

## BETWEEN IDEALISM AND REALISM: CRITICAL PEACE EDUCATION IN DIVIDED POST-CONFLICT CONTEXTS

Basma Hajir

University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom

bh452@cam.ac.uk

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*This paper navigates through Critical Peace Education (CPE), a concept that emerged in response to criticisms of peace education as ‘politicised’, ‘propaganda’, ‘not objective’ and ‘lacking criticality’. CPE aims to develop students’ critical consciousness that would enable them to explore contradictions in their social, political and economic realm. It would also prepare them to act against these contradictions. This paper compares and contrasts theoretical grounds of CPE with three other approaches to education, namely Allport’s (1954) Contact Theory, Taylor’s (1994) Multiculturalism and Gallager’s (1996) ‘teaching contested narratives’. Building on the epistemological similarity between CPE and these three other approaches and given the scarcity of CPE application and evaluation (Bajaj, 2015), I find that scrutinising applications, evaluations and implications of these approaches in conflicted contexts must yield valuable insights to CPE. Accordingly, I explore two conflict/post conflict contexts, namely Rwanda and Palestine- Israel. I review relevant literature that examines and evaluates these approaches and I highlight three challenges to their application; ‘The power of the victor’, ‘identity accentuation’, ‘social transformation: The individual or structural asymmetry?’. The paper concludes with suggesting three parameters that are worth considering when conceptualising CPE: ‘Practicality’, ‘Sustainability’ and ‘Scalability’.*

**Keywords:** Critical Peace Education, Contact theory, Multi-culturalism, Contested narrative

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## Introduction

Education has a critical role in rebuilding fractured post-conflict societies and preventing further conflict (Gallagher, 2004). Educators who believe in the potential of education and its role at the heart of social transformation started teaching for peace to create a common positive vision of the future (McGlynn and Zembylas, 2009). However, in a divided society, education is an important tool for conflicting parties to legitimatise and enhance their position (Davies, 2004). Given this, there is a dire need to pay due attention to the content, role, value and purpose of a peace education programme (Bajaj, 2015). The current paper responds to this need by exploring pedagogical calls in the field of peace education to critically engage students with the conflict. It problematises these calls and assumptions and reviews relevant literature to examine the feasibility of their application in some post-conflict contexts. In this paper, I focus on words that I find standing at the heart of much of what post-conflict critical peace education seems to be influenced by; ‘multiculturalism’, ‘contact’ and ‘contested narratives’, and seeking to achieve; ‘recognition’ and ‘criticality’. I take these words to be precarious. This is mainly due to their theoretical aura that fades into a mirage when put to implementation and praxis in some post-conflict divided context with complex dynamics.

Because the topic is heavily informed by literature from the field of peace education, the paper focuses on the concepts of peace and peace education as an entry point to this review. Following this, two main sections are presented. The first one starts by identifying ‘misrecognition’ as an aspect of structural violence in a post-conflict divided context, which peace education scholars try to address by their recent calls to critical peace education (CPE). Then, I trace CPE in conflict contexts back to Allport’s (1954) Contact Theory, Taylor’s (1994) Multiculturalism and Gallagher’s (1996) ‘teaching contested narratives’. As I find these approaches to education intrinsically linked to CPE, I briefly discuss conceptualisations relevant to each one of them before elaborating on those of CPE. After establishing an epistemological connection between the four approaches and given the scarcity of CPE’s application, I draw on two contextual resources where ‘Multiculturalism’, ‘Contact Theory’ and ‘Contested Narratives’ have been applied or studied. I highlight some reported challenges to their application and draw some insights in light of CPE. Ultimately, I leave it to the reader to locate post conflict critical peace education on the idealism–realism spectrum. I turn now to unpack the concept of peace and explore the goals and aspirations of peace education.

## Peace and Peace Education: Mission and Aspirations

Defining peace is not the most straightforward undertaking. This is mainly due to how wide the concept is and how it varies according to the context and within different cultures (Groff, 2002). While moral conceptualisations of peace are mostly connected to war and conflict, some cultures emphasise the distinction between inner and outer peace and use spiritual capacities to experience connections between the inner and outer world (Harris, 2004). Indeed, a recognition of the complexity of the concept seems to be the best contribution to the field of peace education in the 21st century. This complexity has been captured by Bevington, Kurian and Cremin (2018, p. 1418) in what they expressed as a need for “a nuanced understanding of the plurality of peace”. Put differently, there is no single umbrella that can house all the experiences of people around the world (Denzin and Lincoln,

2000). Therefore, it is justifiable to argue that peace is contextual and interactional (Zembylas and Bekerman, 2013).

