Listening, Community Engagement, and Peacebuilding

International Perspectives

Edited by Graham D. Bodie, Debra L. Worthington, and Zenebe Beyene

LISTENING, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND PEACEBUILDING

This book explores the role of listening in community engagement and peacebuilding efforts, bridging academic research in communication and practical applications for individual and social change.

For all their differences, community engagement and peacebuilding efforts share much in common: the need to establish and agree on achievable and measurable goals, the importance of trust, and the need for conflict management, to name but a few. This book presents listening – considered as a multi-disciplinary concept related to but distinct from civility, civic participation, and other social processes – as a primary mechanism for accomplishing these tasks. Individual chapters explore these themes in an array of international contexts, examining topics such as conflict resolution, restorative justice, environmental justice, migrants and refugees, and trauma-informed peacebuilding. The book includes contemporary literature reviews and theoretical insights covering the role of listening as related to individual, social, and governmental efforts to better engage communities and build, maintain, or establish peace in an increasingly divided world.

This collection provides invaluable insight to researchers, students, educators, and practitioners in intercultural and international communication, conflict management, peacebuilding, community engagement, and international studies.

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LISTENING, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND PEACEBUILDING

Defining terms and setting the stage

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How can communities, especially those with myriad markers of diversity and populations that have contradictory needs and values, ensure all voices are heard? Which voices should be prioritized in decisions that affect all members of a community? When and to what extent should elected officials invite participation among community members and on whom should they focus their attention? Is it reasonable to assume that opening space for the most vulnerable in a population will necessarily lead to solving intractable conflicts or addressing problems such as poverty, health disparities, systemic racism, or uneven distribution of resources? In the midst of violent conflict, what role do dialogue, deliberation, conversation, negotiation, and related forms of community engagement play? Is it always possible to encourage listening during efforts to build or sustain peace?

Clearly, there are no easy answers to questions like these. By bringing together a diverse set of scholars whose work has transformed communities and nations across the globe, we hope this book can begin to stitch together a reasonable narrative and provide insight and guidance to others who work in the areas of community engagement and peacebuilding. At the center of that narrative is the role and function of listening. While there are individual articles and chapters that focus on the role of listening within community engagement (e.g., Hendriks et al., 2019; Moore & Elliott, 2016; Rowan & Cavallaro, 2019) and peacebuilding efforts (e.g., Beyene, 2020; Johansson, 2017), there is no encompassing text serving students, academics, practitioners, and others with interests in these topics. Although the importance of listening to these areas is recognized, there is also clear evidence that those involved in community engagement and peacebuilding efforts, despite their best intentions, often fall short (Johansson, 2017).

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The goal of this text is to provide contemporary insights into the role that listening—as related to individual, social, and governmental efforts—can better engage communities and build, maintain, or establish peace in an increasingly divided world.

This chapter focuses on defining the central term of this book, listening. We begin by acknowledging the many uses (and misuses) of the term and then move to a discussion of how interpersonal forms of listening, with their focus on comprehension and understanding, capture some but not all of the complexity of listening at scale. Both community engagement and peacebuilding work necessarily move beyond listening to a single story or providing space for a single individual to feel heard; they both represent opportunities for large-scale listening, something that is often overlooked or ignored by the organizations responsible for encouraging participation from multiple stakeholders. Scholars and practitioners engaged in community engagement and peacebuilding often champion various forms of engagement, participation, empowerment, conflict resolution, and reconciliation. Whatever term is used, it is typically imbued with notions of "creating space to listen." Our goal is in this book to both explore and begin to unpack what exactly they mean by that.

What is listening?

Listening is an action, ideally an ethical one, undertaken with a spirit of mutual respect void of goals to marginalize or otherwise suppress competing voices. When engaged properly, it entails genuine presence in the service of others and leads to awareness, understanding, trust, and more productive and peaceful communities. Unfortunately, the term listening is also used to describe individual actions and public-facing initiatives that fall short of these ideals. Political listening tours and social media listening tools, for instance, often do little more than uncover new ways to tailor messages and provide politicians or corporations strategies to better sell their constituents (see Macnamara, 2016). Local partners working with international, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in peacebuilding efforts sometimes feel they are not being listened to, despite working with practitioners who claim to be foregrounding local voices (Anderson et al., 2012; Johansson, 2017). Large-scale surveys and other data collection efforts branded as listening to external or internal stakeholders often fail to fully capture individual voices mainly because they are designed to gather information at a more aggregate level. Indeed, "[merely] creating channels for publics or employees to have 'voice' is inadequate. Voice that is unheard is useless to both the speaker and the audience" (Lewis, 2020, p. xiii).

