active in the air and on the sea. He said, “They still talk about the century of humiliation in the last century. They still talk about the rise of China.”

From the perspective of political psychology, it will take a long period of sustained dialogue—of honest conversation between China and other Nations, Japan in particular, to make relationships healthy in the Pacific. The United States as a major Pacific power would be well advised to launch an unofficial sustained dialogue with China on the model of the Dartmouth conference dialogue it has been conducting with the former Soviet Union and now Russia since 1960. (The most recent Dartmouth meeting with Russians took place not far from Washington DC, at the beginning of this month.)

An American Case in Need of Healing

It has sometimes been the case that historians prompted the more courageous political leaders, lay or clerical, to take initiatives to explore historical crimes. The late French Jewish historian Jules Isaac researched the depths of Christian, including clerical, complicity in the repression of European Jewry throughout the centuries and in the Holocaust and worked mightily to get his findings to Pope John XXIII, who instructed the Second Vatican Council to add the question of the Church’s relationship with the Jewish people to its agenda. The result was the production of the major Church document, *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Time) fifty years ago this year that among other significant judgements officially banned the Good Friday liturgy that had stated that the “perfidious Jews” were responsible for the murder of Jesus Christ.

Another historian in Austria briefed then Chancellor Franz Vranitzky on his findings of extensive participation by Austria in perpetrating the Holocaust. Vranitzky as a result went on national television to acknowledge Austrian complicity in this crime. Up to that time the popular myth was that Austria had been Hitler’s first victim.

Recently in the United States, Cornell University historian Edward Baptist published *The Half Has Never Been Told*. The study documents with new data how after the tobacco agriculture in the northern states of what became the Confederacy had declined, and after importation of slaves from Africa had been forbidden, the slave owners bred their African victims to produce children who could then be sold to states in the deep South where the cotton economy was thriving and needed extensive labor.

Baptist describes how productivity was increased by threats of physical punishment of slaves who did not meet production quotas. The author suggests that the owners used torture as discipline of the workers and that the word “plantation” could be replaced by “slave labor camp.”

In light of the murder of nine African American men and women at prayer in their church in Charleston, South Carolina last month by a young white man who embraced the Confederate flag, Americans are looking more deeply than ever into the moral debts owed to the descendants of Africans brought to the country in slave ships.

Final Thoughts on Land and Security

I don't know enough about the history of individual cases of efforts to improve land and water use to build stronger communities in dry land agriculture. But we have representatives from Darfur, South Sudan, and Mali and Chad among other states that have painful modern histories of tribal, ethnic and sectarian violence.

My recommendation in every case where stake holders have memories of traumatic loss is that while organizing for more efficient uses of land and water, a small committee of highly respected representatives be nominated to walk through their shared, painful history together to understand and list the memories of loss of each side. In other words to create an agenda for healing. Such a committee, ideally with the help of a psychologically sensitive facilitator who is also deeply knowledgeable in the history and cultures of the peoples involved, should stay in business as long as it takes to build trust among the stake holders and to the extent possible heal the wounded memories.

One of the great advantages for different groups who have a history of loss is that by working collaboratively on land, water, and food projects that have clear material benefits for all the people, including their children, they have a real incentive to succeed, psychologically, spiritually, and financially.

To end, and in the spirit of Caux, where we meet, I would like to cite three among many great participants in the conference who have made a strong impression on me: Tony Rinaudo, whose commitment to helping his African partners in improving their physical conditions is profoundly influenced by his faith convictions. He demonstrates the power of spirituality. The second is Michael Ben Eli, who, born an Israeli, and now a long-time New Yorker, has shown a genuinely loving commitment to the welfare and progress of the original Bedouin inhabitants of the Negev in Israel. And Ian Robertson, who does not exude obvious spiritual energy but clearly loves his Zimbabwean students and partners in his often heroic efforts to defeat bureaucracies and feed his fellow citizens.

The commitment of these three men—and no doubt many others in the hall—to the care and well-being of their African and Arab brothers and sisters is in my personal thinking symbolic of their personal if perhaps unconscious acknowledgment of and expiation for the sins of the age of Western imperialism. In other words, these are acts of love. Not a term used very much in diplomacy or development economics. But one I sense very much in this hall.

Thank you.