In essence, peace education is concerned with creating structures that facilitate building a just, equitable and peaceful world (Bajaj and Hantzopoulos, 2016), increase tolerance, reduce prejudice and change perceptions of the self and the other (Bar-Tal, 2002). Recognised as the father of peace studies, Johan Galtung significantly contributed to defining the field (Lawler, 1995). Galtung distinguished between the two concepts of positive and negative peace (Galtung, 1969). The significance of his contribution lies in shifting the focus to the process-oriented understanding of ‘peace’. In other words, while achieving negative peace requires stopping direct violence such as physical harm, reaching a state of positive peace is a more complicated process because it implies removing indirect violence that includes both structural and cultural violence (Harris and Morrison, 2003). Examples of a structural violence in a society include injustice, inequality in education, health services or life chances (ibid.). Cultural violence does extend both direct and structural violence by legitimising them and reproducing them across generations (Galtung, 1969).

Galtung (1990) advocates that peace education must abolish direct, structural and cultural violence. This stance has been substantiated by other prominent scholars in the field such as; Bajaj (2008); Harris and Morrison (2013) and Reardon (2001). Similarly, Page (2008) criticises understandings of peace education that draws on the definition of peace as the absence of overt violence. He believes that such definitions exclude the existence of structural violence that prevents individuals from reaching their full potential. Building on these declared goals, it is justifiable to conclude that a successful peace education initiative in a post conflict context should be concerned with addressing structural and cultural violence given that direct violence will have supposedly stopped by the time of the implementation. Starting out from this juncture, the following section seeks to explore two main points that are of paramount importance towards reaching a conclusion of what content should take a priority in a post-conflict peace programme.

## **The Content of a Post-Conflict Peace Education Programme**

This section consists of two main parts. It first explores one aspect of structural violence that is most likely to be found in a post-conflict divided society, namely ‘misrecognition’. Then, it discusses ‘critical peace education’ which is perceived as a necessary tool towards demolishing different aspects of structural violence. Before delving into conceptualisations of CPE, I examine some similar approaches to education.

### *Misrecognition as Structural Violence*

Injustice and inequality are two main forms of structural violence (Galtung, 1969). Martinea, Meer and Thompson (2012) described how ‘misrecognition’ in a post-conflict society evolves into epistemic injustice where localised knowledge goes unheard or is silenced. Accordingly, structural violence in a post-conflict society can exist in the form of a lack of recognition of one of the previously conflicting parties. This usually happens because of unbalanced power relations and dynamics when one of the conflicting parties wins or prevails over the other (Lau and Seedat, 2017).

Tiger (2009) argues that oppression is not only in what is done to people but also about what is taken from them. Interestingly, to unveil structural forms of violence that are often disguised, Lau and Seedat (2017) analysed community leaders' narratives from marginalised peri-urban township of Thembelihle in post-apartheid South Africa and concluded that positive peace is contingent on social justice, representation and recognition of the knowledge and voice of its communities. Participants described their community members as being voiceless victims of oppression. This violence of misrecognition affirms a Manichean<sup>1</sup> worldview in a society where groups are identified as 'good' or 'bad'(ibid.). Ben-Porath (2005) argues that an essential component of recognition in a post-conflict context is acknowledging social groups past relations, how they wronged each other and the impact that past practices have on their present conditions. To achieve this end, it requires the content of a peace education programme to recognise the historical perspective of the other while allowing different parties to hold on to their own version of the conflict (ibid). The following explores the concept of CPE which seems to respond to this specific point.

### *Theoretical Responses: Critical Peace Education*

Despite the love, compassion and nonviolence philosophy of peace education, mainstream peace education has been critiqued for working towards developing technical proficiencies without focusing on broader issues of social justice and liberation (Zembylas and Bekerman, 2013). It has been argued that an uncritical application of peace education could perpetuate structural and cultural violence (Cremin 2016; Wessells, 2012) and accordingly render peace projects part of the problem and the reality they are pretending to address (Gur-Ze'ev's, 2001; Zembylas and Bekerman, 2013).

