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Reflection Paper – Pathways to Peace: Defining Community in the Age of Globalization

I very much appreciate the opportunity to participate in this seminar and share our experiences as practitioners and researchers about the nature of community and ways to transform conflict into cooperation, particularly across borders. In reading Aaron Wolf's paper, what resonated most with me was the underlying theme of integration, be it across the spiritual and the North/West – South/East divides or through the different stages or cycles of conflict transformation. The triad of justice, loving kindness, and compassion is of course about integration through balance. Mutual gains bargaining or interest based negotiation (ADR) models are all about integrating and balancing interests, wants, needs, and values. My recollection is that despite its current Westoverance, the practice of mediation actually began with water disputes in China 2000+ years, specifically to resolve agricultural irrigation conflicts. So it may not be surprising that environmental mediation connects so well with Aaron's integrative bringing East and West closer together. As I offer my preliminary responses to the questions asked of us, I realize that the need for better integration is behind most of my answers.

1. What lessons, both positive and negative, have you drawn from your academic research and/or practice in the field?

x From practice:

Conflict management/resolution/transformation is hard to do. It takes a lot of work, special conditions and resources. When it does work, it is dazzling, when it doesn't work, it can be quite detrimental. There are so many ways in which these processes can go awry, it really is a miracle when it does all come together. It is even harder to sustain new found collaborative engagement over time among diverse participants, unless the intensity or imminence of the shared resource loss or threat remains salient.

Two additional lessons here: first, consultation and assessment (those very first steps in how people are convened and what and how questions are being asked) are critical to the collaborative process starting well before everyone gets to the table; and second, conflict resolution happens in and must connect

conflict resolution processes. Regarding capacity, I think we need to do better than we have, when we presume that “training” is the answer to this barrier. Creating opportunities for mutual learning, for

example, might be a start. Many of us have been so fixated on “the mediator” as part of the conflict resolution equation in this field, that we are only now starting to consider learning that Aaron mentions and how to enable that across cultures. We have been so preoccupied that we have forgotten the importance of leadership not just in the convening role, but as a quality we want to develop in every person in the process. Building the capacity not only to negotiate, but to repair or initiate relationships, integrate new information and change our frames for understanding problems and possible solution sets are just a few of the competencies to foster, not to mention the moral imperatives and spiritual and cultural understanding and tolerance to cultivate.

Regarding the need for convening institutions (having spent the past 12 years building one at the national level), we know that trust building is a central function of these collaborative processes, and to get such processes started, we need the trust and credibility of some broadly respected, neutral entity, be it a public agency, a university center, an NGO, or an elder. We need to create more trusted staging grounds “arenas” as Tom Fiutak refers to them, either by rebuilding existing institutions, repurposing others, or creating new ones.

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governance systems that draw together the public, private and civic spheres to create public value and solve public problems. Collaborative governance may be one way to do that, in democratizing settings, where power imbalances are not too great. Or it might be an open or trusted “bridge” model for negotiating across different cultural or political state boundaries. But for agreements reached or signed to be fulfilled and sustained over time, they need to be integrated into a functioning and abiding governance system.

Food for thought.

