

Anthropology and Peace Making

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Introduction

Can anthropology help us to resolve some of the most pressing problems of our age or is it just an anachronism of a colonial past? That is the question posed by this book. Total war, as an industrial enterprise, and war as terrorism in an age of globalization are undoubtedly two of the most pressing problems of our age – in one form or another perhaps they always were. So can the insights of anthropology help us to reach a better understanding of this most destructive of human behaviours and in so doing resolve them?

Anthropology, in the American tradition, is divided into four sub-disciplines: biological anthropology, cultural anthropology, linguistics and archaeology. I have used the first three to better understand the nature of deadly group conflict in humans and how war might be prevented. Critically, if humans have developed a society based on a culture that excludes the deadly behaviour of war, can we learn from that example and apply such lessons to our contemporary circumstances?

The answer to the first part of this question is a definite ‘yes’. The Inuit in the Canadian Arctic developed a culture without war, but my application of their various cultural adaptations to our modern circumstances has only met with mixed success. The effort worked very well in Northern Ireland where it assisted in the successful negotiation of the Belfast Agreement (Irwin 1999, 2002a) and helped to sustain a slightly fragile peace following the Troubles of the 1970s and 1980s. Elsewhere the application has not been so successful – Israel, Palestine and most recently Syria. In this chapter I will explain why, but first, I should work through the subdisciplines of anthropology and what they have told me about human group conflict from my various researches, starting with human socio-biology.

The socio-biology and evolutionary psychology of human group conflict: *The critical lesson of human socio-biology made here is that group conflict in humans does have a genetic component and, as such, humans, in the absence of effective genetic engineering (not advisable or presently possible), have to be vigilant to prevent such conflict.*

Prior to pursuing academic interests I had lived with the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic for about ten years, having crossed Arctic North America by dog team from Hudson Bay to Alaska in 1973 (Irwin 1974) fifty years after the famed Arctic explorer and ethnographer Knud Rasmussen (1927) made the same journey. At that time the Inuit were still organized into tribes of about 500 individuals, as had nearly all so-called 'primitive' hunter-gatherers of our evolutionary past (Boas 1907, Lee and DeVore 1968, Tindale 1974). Critically, from Rasmussen's (1930a, 1930b, 1931) detailed ethnography it was possible to calculate the extent to which individuals were related (coefficient of consanguinity) to each other both within and between these tribal units as a result of in-group and out-group marriage (Wright 1922, 1931, 1951). Using a computer program that could model the genetics of these natural human populations, the results clearly demonstrated that the differences in the degree of relatedness between these groups could account for differences in in-group cooperation in contrast to, relatively speaking, out-group competition (Irwin 1985, 1987).

The significant term here is 'relative', as West Eberhard (1975) pointed out that it was the relative differences in relatedness that determined social behaviour and not absolute differences in relatedness (Hamilton 1964). It followed that small differences in relatedness between groups could precipitate competitive behaviour, although in mega-population terms the Inuit from Alaska to Greenland had a lot in common. However, in order for such group behaviours, including mate choice, cooperation, competition and out-group violence, it is absolutely necessary that individuals can identify the members of the group they belong to and those that they do not.

Culturally learnt behaviours, referred to as 'badges' for dialects of bird songs (Nottebohm 1969, 1972), can do this, and it seemed very likely that any cultural 'badge' could do the same in human populations. To this end I then mapped differences in tribal dialect onto my Arctic model of Inuit tribes coefficients of consanguinity and got a positive correlation with a boundary effect between tribes (see Figure 10.1). It also followed as dialect, mate choice, cooperation and competition were tied together in the same evolutionary imperatives (Shields 1982), then dialect as a matter of evolutionary and developmental