When it comes to the content of a peace education programme in a post conflict context, CPE seeks to present problems of violence objectively. Instead of convincing students with the correctness of one side, it engages students critically with the conflict. Moreover, it aspires to disrupt asymmetrical power relationships and unpack their political, economic, social and historical roots (Bajaj, 2015). It empowers individuals, enable voices to be heard and boost the participation and agency of the marginalised (Diaz-Soto 2005; Bajaj 2008; Bajaj and Brantmeier 2011; Brantmeier 2011; Trifonas and Wright 2012; Hantzopoulos, 2011).

Reflecting on CPE's goals and ambitions, the following reviews relevant literature and establishes connections between CPE's argument and those of Allport's (1954) 'Contact Hypothesis', Taylor's (1994) 'Multiculturalism' and Gallagher's (1996) 'contested narratives'. The following first briefly discusses each of them and then more details about CPE are presented.

### *Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis*

Allport (1954) believed that ignorance of the perspective of other groups and communities results in prejudice and fear. Therefore, he suggested that group contact could enable individuals to learn about the other and accordingly alleviate conflict between groups and develop positive intergroup emotions and attitudes towards them (see also Amir, 1976; Pettigrew, 1998). Other scholars further developed this hypothesis into a theory (Hewstone and Brown's, 1986) and established its

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<sup>1</sup> dualistic.

original proposition that intergroup contact decreases intergroup prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006).

It is worth noting, however, that Allport (1954) proposed some conditions as prerequisites for effective contact. These conditions include; equal status<sup>2</sup>, support by an institutional and social authorities<sup>3</sup>, cooperation<sup>4</sup> and superordinate goals<sup>5</sup>. Later, Hewston and Brown (1986) suggested that to achieve an effective reduction of intergroup conflict, identities should be highlighted, and controversial issues should be discussed.

### *Taylor's (1994) Multiculturalism*

'Multiculturalism' is meant to offer learners a chance to learn about the others and acknowledge the multiplicity within a nation (Taylor, 1994). Multiculturalism which is based on political science theories such as Pluralism and Liberalism has prompted various curricular developments especially in societies with relative peace (Niens, 2009). Multiculturalism is thought to aim to facilitate social cohesion in democratic societies (ibid.) and have little impact on peace education in conflict contexts (Bekerman and McGlynn, 2007). Despite this, one important aspect of the multicultural thought that seems to align well with the implications of critical peace education in conflicted settings revolves around the importance of acknowledging rather than dismissing past wrongs, which multiculturalists find essential to overcoming mutual hostilities (Taylor, 1994).

### *Teaching Contested Narratives*

In post-conflict societies, a country's history is often a central concern (Freedman et al., 2008; Smith and Vaux, 2003) and questions of how to deal with past narratives are critical (Dierkes et al., 2007). Therefore, the focus on exploring how we should teach history in such conflicted contexts has significantly increased (see for example Gallagher 2004; Smith and Vaux 2003; Tawil and Harley 2004).

A multi-perspective, enquiry-based model of history teaching began in England in the late 1960s<sup>6</sup> (Shemilt, 1980). From the 1990s, international agencies such as OSCE and the Council of Europe have been promoting principles of this model in contexts emerging from conflict (McCully, 2012). In line with this enquiry-based model, Gallagher (1996) advocated that history teaching should equip students with critical thinking and moral reasoning skills. Such a skills-based approach helps students to reach informed and balanced conclusions after being exposed to various viewpoints (ibid.). This, in turn, contributes to a deeper social understanding (Smith, 2005) and reinforces peaceful tendencies in societies emerging from conflict (Cole and Barsalou, 2006). This stance is also enhanced by VanSledright (2008) who views using history education to

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<sup>2</sup> Members of the two groups should enjoy similar characteristics, qualities and equal engagement in the relationship.

<sup>3</sup> Authorities should support positive contact.

<sup>4</sup> The environment should be non-competitive and encouraging cooperation.