The difference between genuine listening and attempts only labeled as such, therefore, does not rest merely on whether the speaker *feels* heard. To be sure, from the perspective of the speaker, the act of (truly) listening signals that their voice has value, that they are valued, and that their perspective has merit and

meaning. All of these outcomes are important, perhaps imperative, in both community engagement and peacebuilding efforts. As such, attempts to increase opportunities for people to "speak up," "have voice," or otherwise participate and engage are essential to organizations and society, particularly to democratic forms of participation (e.g., Bickford, 1996; Dobson, 2014).

While it is true that listening will not (and perhaps should not) always result in agreement, compromise, justice, peace, or reconciliation, and might result in undesirable outcomes for some (e.g., re-triggering a trauma response), successful listening cannot simply rely on the impression that it has happened. Rather, genuine listening is an active, two-way, and symmetrical process that ultimately results in change. Sometimes the change that results from listening is internal to the listener who gains added perspective or understanding and thinks about an issue somewhat differently. Other times, internal change is insufficient. It must go beyond the individual or interpersonal level if it is to (re)shape decision making and begin to dismantle the structures that make problems feel intractable in the first place.

Part of the reason listening is ill-defined within community engagement and peacebuilding scholarship is because the term is largely conceptualized as a personal practice enacted within interpersonal interactions. Traditionally, listening has been conceptualized as a set of affective, behavioral, and/or cognitive processes enacted in the service of enjoying, responding to, and/or making sense of aural information, produced by others (Worthington & Bodie, 2018). Most models begin with the reception of sound, often labeled hearing, then suggest humans go through various stages of (selective) attention, comprehension, interpretation, evaluating, and responding, to name a few of the more common processes (Worthington, 2018). Within this framework, then, the paradigmatic case of "good" listening is when a single individual fully understands what another single individual has attempted to communicate and, as a result, effectuates a deeper relational dynamic (Burleson, 2011). To be sure, practitioners must be skilled in asking questions, expressing understanding, and paraphrasing; they also benefit from training in various models of dialogue, such as appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 2000), that stress shared discovery and mutual problem-solving. As we will see in the section that follows, however, such interpersonal forms of listening are not easily translated at scale.

From interpersonal to large-scale listening

The earliest research on listening was conducted to uncover strategies students use in classroom settings while listening to lectures (see review by Beard & Bodie, 2014). Throughout the 1950s and continuing until the late 1980s, several research programs were launched to develop tests capable of measuring *listening comprehension*. Although these tests differed in some important ways, each was designed to capture how humans are able to understand (i.e., make sense of) spoken language and use that understanding to respond appropriately (Ridge, 1993).

Starting in the 1980s, research on listening took a distinctly relational turn. Much of this work was published by communication scientists who drew heavily from the therapeutic literature (e.g., Rogers, 1957); in this context, a main goal of listening is the formation, maintenance, and transformation of close relationships (e.g., friendships, romantic relationships; Bodie & Denham, 2017). Particularly important in the context of close, personal relationships is the type of understanding marked less by mere comprehension or even evaluation of information and more by related abilities often labeled empathy, sympathy, or compassion.[1] We listen to the news of a building's collapse, a friend tells us of trouble with their child, or a family member describes recent financial problems, and we respond with compassion or sympathy. Indeed, research finds that more sophisticated attempts to comfort a distressed person move beyond a focus on the route details of an event, focusing instead on explicitly acknowledging and validating the perspectives and feelings of the distressed (Bodie et al., 2016; Burleson, 2003).

The shift from situating listening as an individual phenomenon to an interpersonal-level one, resulted in a change of focus. Instead of emphasizing understanding, comprehending and making sense of messages for the purposes of learning, researchers focused on an other-oriented, feeling-centered, empathic form of attention. From a psychophysiological perspective, empathy involves *feeling as* the other, meaning specific neural processes are activated as we experience the same (or at least a similar) emotional response as the other person (Lamm et al., 2019). Empathy provides a closer identification with the other and a closer sharing of a mental state. Here, listening both drives and is affected by our empathic response. Thus, our empathic response to another person's situation may lead us to engage in the kind of listening that centers the other person's perspective and feelings, and that shared affective and cognitive response may lead us to listen more closely, carefully, and for a longer period of time than perhaps we would otherwise.