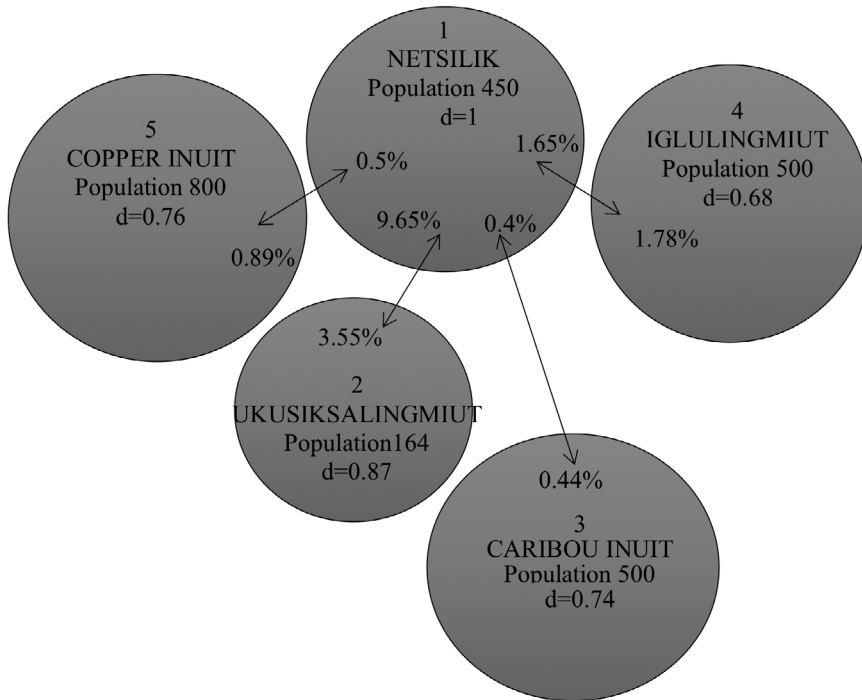


Figure 10.1 Inuit tribes of the Central Canadian Arctic, where the rates of migration (in-group and out-group marriage) are: 1 to 2 – 3.55%, 1 to 3 – 0.44%, 1 to 4 – 1.78%, 1 to 5 – 0.89%, 2 to 1 – 9.65%, 3 to 1 – 0.4%, 4 to 1 – 1.6%, 5 to 1 – 0.5% and d = dialect coefficient (Irwin 1985, 1987).

psychology should be largely set by puberty. For the most part this seems to be the case.

Of course, we do not live in tribal groups of 500 any more, but we do live in groups bound by common elements of culture. Learnt, for the most part, through enculturation in schools, by puberty we know who we are, who our in-group is and most probably who our out-groups are. Our dominant preferences for mate choice are set, as is the potential for violence towards out-groups given the right circumstances.

But the differences are relative, not absolute, so when I got to Northern Ireland and found two populations of ethnic Europeans who both spoke English with quite similar accents, the fact that they went to different schools – both Christian, but with different denominations, Catholic and Protestant – was enough to create, in this case, a sectarian divide. To all intents and purposes they belonged to two different tribes. But the Inuit are the exception to this apparently universal

law of human nature. They created a world without war. How did they do that and why?

The ecology, linguistics and cultural anthropology of Inuit non-war: *The critical lesson here is that humans can create societies underpinned by a culture that excludes war as an inevitable behaviour. Having done it at least once, we should be able to do it again.*

I will begin with the why? In socio-biology it is important to differentiate between ultimate cause and proximate mechanism. In evolutionary terms, the ultimate cause of in-group/out-group behaviour is the genetics of such groups in our evolutionary past while the proximate mechanism, the levers and buttons of pro-social and anti-social behaviour are, among other factors, the group 'badges' we acquire through enculturation. So what, first, then, is the evolutionary ultimate cause of Inuit non-war? Or, putting it another way, what are the factors that make the behaviour of war so maladaptive that it threatens their very survival?