<sup>5</sup> While political leaders usually see social amnesia as the best way to 'move on' and maintain stability (Cole and Barsalou, 2006), many argue that schools' history curriculum should be revised and a more truthful history should be presented (Hodgkin, 2006; Cole, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> It originated in the Schools' Council History Project (SCHP).

construct one collective memory as an ideological indoctrination that limits students' chance to develop their cognitive abilities. Also, Buckley-Zistel (2009) believes that providing a 'more situated version of the past' (P.48) where different stories from the population are represented helps to avoid further conflict.

On the other hand, however, Cole (2007) advises that such interventions in the history curriculum should only be done after addressing other structural legacies. Another interesting remark comes from McCully (2012) who warns against making generalisations concerning a positive impact of a multi-perspective, enquiry-based history. McCully believes that all such claims lack empirical evidence and there is a need for a systematic research scrutiny of classroom practices.

### *Critical Peace Education (CPE)*

Some aspects of the three previous arguments are interrelated with the aims of post conflict critical peace education. Similar to them, CPE promotes 'taking the other's perspective' and 'recognising other historical narratives' (Ben-Porath, 2005). The ultimate goal of CPE is developing students' critical consciousness that would enable them to explore contradictions in their social, political and economic realm and prepare them to act against them. CPE scholars such as Fisher (2000) reports how some practitioners realise that peace education should shift its focus from making people nicer to each other to promoting a 'culture of resistance' against propaganda and manipulation of government, media and powerful people. Fisher (2000) believes that a peace education programme should include '3Es'; 'exposure, encounter and experience'<sup>7</sup>. In a similar vein, McMaster (2002) believes that to lead people out of a culture of violence, there is a requirement for antagonists to walk through history together to achieve critical probing and shatter reductionist readings of historical narratives. Bajaj (2008) argues that peace education research and efforts should be made towards developing understanding of how to practically achieve these ends.

To provide practical guidelines, Bajaj (2015) builds on Brantmeierer's (2011) stages for critical peace education<sup>8</sup> and comes up with six core competencies<sup>9</sup> that she thinks CPE initiatives should be oriented towards. She also suggests some possible education activities that could help achieve each competency. Of relevance to my argument here are the possible education activities that Bajaj suggests for promoting 'conflict transformation skills' competency. Bajaj sees exploring the roots of violence and attending to the power relations of entrenched conflicts as possible education activities. Moreover, Harris and Morrison (2013) contend that the role of peace educators is to present a variety of points of view so that students receive as comprehensive an understanding as is possible.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Exposure' to the conflict is vital and could be achieved through reading other narratives or people deeply reflecting on their own positioning in a conflict. Afterwards, it is necessary to 'encounter' those with opposing views and different stances. Finally, it should include 'experience'. In other words, allowing students the opportunity to act together with others whom they disagreed with in the beginning.

<sup>8</sup> "(1) Raising consciousness through dialogue (2) Imagining nonviolent alternatives (3) Providing specific modes of empowerment (4) Transformative action (5) Reflection and re-engagement" (Brantmeier, 2011, 356)

<sup>9</sup> The six core competencies are: "Critical thinking and analysis, empathy and solidarity, individual and coalitional agency, participatory and democratic engagement, education and communication strategies, conflict transformation skills and ongoing reflective practice" (p.162)

## **Discussion**

I find establishing the link between the three arguments of ‘Multiculturalism’, ‘Contact Theory’ and ‘Teaching contested Narratives’ on one hand and CPE on the other necessary and enlightening. This is due to the undeniable similarity in the epistemological and theoretical rhetoric of these arguments which renders a careful drawing on each other’s research findings, implications and practical recommendations not only justifiable but necessary and insightful. This is particularly effective for CPE. While the theoretical propositions in CPE field are rapidly growing, there is a stark lack of application in contexts with different conflict natures, levels and dynamics. As a result, there is also a scarcity in evaluation research that is needed to constantly develop the theoretical grounding of the field. Accordingly, seeking insights from such arguments and from contexts where they have been applied responds in a way to Zembylas and Bekerman’s (2013: P. 206) call to revisit the theoretical groundings of our vision of peace education and attempt to ‘move away from limiting epistemologies to pragmatic ontologies’.

