บทความปริทัศน์ (Article Reviews)

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Daniel Bar-Tal and Eran Halperin, "The nature of socio-psychological barriers to peaceful conflict resolution and ways to overcome them," *Conflict and Communication Online, Vol. 12,* No. 2, 2013, pp. 1 - 16. Reviewed by Yanuar Sumarlan.

In this paper the authors elaborate on the nature of socio-psychological barriers [against peaceful conflict management] and propose some ways to overcome these barriers.

These authors accomplish these purposes in generally three steps. ***First,*** they build hypothetical mechanisms through which the society blocks alternative values (for peaceful conflict management) to disseminate throughout its population: (1) control of information (to support pro-conflict narratives), (2) discrediting counter-information, (3) monitoring (scrutinizing information, e.g., textbooks, NGO reports, media news, scientific studies, etc.), (4) punishment (against organizations or individual challenging the dominant narratives), (5) restricting access to archives (blocking public access to counter-hegemonic narratives), (6) censorship (blocking products like newspaper articles, cultural channels, or

official publication that challenge dominant conflict-supportive narratives), and (7) encouragement and reward mechanisms (to encourage sources, channels, agents, or products that promote the socio-psychological conflict repertoire).

Second, they use a concept proposed by some other researchers known as *freezing* as the process that accommodates the absorption of the societal mechanisms by its individual members. A cognitive process that is strengthened by the rigid structure of the conflict-supporting beliefs held by many society members, freezing is supported by three factors: rigidity, motivation, and group-internal emotions. Rigidity refers to the robust nature of the societal beliefs that are organized in a coherent manner with little complexity and greatly differing from alternative beliefs. Motivation reinforces the society members' view on the accepted beliefs of the ethos of conflict and the collective memory as true and valid as they fulfill various psychological needs. The group-internal emotions like fear function to close society members' psychological repertoires and strengthen the rigidity of their societal beliefs. In sum, freezing triggered by many different factors is the dominant reason the societal beliefs of the culture of conflict function as socio-psychological barriers.

Third, the authors hypothesize that to overcome these psychological barriers at individual level, peacemaking involves *unfreezing* as a key process that leads to change in the conflict-supporting repertoire. The process of unfreezing hypothetically begins with the spread of a new idea(s) inconsistent with accepted beliefs and attitudes that create some sort of tension, dilemma, or even psychological conflict. The new idea(s) becomes instigating

belief that motivates the society members to re-evaluate the accepted social beliefs or the culture of conflict. To cut the long story short, this instigating belief provokes cognitive dissonance and a new mediating belief that calls for changing the context of intractable conflict. The most important part of this third step is that the authors actually launch three studies to test this set of hypotheses among representative samples of Israeli Jews communities.

The first [correlational] study finds that the Israelis who believe that continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would bring unacceptable losses to Israeli Jewish society are more inclined to look for alternative information about the conflict and show greater willingness to make compromises for peaceful conflict resolution. The second study shows that information about possible future losses caused by the implementation of a one-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict leads to attitudinal unfreezing and to a higher levels of support for compromise among members of all political groups. The third study shows that the effects that instigating beliefs about future losses have on cognitive unfreezing and support for compromise are significantly greater than the effects of instigating beliefs regarding future gains.

This article shows that among a Jewish society whose members believe that in few next decades they would be outnumbered by the Palestinians the process of unfreezing is possible. The ultimate outcomes of unfreezing include changes in the repertoire that supports continuing the conflict, greater readiness to reassess the conflict, and willingness to entertain alternative beliefs. This study shows the importance of substantiating some hypothesis through population-based [correlational] studies on factors that might

reinforce or retard the socio-psychological barriers to peace. Nevertheless, the studies' attempt to pick representative samples among the Jews communities might hide the fact that various groups with a vested interest in continued conflict are neglected by the studies.

This study's best values lie in the techniques of designing a set of research on a very complicated research not only about what happens at the psychological level where values are internalized or rejected but also at the societal levels where values are shared or refused.