Quite simply, the harshness of the Arctic environment (Irwin 1985, 1989) to which the Inuit adapted through a wide range of material culture inventions, including hunting techniques, the igloo made of snow blocks, dog teams and sledge, kayaks and very sophisticated Arctic clothing. The clothing was made by the women, while the hunting was dominated by the energy, persistence and bravery of young men often risking their lives to bring meat home to their families or dying in the attempt. This division of labour by gender required a manipulation of the sex ratio and a certain flexibility in sexual relations. As young males were so essential for the harvesting of Arctic game and as they so frequently met an early death in doing so, males were always kept at birth while females were frequently considered surplus to requirements and disposed of. Thus the post-birth sex ratio in the central Canadian Arctic was about 2 to 1 in favour of boys to girls. By mid-age, due to male deaths, the sex ratio was balanced 1 to 1 and in old age there were more women than men (Weyer 1932). Males most certainly could not be wasted on war. The challenges of Arctic survival were challenges enough. From an evolutionary perspective it might have been thought better if the birth sex ratio could have been manipulated genetically, thus saving unwanted female pregnancies, but this is not possible in mammals. Additionally there may have also been some advantage in manipulating the ratio rationally by design to fine-tune the sex ratio to the precise degrees of Arctic harshness of the Inuit habitat from Alaska to Greenland. A strong positive correlation between the

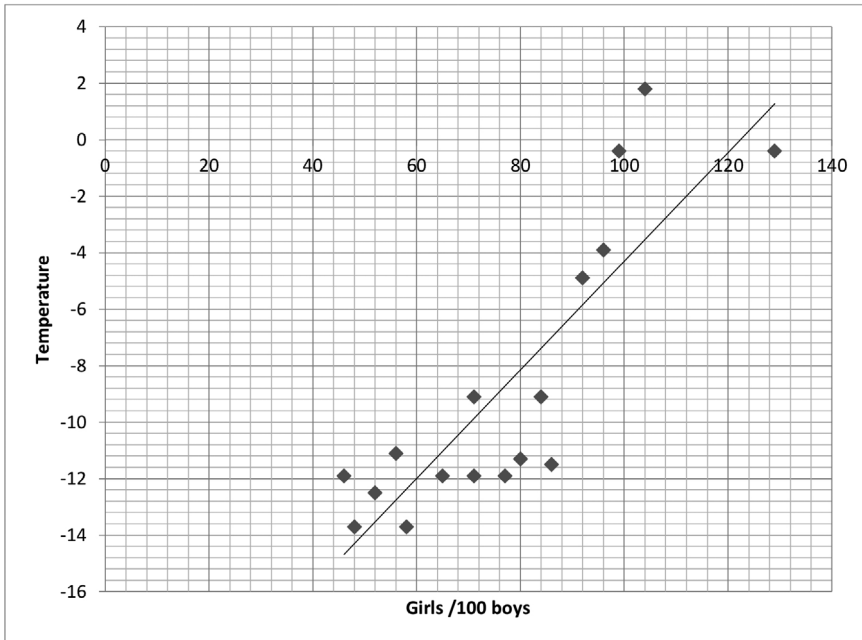


Figure 10.2 Annual mean temperature plotted against the index of female infanticide – ratio of girls/100 boys – for Alaska, Canada and Greenland.

post-birth sex ratio and annual mean temperature across the Arctic would seem to prove the veracity of this hypothesis (see Figure 10.2).

So much for the ultimate cause, but what then is the proximate mechanism? First and foremost, humans determine right and wrong behaviour through their moral codes and central to all moral codes are discriminations between right and wrong killing of humans. Table 10.1 lists the cognates for killing humans in Inuktitut (Inuit language). Significantly the abandonment or freezing of a baby does not constitute the taking of human life if the baby does not have a name associated with a person's spirit or soul. In Inuit metaphysics the ethical benefits of personhood are only achieved with the giving of a name/soul associated with the reincarnation of a deceased relative (Irwin 1981). Suicide can be right or wrong, murder is wrong, and revenge killing or execution is acceptable when necessary in order to prevent a blood feud. 'Fighting' and 'many people fighting' is descriptive and 'many people fighting and killing' is also descriptive, but in Inuktitut this cognate is achieved by adding *murder* to *many people fighting*, so 'war' can never be a praiseworthy act – it is always murder (Irwin 1989).