While all four arguments sound attractive and of an emancipatory promise, such pedagogical approaches require a responding and cooperative political climate to facilitate their application. Also, because of the vast variety of conflict natures, there is a need to articulate the theoretical groundings of these arguments in an intricate nuanced way. Considering this last point reveals the following:

- ‘Contact Theory’ enlists important conditions as prerequisites for its success.
- Multiculturalism scholars have recurrently disclosed the need for a democratic context for their approach to be implemented.
- Proponents of teaching contested historical narratives highlight the importance of addressing structural legacies before introducing such interventions and accentuate the need to avoid sweeping statements about a positive impact without solid empirical evidence.

On the other hand,

- Although theoretical work in the field of CPE is increasingly on the rise, no attempt at defining some conditions or requirements that could guide CPE scholars to identify different levels of analysis can be detected. Also, no identification of features or particularities of conflict contexts where CPE can be successfully applied or not practically possible can be found. Furthermore, addressing structural legacies is recognised as part of the CPE mission.

Having explored theoretical groundings of the four arguments under focus (Check figure 1), the following second section of this paper reflects on contexts where ‘Contact Theory’, ‘Multiculturalism’ and ‘Contested Narratives’ have been operationalised. This has been done to offer further insights into CPE in practice.

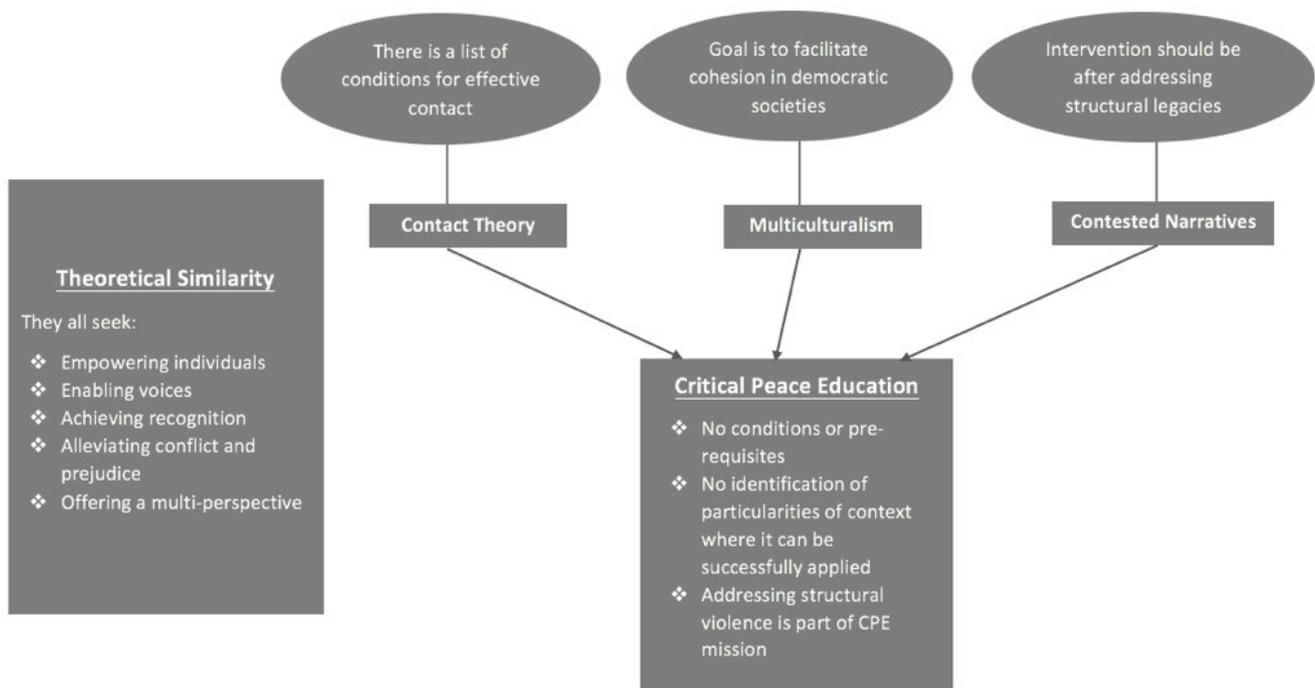


Figure 1<sup>10</sup>. Contact theory, multiculturalism, contested narratives and CPE

## Reflection on Contextual Resources

The conflict/post conflict contexts of Rwanda and Israel/ Palestine offer compelling insights. In the following, I first justify my selection of these two contexts. Then, I elaborate on three challenges to the application of ‘Multiculturalism’, ‘Contact Theory’ and ‘Contested Narratives’ there.

