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**Presentation at *Pieces of the Coexistence Puzzle:
Democracy, Human Rights, Gender and Development***

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What is the coexistence puzzle we are assembling? When put together, we should have something that looks and feels like coexistence.

The American Heritage Dictionary definition: Coexist “To live in Peace with another or others despite differences, especially as a matter of policy.”

We take it a little further here at Brandeis – “Peaceful and Positive Relationships between groups that are different from one another.” More than a definition, we posit the following indicator: “Coexistence is strong when different ethnic, racial, religious, and social groups feel safe, equal, at home, and respected in the communities and countries where they reside.

Many of the puzzles I’ve worked on have both darker and lighter pieces coming together to form a complete picture. In the few minutes I have I will highlight some of both the darker and lighter pieces of the coexistence puzzle. I’ll start with the dark pieces or barriers and challenges to coexistence.

Some of the pieces will not be new, but as I put it together, perhaps there will be some new insights.

I identify 3 barriers: Attitudes, Structures and Institutions, and finally, Historical and Cultural Context.

Attitudes

First is Zero-Sum worldview. This is often driven by fear and or a quest for power as a response to fear – the more power I have, the less I have to fear. The kind of Zero Sum thinking that operates as a barrier or challenge is: “my ideas must prevail over yours”. “We are right – you are wrong”, “my culture (group people party) is superior to yours and you must not be allowed to exist – or if you do exist, certainly not in a way that is equal to us.” In short, the only way for us to win or prevail is if you lose or simply disappear.

When Zero Sum thinking dominates, (especially on both sides) both are motivated to engage in violent means believing that they can beat the other into submission.

A sub-set of Zero Sum is seen in the competition for limited or scarce resources: economic, natural, and environmental and food resources. Competition for these fundamental human needs leads to structural inequality among competing groups, the likelihood of extreme poverty, and the collapse of societal support structures such as

livelihoods, education and public health. (In which is included water, sanitation). “The well is on my land – I’ll take all the water – none for you.” “The oil is a public resource to benefit all of us – not just the political elite and the corporations”. Yet, disputes over water, oil, poppy, and diamonds have become fodder, which fuels grievances of minority and marginalized populations leading them to engage in violence to satisfy those grievances.

A second sub-set of Zero Sum is Isolation. “We can be secure only by isolating you from us. “We’ll relegate you to non-productive land—you’ll live in the camps” or, we’ll build a fence or wall to keep you away and us safe.” We’ve seen that before going back to Biblical times, the Almond Hedge when South Africa was settled by the Dutch, the Berlin Wall – the Iron Curtain, The Border between US and Mexico and the Israeli wall.

The Second Barrier is Structural and Institutional. Just for now I’ll identify political institutions which engage in foreign policy agendas (limited to GWOT) as compared to broader development goals such as the MDGs and agenda of the 2005 World Summit) which if implemented would serve to reduce the motivations of many of those engaging in acts of terror.

Within this barrier is the inefficiency of institutions that are overwhelmed with bureaucratic blinders preventing them from meeting actual human security and development needs and which unfortunately become servants of the political agendas of member states – arriving at the lowest common denominator as a measure of success – satisfied only that they reached some agreement.

These kind of structural and institutional barriers crowd out the voices of those they are in most need of hearing and this is often due to corruption and elitism from government leaders who serve as representatives to the institutions set up to serve those that are most needy.

Third Barrier: Historical and Cultural Context. What is it that drives the need for creating “the other”? Yes -- they are different from us but how? Is it religious, sectarian, racial, ethnic, nationalistic, Ideology, social behavior, history? Perhaps all of the above. My definition of culture is a “set of beliefs, values, norms, and practices that are accepted and expected by a cultural identity group”. So if they believe, say, or do something that is either unacceptable or unexpected to, then we can become afraid and isolate ourselves or them, or we judge and reject them as not worthy of our time or attention.

There are probably many more barriers but for the sake of time I’ll leave it with three.

Now to shift to some of the lighter pieces of the puzzle – what are some ways to meet and overcome the barriers?