Table 10.1 Netsilingmiut cognates for taking human life

English	Inuktitut and literal translation
Baby abandonment	<i>Nutaraarluk* Iksingnaoktauyoq</i>
	Baby Leave it – he or she – doing it
Baby freezing	<i>Nutaraarluk Qiqititauyoq</i>
	Baby Freeze it – he or she – doing it
Suicide	<i>Inminik Pitariok</i>
	Self He or she took life
Murder	<i>Inuaktok</i>
	Human – he or she took life
Revenge killing or execution	<i>Akeyauok</i>
	Back – he or she – to him or her
Two people fight	<i>Unatuktook</i>
	Fight – them (two)
Many people fight	<i>Unatuktoon</i>
	Fight – them (many)
War**	None
Many people fighting and killing each other	<i>Unatuktoon Inuakgrotioon</i>
	Fight – them (many) – human – they took life (many)

*A baby that is not a person can be discriminated by the qualification that the baby does not have a name/soul, *Nutaraarluk Atikungitok*: Baby – Name – he or she – without.

**With a holoplastic language like Inuktitut it is possible to generate almost any meaning. However, 'war' as an organized activity that does not entail the blameworthy taking of life (murder) cannot be given an adequate translation. Revenge killing or execution, *Akeyauok*, can only be used with respect to specific acts of murder and the associated murderer(s).

Other elements of what can be characterized as co-adaptive culture types for pro-social behaviour in general included pseudo-kinship, wife exchange, systematic adoption, sharing partnerships, a common language, common ownership of resources, and a very rich mythology that emphasized right and wrong behaviour. With regard to decision making, this mostly followed the lines of authority laid down in kinship. A younger brother would be expected to be guided by the decisions of an older brother and then by their father, and he by his older brother or father, and so on. But when a difficult decision had to be made among peers, then the decision had to be by consensus. To avoid conflict everyone had to agree. There were no tribal chiefs to make a decision one way or another (Steenhoven 1959). I first came across this political decision-making process when I had occasion to look over the minutes of the council meetings in

the Arctic village of Chesterfield Inlet and noticed that all issues voted on were carried unanimously. Later, when I worked for Inuit organizations as an adviser and attended their board meetings, an agenda would sometimes take a day or two to work through, with all voting decisions left to the last hours of business on the last day only after, through extensive informal discussions, consensus decisions had been arrived at outside the formal meetings of the board.

Over a period of several years I got the hang of this very different kind of decision making that required listening to the different points of view, searching out common ground, and if necessary the best possible compromise, and anyone who was good at doing this was rewarded with a position of leadership. Subsequently, following my academic training and my first appointment in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, I was invited to join the departmental meetings that also followed an agenda. But after what sometimes seemed to me to be the briefest of discussions, a vote was taken and the majority decision prevailed. I was horrified. Some colleagues had been overruled and left the meeting quite disappointed with the outcome – and then I remembered that that is how the ‘white man’ made their decisions. Quite shocking!

From enculturation to ‘peace polls’ and the application of consensus decision making to the Northern Ireland conflict: *The critical lesson here is that some lessons from pre-industrial societies that have moved beyond war can be applied to modern societies and help them to peace.*

With the benefit of a postdoctoral fellowship from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), which had also supported my Master’s and doctoral research, I based myself at Queen’s University Belfast to make a comparative study of the education systems in Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine. The schools were segregated and always had been, ensuring the separate enculturation of Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Palestinians (Akenson 1970, 1973; Secretary of State for the Colonies 1937, 1946). But in Northern Ireland, against the wishes of the established church hierarchy, there was significant grass-roots support for integrated education. Depending on how the question was asked, between 30 and 70 per cent wanted their children to go to schools together as long ago as 1968 (*Belfast Telegraph* 1968ab). But the UK Government had only made provision for 2 per cent of children to attend integrated school by 1990 at the height of the Troubles. Armed with this polling evidence and signed affidavits from parents who had been forced to send their

children to segregated schools against their wishes, I was able to take a human rights case to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1994, which ruled that the UK Government should put more resources into integrated education (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 1995).

The ‘silent majority’ were given a voice through polling and they had won, and by giving this silent majority a ‘seat at the negotiating table’ through public opinion polls, peace was achieved in 1998 with the signing of the Belfast Agreement. To this end, I conducted nine surveys of public opinion in support of the Northern Ireland peace process between April 1996 and February 2003. Critically, the questions for eight of these polls were drafted and agreed with the co-operation of party negotiators to enhance the peace process by increasing party inclusiveness, developing issues and language, testing party policies, helping to set deadlines, and increasing the overall transparency of negotiations through the publication of technical analysis and media reports (Irwin 1999, 2002a).