### *Rwanda and Israel/ Palestine*

Rwanda is a country that was ripped apart by violence from 1990 till 1994. Two main ethnic groups constitute the population of Rwanda, Hutu and Tutsi. The Rwandan genocide was mainly against the Tutsi. 70% of their population were killed in a 100-day period. However, the genocide ended with the victory of Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) which was Tutsi-dominated (Buckley-Zistel, S., 2009). In other words, the conflict did not end with a mutual peace agreement where conflicting parties were in a position to impose equal power. This is the exact reason this context was selected.

Israel/ Palestine is an ideal example to investigate a deeply divided context where Multiculturalism and Contact Theory have been vividly applied to improve Jewish-Arab relations there. While Palestinians

<sup>10</sup> This figure has been designed by the author of this essay.

formed the majority in Palestine up until 1947, they now constitute a minority, as only a few of them remained after their defeat in 1948<sup>11</sup>. Although Israel is considered a democracy and should technically meet the conditions of Multiculturalism and intergroup contact approaches, its democratic character seems to be struggling with living up to these approaches goals and aspirations. Several failures and challenges have been reported which are worth bringing forward in light of CPE.

## Challenges and Insights

The first challenge that cases of Rwanda and Palestine/Israel yield is the unavoidable power of the victor.

### *The power of the victor*

Benjamin (1968) famously remarked that history is written by winners. After the end of a conflict, victors manipulate the process of developing the history curriculum (Stover and Weinstein 2004), resist histories that include the presentation of the other side's perspective (Cole and Barsalou, 2006) and choose which narrative to remember and what to forget (Buckley-Zistel, 2009). As a result, the official narrative usually defines the past according to the interests of those in power, who mostly choose to silence alternative discourses (Conway 2003; Epstein and Lefkovitz 2001).

AlHaj (2002) examined multiculturalism in Israel as it was represented in Jewish and Arabs schools' history curriculum. He found that history curriculums in Jewish and Arab schools reflects the wider social power system and is a tool in the hand of the powerful to legitimise the dominant Zionist ideology. AlHaj concluded that the history curriculum is far from any model of multiculturalism and reflects the asymmetrical relationships between Arabs and Jews in Israel/ Palestine.

In Rwanda, Straus and Waldorf (2011) reported the challenges of their work on a project that helped move Rwanda closer to reintroducing teaching history into Rwandan schools<sup>12</sup>. Unfortunately, their project failed to include a content that would enable students to engage critically with past violence. The authors justified this failure by the wider political context where the Rwandan government wanted to abolish ethnic identities (Hutu, Tutsi and Twa), and accordingly presented a national narrative that denied the existence of ethnic rivalries before the Belgian colonialism and prohibited any other interpretations of the past. Buckley-Zistel (2009) explains how this national narrative is perceived in the Rwandan context where the government is thought to be following this approach to further its legitimacy, mask the Tutsis' monopoly of the country's military and political power and to eradicate all criticism of the government. A sense of resentment among Rwandan people is also reported especially that any account of the genocide other than the official one is a criminal offence added to Rwanda's penal code in 2002 and is legally prosecuted (Hilker, 2011). A relevant interesting suggestion from Straus and Waldorf's (2011: P.309) research is that "When one identity group has power and others are subject to that group's policies, history reform becomes almost an impossible task".

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<sup>11</sup> The rest have been forced out and rendered refugees in surrounding Arab countries and other parts of Palestine.

<sup>12</sup> That was after ten years of no history courses taught in secondary schools.

## *Discussion*

Reflecting on the ‘Power of the Victor’ presents the first challenge to the implementation of CPE and the ability to propose different viewpoints, let alone to achieve the actual wanted change<sup>13</sup>. In the Rwandan case, critical engagement with the conflict is likely to take place from a new position whereby a third party is to be blamed for the interethnic conflict of the mid-90s. Rwanda’s example suggests that applying CPE there is not practically possible. Ironically, given the penal code introduced in 2002, CPE educators are likely to be legally prosecuted.