The list of potential prescriptions is long but I’ll just focus on two -- Education and Practice. Here at Brandeis in both the Masters in Coexistence program and the SID program at Heller School, we like to think of ourselves as preparing those who will tackle

these challenges – to borrow from my colleague Mari Fitzduff, we are preparing the young “pracademics” for the field in three areas:

1. To learn and understand the causes of intercommunal conflict. This is looked at through an interdisciplinary lens that includes literature from the fields of conflict, psychology, social psychology, dispute resolution, gender studies, research methodology, ethnic conflict, development, economics, international relations, intercultural communication, the arts, and organizational studies. In addition to literature, our students here from professionals in the field and then spend time in the field with agencies and organizations as part of their degree completion process.
2. To develop skills in designing conflict sensitive interventions. Here we subscribe to the notion of interventions that not only “do no harm” but that also “do good” by realizing that societies in or emerging from conflict are part of a large interconnected web where touching one part of the web impacts another. Knowing when and where to touch is part of developing a conflict sensitive approach to ensure that you minimize unintended consequences as one tries to prevent, mitigate, and in some cases resolve intercommunal conflict and violence.
3. Mainstreaming coexistence and conflict knowledge and skills within government, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. This is our version of “pracademic diplomacy” where we interact with agencies, understand their needs, inform and educate them about our program, offer our students as interns and potential employees and, hold conferences like this, engage in our research and writing. Recently in NY and Washington DC trips, I was heartened as we visited numerous agencies from the Amnesty International to the UN to USAID to USIP and others that the fields of knowledge and the vocabulary of conflict, development and intercommunal coexistence is aligned with our programs or perhaps more modestly that our programs are aligned with what’s happening in the field.

Now, in conclusion, I’ll highlight the brightest pieces of the puzzle – What are the Opportunities?

Here I’ll focus on perhaps one of the most difficult conflicts we face in the world – Iraq. I first began working on Iraq issues in early 2001 with a program that culminated with a training program in Cambridge and Iraq to train 30 or so Kurdish Academics in “Western Approaches” to dispute resolution and conflict management. It was a collaborative experience that ultimately resulted in a combined curriculum that integrated Western, Non-Western and distinctly Kurdish approaches. During the process, one of our professors was assassinated in a car bomb attack by some who feared and felt threatened by knowledge and the potential for change. I then worked with 60 or so Shi-ite Iraqis, provincial and local leaders from South Central Iraq on four occasions in both Amman and Kuwait – my last trip to the region was last October. During this process I’ve developed a perspective of Iraqi need that is closer to the grass-roots level than what is reported in the media.

What are the opportunities for coexistence in Iraq? There are many. The first question is, do Iraqis want coexistence? In a Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion in June of 2006 Iraqis were asked the following question:

How important is the establishment of a “unity” government to the future peace and stability of Iraq?

Eighty nine per cent answered that it was extremely important. Even more telling is the breakdown of different regional and ethnic groups.

This tells me there is political and social will for coexistence. At the same time, some of the barriers I mentioned still exist.

There remains a Zero Sum worldview – sometimes fear based, sometimes power based. Structural and institutional weakness, and little appreciation for Iraqi historical and cultural context.

In the Saddam era, a definite zero sum worldview dominated the Ba’ath party’s rule of tyranny.

Iraq is a country with a long history of tribal, clan, family and local community centric governance. There is little spontaneous trust for those outside of the immediate circle. It will be hard for local people to trust a government which is hundreds of miles away and headed by people they don’t know or trust. Yet that’s what the US has been trying to set up in the Al-Maliki government.

As one participant told me: “we’ve been trained and conditioned not to trust anyone. In our history, those who’ve asked for our trust have betrayed us, killed us, and suppressed us. This is why we need our militias – they are the people we know and trust to protect us.

As one Sheik told me, “We don’t have any experience with democracy” because we’ve never really had it. It must look like we’re foolish or incompetent. The truth is we really need help.”

Another town official told me – we want democracy here but it has to be “Iraqi” democracy, not American democracy. What can you teach us about Federalism”

Work at the grass-roots level is critical to build “on-the-ground” capacity for building democratic institutions that work, dialogue process that offer tools other than violence to resolve disputes, linkages with other towns and communities to identify and implement best practices for improving personal and community income.

Most importantly, there are opportunities for building linkages with the National government and building important partnerships that create a climate leading to trust on both sides.

Lastly, Iraqis are the key to their own security – as human needs, and human rights are implemented – they will become allies for peace rather than skeptical angry commuter insurgents.

With coexistence, members of conflicting groups may ...still mistrust one another, but they often undertake parallel or even joint activities. Ideally, by engaging in parallel activities and acknowledging these undertakings, members of conflicting groups can build a greater sense of security and a modicum of respect for others. Through the gradual recognition of increasing economic opportunity and human security, members of different groups can come to accept one another as participants in the society and interdependent actors.

Sadako Ogata (2003) *Imagine Coexistence*

This is the hope and opportunity for coexistence. These are my pieces of the puzzle, and now others will offer theirs and perhaps together the full picture will emerge.