Most importantly, *all* the parties to the conflict were included in this process and *all* the policies that they wanted in a peace agreement were fairly tested against public opinion, using a method that would find common ground where it existed and what the best possible compromise was where it did not. This was done by not only identifying an informant’s first choice but also the rank order of all their other choices by asking them which policies, over a range of policies, they considered to be ‘essential’, ‘desirable’, ‘acceptable’, ‘tolerable’ or ‘unacceptable’ for peace (see Figure 10.3). In so doing it was possible to apply the Inuit methodology of compromise and consensus discourse to a modern population using a combination of one-to-one private discussions with the representatives of the conflicting parties, public opinion polls that covered all sections of the Northern Ireland population, and a public diplomacy campaign to disseminate

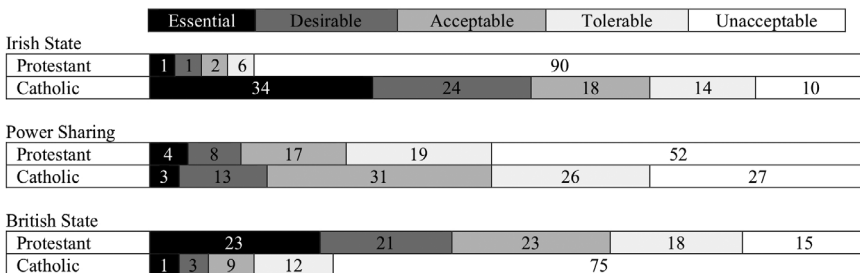


Figure 10.3 The incorporation of Northern Ireland into the Irish state is ‘unacceptable’ to 90 per cent of Protestants and incorporation into the British state is ‘unacceptable’ to 75 per cent of Catholics, with ‘power sharing’ the only acceptable compromise.

Table 10.2 Protestant and Catholic priorities for peace in Northern Ireland

	Protestant per cent	Essential	Catholic per cent	Essential
1st	Disband all paramilitary groups.	70	A Bill of Rights that guarantees equality for all.	78
2nd	Stronger and effective anti-terrorist measures.	70	Completely reform the police service.	70
3rd	The Republic ends their claim on Northern Ireland.	62	A Bill of Rights that protects the culture of each community.	67
4th	A Bill of Rights that guarantees equality for all.	37	Disband all paramilitary groups.	67
5th	End the Anglo-Irish Agreement.	36	Return the army to their barracks.	61
6th	A Bill of Rights that protects the culture of each community.	36	Politics without a sectarian division.	59
7th	Integrate Northern Ireland into the UK.	35	A right to choose integrated education.	53
8th	A right to choose integrated education.	35	A right to choose integrated housing.	51
9th	Politics without a sectarian division.	32	British withdrawal from Northern Ireland.	46
10th	Separate politics and religion in Northern Ireland.	31	Open government and Freedom of Information Act.	46
11th	A right to choose integrated housing.	30	Stronger and effective anti-terrorist measures.	40
12th	Separate politics and religion in the Republic.	30	Reformed and shared government.	32
13th	Open government and Freedom of Information Act.	24	Separate politics and religion in Northern Ireland.	20
14th	Reformed and shared government.	12	Separate politics and religion in the Republic.	15
15th	Return the army to their barracks.	8	End the Anglo-Irish Agreement.	10
16th	Completely reform the police service.	7	The Republic ends their claim on Northern Ireland.	7
17th	British withdrawal from Northern Ireland.	1	Integrate Northern Ireland into the UK.	4

the results of the research to everyone who had a right to vote in a referendum (Irwin 2002a).

Significantly this process encompassed some additional aspects of research methodology central to the discipline of cultural anthropology. First, the use of in-depth interviews with all the parties to the conflict to both understand and then test *their* proposals from *their* perspective against public opinion in *their* communities to reveal the central concerns through *their* world view, *their* emic perspective. Secondly, testing their proposals in other communities and in turn testing the 'others' proposals in their communities and publishing the full results to create a reflexive public discourse in which each party to the conflict had an opportunity to 'see' the conflict from the perspective of the 'other' (see Table 10.2). Through this process in Northern Ireland the peace agreement, when it arrived, was not a surprise to anyone and it easily passed a referendum, as predicted by the polls. Facilitated by an inclusive discourse, a consensus had been achieved.