In the Israeli Palestinian case, the main narrative continues to be dominated by the winner group and although there have been efforts to offer a more multicultural balanced perspective of the conflict, the objectives of multiculturalism completely vanish in the history curriculum in the Jewish schools.

Some might argue that in such contexts that are unwelcoming to the idea of involving students with different narratives, it is our mission to ask questions like: ‘Where do we target our interventions?’ and ‘What other forms of peace initiatives can we introduce?’. While my thoughts are in line with this last argument, it is worth remembering that ‘misrecognition’ is an aspect of structural violence and a CPE initiative that starts out reconciling with the fact that addressing structural violence is beyond its capacity is indeed failing before it starts. This is particularly relevant if we are to remember the goals that are established in the field about addressing all forms of violence. Here, we reach a dilemma that raises several questions. A big nagging question is: Does CPE need to articulate more realistic goals that respond to different natures and levels of conflict in a more nuanced way?

## *Identity Accentuation*

Indeed, Rwandan government’s excuse for suspending to teach history and then teaching one national narrative is its fear of retriggering the conflict. As a result, it chose to evade the possibility of re-igniting ethnic distinctions at the expense of addressing the resulting structural violence. Although some Rwandans view the government approach to the issue as manipulative, some previous research on intergroup contact highlights how intergroup encounters where different identities and perspectives of the conflict are discussed enhance negative attributions and stereotyping among participants (Moaz, 2000a and 2000b). This stance is later substantiated by Bekerman and Maoz (2005) who expressed what they see as an inherent challenge in such initiatives and their tendency to create a context where conditions of the conflict and nationalist discourse can be easily reproduced. Hammack (2009) explored two American-based coexistence programs for Israeli and Palestinian youths. These programmes follow the contact theory approach. Professional facilitators conducted dialogue sessions where the conflict has been directly discussed and participants’ social identities were brought up to the forefront. The overall aim of the two programmes was to achieve a transcendence of a delegitimizing in-group narrative. Unfortunately, results show that the identities of many of these programmes participants were accentuated instead and their identification with the narrative of their own groups was further elevated. Literature in realistic conflict theory (Sherif, 1958) has consistently demonstrated that opening lines for discussing conflict and different perspectives is necessary towards reducing hostility. However, doing so without ‘superordinate goals’ only intensifies a sense of in-group identification and solidarity, increase accusations and recriminations and reproduce conflict. For this

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<sup>13</sup> Critical thinking, participatory engagement, reflective practice, conflict transformation skills.

reason, Hammack (2009) suggested that identity accentuation in these programmes was normal and expected. Interestingly, while identity accentuation is the least desired outcome for CPE for its implication of conflict reproduction, Hammack (2009) tries to highlight a positive side which is intrinsically linked to an aspect of structural violence, namely ‘lack of recognition’. Hammack views identity accentuation in a positive light because it enables individuals to recognise and express the distinctiveness of their social identities. Furthermore, Hammack calls for a model that embraces identity accentuation as necessary.

### *Discussion*

Reflecting on ‘identity accentuation’ presents the second challenge to the practice of CPE, especially in terms of the ability to move from implementation of ‘exposing students to different perspectives’ to tackling questions like; How are we to sustain the positive side of the tricky result of ‘identity accentuation’ and any other transformative skills students might acquire? The Israeli Palestinian case presents a real challenge where achieving ‘recognition’ in the settings where these programmes are delivered might be pointless and rather counterproductive if those in power are unwilling to lift structural inequalities. In this scenario, minority group members who further recognised their identities and accentuated their narratives might see no other option to regain their rights than generating conflict. Resorting to violence might be their only way to stand up to the macro socio-political reality and other aspects of power imbalance, structural asymmetry and majority-minority relations.

Highlighting the importance of the macro socio-political reality, Bar-Tal (2004) argues that intergroup contact contributes minimally to conflict reduction because it lags behind political change. The following section further elaborates on this point.

### *Social Transformation: ‘Individual’ or ‘Structural Asymmetry’?*

One of the criticisms to intergroup contact is that it relies on a bottom up theory of how transformation occurs and views individuals as ‘producers’ and not ‘products’ of a social structure (Hammack, 2009). I argue that this does indeed apply to ‘Multiculturalism’, ‘contested narratives’ and accordingly to ‘CPE’ too. They all connect social transformation to the individual rather than structural inequities or social policies. Interestingly, Hammack (2009) assimilates this with the American Dream myth where individuals are deceived into thinking that they have an equal chance to succeed. The truth is, however, that the huge undeniable structural inequality does disenfranchise minorities from advancement opportunities.