Consideration of the thoughts, feelings, perspectives, conditions, and circumstances of others is at the heart of human engagement in all its forms, including efforts to build community and peace. Perhaps most important for this chapter (and for this book more generally), however, is the following: While there are clear examples of when an other-oriented and feeling-centered form of listening can be beneficial, such as in the context of dialogues seeking to bring communities together across difference (see Bodie & Godwin, 2022), this type of listening does little to change anything about systems or structures that cause pain and anxiety in particular communities, neighborhoods, or across specific classes of people (Dobson, 2014). In other words, the type of change elicited when we are listening interpersonally, often colloquially referred to as changing hearts and minds, might be necessary but is certainly insufficient (e.g., Dickson, 2009). The power of listening, if it is to be truly transformative at scale, must extend beyond some finite set of individual outcomes such as better understanding or increased empathy, as important as those outcomes are for a fully functioning society

(Freinacht, 2017). As Cohen (2019) put it, dialogue "cannot solve all problems or bridge all gaps. Calling for coexistence without seriously addressing the issues that underlie polarization can become a shallow call for peace with no justice" (¶11).

It is true that listening enables individuals and institutions to gather relevant information about others' mental states and perspectives and the complex contexts within which they are situated. Thus, community development and peacebuilding practitioners should be trained in skills that allow for better comprehension and understanding. Although we are imperfect mind-readers, "failing to consider the mind of another and running the risk of treating him or her like a relatively mindless animal or object … are at the heart of dehumanization" (Epley, 2014, p. xiv). Importantly, dehumanization is a strong predictor of intergroup hostility (Beyond Conflict, 2019; Giner-Sorolla & Russell, 2019), suggesting that creating spaces for seeing others' humanity is important beyond just the interpersonal realm (e.g., Wilmer, 2018). At the same time, it is true that simply feeling heard is inadequate when moving beyond the interpersonal. Situations involving the unequal distribution of power and conflict rooted in racism or other forms of hatred, for instance, at minimum raise questions regarding ideals of "open-mindedness" or the need for creating space for all voices and perspectives (e.g., Wahl, 2019). Indeed, each of us (the authors of this chapter) has heard critiques of the work we do as being naive and idealistic, quixotic in fact. Thus, as we expand our understanding of listening beyond the interpersonal to what Macnamara (2016) has called "large-scale listening" (p. 4), we must consider not only the outcomes of listening in broader (e.g., organizational, societal, and cultural) contexts but also the elements that make this sort of listening possible.

Making large-scale listening possible

What we know from research exploring listening in close relationships and from the work of dialogue practitioners who encourage conversations across differences is the importance of *creating space* for people to interact in supportive, welcoming, and inclusive environments free from judgment. Such spaces are needed if people are to feel heard. Thus, providing opportunities for people to voice their real, honest, and raw opinions; react to current policies that affect their lives; and participate in shared decision making are essential ingredients for effective community engagement and peacebuilding efforts. The creation of space for large-scale listening was coined by Macnamara (2015) as "an architecture of listening" that can help counterbalance "the policies, systems, structures, resources, and technologies devoted to speaking" (p. 47). In contrast to much (perhaps even a majority in some cases) of the work done by NGOs, governments, international aid organizations, and the like, which involves speaking to stakeholders (e.g., holding informational forums, putting together one-pagers for people to understand how to take control of their health),

an architecture of listening requires a shift in thinking. Fundamental to this shift, according to Macnamara (2020), are elements "required to supplement interpersonal communication and aid human interpretation of the large volume of information and feedback received in the form of structured and unstructured data" (p. 391). These elements include a *culture* of listening, *policies* for listening, the *politics* of listening, *structures* and *processes* for listening, *technologies* for listening, *resources* for listening, *skills* for listening, and the *articulation* of listening to decision making.