Beyond Northern Ireland and the politics of peace making: *The critical lesson here – fortunately for me and those caught up in the Irish wars – is that Northern Ireland in the 1990s was 'the exception that proves the rule'.*

Following on from Northern Ireland, the first opportunity I had to apply the peace poll methods elsewhere was Macedonia. The Balkan wars had taken their toll in Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo and it was thought that rebels from Kosovo were about to take their armed struggle into Macedonia, which in 2002 had managed to stay out of the war. I was asked to conduct a peace poll that was expected to expose this clear and present danger, but what it revealed was a desire for both Serb Macedonians and Albanian Macedonians to have free and fair elections (Irwin 2002b). With support from the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), this was done and a war was avoided. Peace polls were then run in Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia, but for them it was too late and the polls could only show what needed to be done to help secure a peace following the devastation – and in some cases, genocide (Irwin 2005ab).

With colleagues from India and Pakistan I was able to run peace polls in Kashmir and tease out compromises acceptable to the Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim communities, but then another poll undertaken by Ipsos-MORI for the Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA), which only identified the informants' first choice, suggested a peace agreement was not possible – a serious

mistake (Irwin 2012). With support from the Norwegian Government I then moved on to Sri Lanka and building on polling work done by others, it was not difficult to demonstrate that the people of Sri Lanka would be very content with a modest degree of devolution. They did not require a separate Tamil state (Irwin 2008, 2009a, 2010).

But the Rajapaksa brothers who ran the country would have none of it. Following their defeat of the Tamil Tigers, they could have easily entered into a magnanimous agreement that would have settled the ethnic and sectarian disputes on the island for generations to come. But they preferred to play the ethnic card in elections and pit one community against the other to hold on to power. Fortunately, the Rajapaksa brothers have now been replaced and the prospects for the people of Sri Lanka are much improved. Significantly, the civil wars in Sri Lanka could have been avoided if they had not torn up their original constitution that protected all communities before the law in favour of ethnic electoral politics that briefly entrenched the power of a ruling elite (Irwin 2012).

In Sri Lanka I had been allowed to run my polls with the support of their Minister of Science, Professor Tissa Viterana, who tabled my reports in his Parliament and in so doing made a contribution to the democratic process. The Tamils would be satisfied with powers devolved to the Provinces in the North and East in accordance with their constitution and the president could no longer deny that fact. In time this truth – and rampant corruption – caught up with him. This was arguably a small success, although delayed. In Israel, Palestine, Sudan, Egypt, Syria and more generally in terms of relations between the West and the Muslim world, I have been less successful (Irwin 2012).

I had been working with Senator George Mitchell in Northern Ireland for several years, so when Barack Obama became US President and George Mitchell became his Special Envoy to the Middle East, I was given an opportunity to run a peace poll in Israel and Palestine. In addition to confirming what many other polls had shown, namely that a two-state solution was acceptable to the people of Israel and Palestine, I was also able to demonstrate that the peace process itself was not acceptable and that both Israelis and Palestinians wanted it reformed to produce a result (Irwin 2009b). Secret negotiations behind closed doors were not enough. International involvement and a timetable would be welcome. But the president of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu had no such interest, so the talks continued to fail and George Mitchell resigned his post. Netanyahu, who had grown up in America, understood Washington politics and could manipulate US policy towards Israel to meet his interests of no peace deal with the Palestinians (Irwin 2012).