Noteworthy is that this approach was challenged by Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) social identity theory that attribute the origin of conflicts to the social structure that has a significant influence on the individual and not vice versa. Studies of intergroup contact in Israel/ Palestine (Bekerman, 2002; Halabi & Sonnenshein, 2000, Moaz, 2000a) enhance this theory and highlight the importance of the sociohistorical context and the influence of the outside power relations and structural asymmetry on the success of the encounter. Bar-Tal (2004) highlights how intergroup contact projects in Israel/ Palestine completely collapsed when violence erupted in the two Intifadas of 1987 and 2000. Therefore, he contends that coexistence efforts should not be exerted with big aspirations

for social change. This is because the effectiveness of these efforts and intergroup relations are inextricably interrelated with an encompassing conflict resolution process where the political, economic, societal and military conditions are in line with the goals of these efforts (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004).

### *Discussion*

Reflecting on how applications of ‘multiculturalism’, ‘contact theory’, ‘contested narratives’ and CPE are embedded in a system of structural asymmetry is a third challenge. It is not only the individual change that is needed, but also structures that are in place to enable such a conflict transformation to come to light. Indeed, CPE might successfully manage long term transformation in individuals without achieving a critical mass to make change at scale. Thus, ‘how can we amplify the effects on the individuals that are changed so that they affect the environment? Due to the powerful structural asymmetry as being very strong over us, the question naturally arises of how feasible it is to scale up any prospective ripple effect. Other critical questions are: Is CPE in a need to reconsider its target? sort out its priorities? or just define more modest goals? Noteworthy is that Bekerman and Moaz (2005) identified this challenge to the application of CPE when they advocated a post-positivist realism in the field. This view recognises that although some theoretical conceptualisations are valid and describe the empirical world well, they might be of a little influence due to stronger constructed hegemonies that control our lives and the opportunities available to us. Although this call has been there since 2005, rigorous responses to it in the field are difficult to be detected.

### **Insights**

Building on the analysis and the three discussions under ‘The Power of the Victor’, ‘Identity Accentuation’ and ‘Individual or Structural Asymmetry’ sections, I suggest that one way of pushing the field of CPE toward the realistic end of the spectrum could be by conceptualising it in a three-dimensional way: Applicability, Sustainability and Scalability.

**Applicability:** The parameter of ‘applicability’ acknowledges the complexity of CPE implementation and the particularity of different post-conflict contexts. Therefore, it facilitates the advancement of a context-specific, location-sensitive CPE that is based on a true understanding of local socio-political climates.

**Sustainability:** The parameter of ‘sustainability’ acknowledges that CPE can serve as a factor of sustainable long-term change only when an equitable social structure and reality provide a background for it.

**Scalability:** The parameter of ‘scalability’ acknowledges the tricky relationship between individual transformation and social structural change. Therefore, it has a modest vision of the scale at which CPE can effectively operate. It also decides on targeting CPE efforts based on answers to the question: ‘How effective is individual agency in the face of structural asymmetry in this particular context’?

## Conclusion

There seems to be a need in the field of peace education to be reoriented towards a more realistic view of its role in a post-conflict context. This can possibly start with acknowledging reality and articulating goals that respond to different natures and levels of conflict in a more nuanced way. The field might benefit from enlisting some prerequisites to its application.

A political will is needed to be in line with CPE objectives and to provide background for it. CPE needs to reconsider the possibility of accentuating students' identities by exposing them to different views of the conflict especially in contexts with aspects of power imbalance, structural asymmetry and unjust majority-minority relations. It is informative to pose questions around the chances that CPE would serve as a factor of sustainable change in such contexts.

Finally, there is a need to reconsider the relationship between individual transformation and social structural change. This paper invites peace education scholars to contemplate some critical questions such as; Can CPE goals be achieved by targeting all our efforts towards transforming the individual? Does CPE need to sort out its priorities and be more critical on how to operate in conflict/ post conflict contexts?

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