As used in the context of community development and peacebuilding, culture refers to the general and often taken-for-granted norms, beliefs, "best practices," and customs of an organization, work team, program, intervention, or other systems of practice. We believe listening is a central norm shared across community engagement and peacebuilding efforts, often manifested in the idea that outside agents and local partners are equals; it seems axiomatic that outside actors should genuinely listen to and implement the perspectives and advice offered by those most affected by the decisions being made. This norm is grounded in a consensus, albeit not one that has always existed, that outside entities cannot "bring" change or peace with them; rather, community engagement and peacebuilding are long term, comprehensive approaches that require understanding and honestly addressing the root causes of conflict within a given area. In an extensive study of over 6,000 recipients of international aid, for instance, Anderson et al. (2012, p. 83) reported

> wide agreement that outside aid providers should work through existing institutions where they are strong and support them, if weak, to help them gain experience and resources for bettering their societies. Receivers and providers of aid together recognize that international donors are only temporary actors in recipient societies and that governments and local organizations know their contexts better than outsiders do.

And, yet, as this team reported, recipients of aid often comment that they are uninformed, uninvolved, and unheard.[2] Indeed, a lack of attention to "the voice of the people" is an often-cited reason for the failure of all kinds of community engagement and involvement efforts, including those centered on conflict resolution and peace.

How participants' voices are included in the decision-making process is most readily captured by various models of participation. Quite popular among these models is the five stances Wilcox (1994) presented based on the work of Sherry Arnstein. At the very lowest level is *information* or simply telling people what is planned. Clearly, simply providing an open forum where community members are told what is planned hardly constitutes a genuine attempt to hear different perspectives. Any community engagement or peacebuilding efforts built on a culture that only embraces an information approach cannot be said to constitute

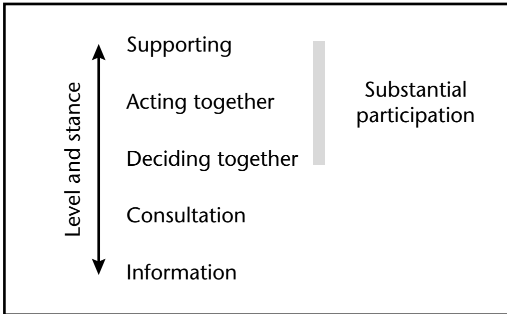

FIGURE 1.1 Five stances for community engagement projects (Wilcox, 1994)

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any effort to actually listen. In Macnamara's language, these efforts are built on an architecture of speaking (in other words, they do not have a culture of listening). As one ascends the Wilcox ladder, control moves from initiators to community members (see Figure 1.1), thus creating different listening cultures.

Even in these higher rungs, however, listening can still become a catchphrase rather than an embedded practice that involves earnestly seeking to understand multiple perspectives. For instance, Wilcox noted that when engaging in *consultation*, community members may be offered a variety of options, which then requires listening to the feedback provided about each option. But as we have already suggested, simply providing space to hear feedback does little to ensure that feedback is actually utilized in decision making. Consultation, therefore, seems more about allowing people to feel heard than about employing genuine listening. Similarly, when *deciding together,* although there is greater engagement when choosing among possible solutions, unless sufficient time and resources are devoted to developing actual processes of listening, this rung can look much more like consultation than a new form of participation.

Regardless of the type of participation utilized in a given project, community engagement and peacebuilding practitioners should make their listening culture more explicit. As one notable example, in their *Participation, Leadership, and Civic Engagement* (PLACE) report, the County Board of Arlington, VA (2012) provided clear acknowledgment of how they envisioned community participation in their stated values of inclusiveness, individual activism, long-range planning, respect for process, level playing field for all, personal connections, reach the individual, responsive, no predetermined outcomes, volunteerism, and progressive nature of Arlington. Moreover, they expressed a commitment to "listen to all concerns" because "good ideas can come from anywhere" (p. 11).