In Syria I thought, and was advised by colleagues, that peace polls might work better there, but again the interests of nation states got in the way –this time Washington, Turkey and the Gulf States on one side of the equation and Iran and Moscow on the other (Irwin 2015a). In Darfur, Sudan and Egypt the situation was less complex and quite cut-and-dried. In Sudan the government put an end to a peace-polling project when they were not allowed to edit the questionnaire to meet their interests and in Egypt, at the time of the Arab Spring uprising, the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) would not give permission to run polls at all. Finally, with regard to relations between the West and the Muslim world, Michael Traugott brought me to America for a seminar to explore this issue following the publication of a report from their Council on Foreign Relations (2003) that highlighted this problem. Subsequently, following the ‘7/7’ London bombings in 2005 I was able to conduct a peace poll-style research programme among the UK Muslim community in 2006 (Irwin 2006). But following the recent wars in the Middle East and the ‘7/7’ London bombings, the results of that research were not welcome; attempts were made to silence the report and ten years on the problem remained unaddressed with the Taliban and al-Qaeda transformed into the Islamic State.

My efforts in this regard are not unique. Negotiators involved in the Northern Ireland peace process such as Jonathan Powell (2014) also advocate *Talking to Terrorists*, as does the anthropologist Scott Atran (2010) in *Talking to the Enemy*. The approach I take in reporting my research has a lot in common with peace journalism, which advocates balanced analysis from all sides to a conflict as well as the applied methodologies of Donald Campbell (1984) with its emphasis on the inclusion of adversarial stakeholders. Critically the interviews lead to public opinion polls, which are published to create a discourse designed to facilitate a process of consensus decision making. Telhami and Kull (2013) made another effort in this regard during the Israel/Palestine round of negotiations when John Kerry became US Secretary of State in 2013, but with no more success than myself given the same Washington politics.

Worlds without war: *The critical lesson here is that worlds without war and an objective social science devoid of political interests are the exception rather than the rule – but does it always have to be so?*

The Inuit created a world without war as a matter of ecological necessity. They could only survive in the high Arctic if they ended war, and they did. In Northern Ireland the fragile peace only came about when all the other players shared a

common interest in peace and the rest of the world does not seem to have reached that point quite yet. Can we hurry them along by understanding the situation we are in, as we now surely do, and change things for the better? Evolution theory – biological, cultural or otherwise – is neither optimistic nor pessimistic on this point. Quite simply, those worlds of sentient beings that come to terms with the dangers that face them – principally, competition for finite resources on a finite planet – will survive and those that do not will not. With this point in mind, I have tried a number of options for the mainstreaming of consensus decision making as an essential aid to conflict resolution and peace making globally, but so far without the hoped-for result.

First, as an academic, I did what academics do and applied for grants, undertook peace polls whenever funding became available, gave international conference papers and published. My colleagues in the World Association of Public Opinion Research (WAPOR) recognized the value of the work and with the encouragement of their then president, Professor Michael Traugott, we drafted new research standards for polls that deal with violent conflict (Irwin 2012). But these standards that emphasized transparency and working with all sides to a conflict were incompatible with the interests of the multi-million-dollar polling industry that was collecting this data globally for the intelligence services of national clients and consequently the new standards were never approved.

So then I tried the UN. Their Department of Peace Keeping Operations (UNDPKO) had come to the conclusion that their country missions would be far more successful if they took on board the views of local people and what they wanted instead of focusing solely on the agenda of political elites and third-party donor states (UN 2009, 2011). Through a series of workshops, consultations and publications, a UN (2013) manual was produced for best practice in this regard. It was very well researched and illustrated with numerous examples of local successes to set a new international standard for such work and peace polls were a part of it. This was in 2013 and I thought these new best practices would necessarily become a central feature of the activities of the UN Special Envoy to Syria in his efforts to bring that war to an end. But the views of the local people were only given lip service in favour of a grand bargain that would encompass the interests of the Syrian regime, regional and global powers. The UN, I quickly discovered, is the servant of the nation states that make up the UN and not the people that make up those nation states.

Knowledge is power and if the power of peace making is to be given to the people, then the people must own that knowledge. The people must know what

a reasonable compromise in any conflict must look like and be given an opportunity to accept or reject it. They are the people who are living and dying in the conflict, not the third parties who survey their hopes and dreams and edit them to meet their own selfish interests. Peace polling should be a right, not the last point of enquiry when all else has failed. Better still, peace polling should track and monitor potential sources of conflict globally before they become deadly (Irwin 2013, 2014, 2015b). In our age of globalization, world peace polls are now possible and in this age of information their time has surely come.

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