When explicit statements about listening are not available, culture can be gleaned from the policies already in place as well as internal and external politics enabling and constraining different levels of listening practice. Policies for listening are more than vague philosophies; they include specific directives and

guidelines to relevant departments, units, and agencies on who is to be listened to and how listening is to be conducted. Even if the PLACE document did not have explicit value statements, for instance, we could glean their listening culture from various documents such as the *Six-Step Public Engagement Guide for Capital Projects* which outlines engagement policies that articulate how to, for instance, define the scope of a project, identify relevant stakeholders, and determine how much engagement is appropriate (Arlington County Office of Communications and Public Engagement, 2018). Within this document, we find several explicit directives to "work with stakeholders in a cooperative and collaborative way" and "ensure public notice and engagement is based on building trust and seeking to involve all stakeholders and range of perspectives, without predetermined outcomes." We also find, however, examples that, on the surface, seem reasonable but that nevertheless may be grounded in internal or external political pressure. For instance, several "activities [that] do not require an engagement plan" are listed including "water service line maintenance" and "pothole and patching." To repair a water service line or fill a pothole seems apolitical, though which lines to repair or potholes to prioritize for filling can be quite political. Who decides which of these issues are most salient to a community? What internal (e.g., inter-agency) and external (e.g., social or cultural milieu) politics helps to decide (oftentimes unconsciously) which projects are most important or get funded? Does the public have a voice in determining project priority, budget allocation, or the schedule and timing of meetings? More generally, prioritization and issue salience are likely governed (or at least dictated) by specific policies and politics, in which case there are also likely available structures/processes, technologies, and resources (including skill development opportunities for leaders and community members) that assist in decision making and project implementation.

Efforts by community engagement and peacebuilding initiatives to invite input, address critics, and monitor social media conversations should also include explicit processes and training in the skills that enable leaders and community members to make sense of the vast diversity within the public commentary. At a basic level, decisions must be made on who is delegated these responsibilities, including which units, departments, agencies, and people within these entities are responsible for listening. What processes are in place that enable the highest likelihood that multiple perspectives are not only invited but actually heard? Within job descriptions used to hire practitioners or decide on contractors, how often do words that signal a listening culture (e.g., communication, engagement, consultation, collaboration) appear?

Within the budgets of those units, departments, and agencies responsible for opening spaces for public engagement, what technologies and other resources (e.g., human resources, time, financial) are available to enable greater listening? And what opportunities to learn new listening-related skills (e.g., relationship building, two-way dialogue, validating emotions) are made available? Functions such as research and processing public correspondence (e.g., emails, letters,

voicemail) seem, on the surface, dedicated to some form of listening, though as we mentioned at the start of this chapter, those processes can leave important voices out of the larger conversation if enough attention is not paid to how information is collected and analyzed.

The final element of Macnamara's concept of an architecture of listening is how departments or teams focused on attending and responding to public comments (like research or public relations) are held accountable for acting on the information they hear. What gets sent to decision makers and ultimately gets reported in public-facing documents? Who decides how best to discuss "sensitive issues" or "critical commentary" with those in decision-making positions? And how do community engagement and peacebuilding teams decide when not to act on minority or majority opinions expressed in open forums, private emails, or other non-public-facing documents (letters, voicemails, surveys, interviews, etc.)?

Summary

Although listening is most readily conceptualized as an individual (intrapersonal) or interpersonal act, organizations, including those with community engagement or peacebuilding missions, also take a stance on the importance and role of listening in their work. It is important to note that the systems created to enable genuine listening at scale do not replace human listeners, though they can help "facilitate communication that is delegated, mediated, and asynchronous" (Macnamara, 2020, p. 391). Moreover, they cannot simply be add-ons or afterthoughts but rather must be built into the very fabric of any large-scale listening endeavor (i.e., an architecture of listening). The "open culture, policies, resources, technologies, and skills to facilitate listening" (p. 393) as well as the way in which units responsible for attending to myriad perspectives are held accountable should be accepted as essential by all involved – from executive-level leadership who likely plan or orchestrate listening events to the practitioners doing the work. Moreover, these elements can be used as a check to the infrastructure and practices used in the field. In general, the necessity of scaling a concept such as listening means that we take those activities and ideas developed and shown to work in interpersonal settings, with the goal of meeting the needs of the masses. It does not mean, however, that we extrapolate all elements of interpersonal listening, as our discussion on empathy and "changing hearts and minds" above indicated. It does mean that we can utilize specific methods of listening at scale, some of the more popular of which we summarize below.

Methods for large-scale listening

While recognizing there are important differences (as well as the wide variety of approaches and frameworks within each), community engagement and peacebuilding efforts have much in common – the need to establish and agree

on achievable and measurable goals, the importance of trust, and the need for conflict resolution and management to name but a few. Efforts to listen to, amplify voices of, or otherwise include multiple perspectives in decision making go by various names such as community involvement, collaboration, public consultation, public forums, dialogue, and deliberation (see Schooler, Chapter 2). And, there are iterations found in practices such as participatory budgeting, public planning (urban development), democracy building, and citizen panels.

Importantly, any one of these ways to engage or invite relevant stakeholders into the decision-making process can be developed and administered with more or less attention to actual participation (and, as we raised above, more or less likelihood that genuine listening will occur). Moreover, community engagement and peacebuilding practitioners can utilize various methods for listening to match their goal(s) based on the time and other resources available to actually implement genuine listening. Next, we chart several standard methods for listening used in community engagement and peacebuilding efforts with a focus on those methods that reflect our notion that successful listening must move beyond the mere impression that it happened.

Participatory action research

Administering a survey or conducting a set of town halls (or a more formal listening tour) is often little more than a nod to inviting genuine participation. If, however, these methods are situated within models of Participatory Action Research (PAR) or Community-based PAR (CBPAR), then they begin to look less like one-way, asymmetrical research designs and more like true two-way, symmetrical listening-based designs that place relationships at their core (Ferguson, 2018). The problem with most approaches that attempt to use research as a form of honest community participation is that community members are rarely consulted in its design, analysis, or interpretation. PAR and CBPAR, on the other hand, are built on "a set of principles and practices for originating, designing, conducting, analysing and acting on a piece of research" distinguished by the following characteristics (Pain et al., 2011, p. 2):

- Driven by participants (a group of people who have a stake in the environmental issue being researched), rather than an outside sponsor, funder, or academic (although they may be invited to help);
- Offers a democratic model of who can produce, own and use knowledge;
- Collaborative at every stage, involving discussion, pooling skills and working together; and
- Intended to result in some action, change, or improvement on the issue being researched.

As a model, PAR emphasizes listening to and across participants as part of the questioning process. For example, PAR encourages participation and recognizes the importance of hearing from those who have been ignored or unheard. Learning is reversed as community members become the source of local information. As a result, critical thinking and listening are key elements of the questioning process of the PAR approach. While Fine (2006) and others (e.g., Manzo & Brightbill, 2007) suggest that listening is both an ethical component of PAR and a necessary element when engaging in PAR activities, Krueger-Henney (2016) has argued for the inclusion of intentional social listening as "PAR is full of these ambiguous and in-between spaces that are packed with uncertainties and that can blur visions of constructing counter-hegemonic, anti-racist, and decolonial inquiries" (p. 57). Patel (2016) contended that a greater understanding of the nature and role of listening within PAR processes is needed as it is through listening that co-researchers can address those "social, physical, and ethical locations, which profoundly compromise the potential for transformational change" (p. 5).

Asset based community development

Similar to PAR, Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) begins with the assumption that local people have the capacity to build strong communities (Kretzmann, 2010; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). While traditional models of community engagement begin with "needs assessments," that is surveys designed by "experts" that assess the problems faced within a community, ABCD centers on a community's assets and strengths. This change is important as it allows individuals to emphasize abilities and possibilities of a community, rather than problems or other negative framings. As a community-driven model, professionals act as facilitators, not experts, drawing on co-created local assets. This emphasis recognizes that change is community driven and that the members of a community are both the agents and the drivers of change (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Mathie et al., 2017). Thus, central to this approach is the relationship building that occurs when community members interact with one another as active citizens rather than as clients receiving a service from an institution or agency (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

One technique that follows the principles of ABCD is the charrette, most often used in community planning and urban development wherein there is known or heightened potential for confrontation between developers and residents (Lennertz & Lutzenhiser, 2017). While a charrette can be adapted to a variety of project types, it typically focuses on design-related projects. As a part of this process, a team of stakeholders (e.g., government officials, citizens, developers) work together to develop and implement a plan centered on a specific goal or project. The basic charrette design involves short, intensive meetings encompassing as many stakeholders as possible, who collaborate to identify possible problems and debate potential solutions. Notably, the charrette planning process

has, over time, been compressed into a short period of time (i.e., hours or days), though it was originally devised as an intense and weeks-long process that brings together the greatest number of stakeholders, promotes feelings that all parties are being heard, heightens creativity and collaboration, and builds a shared vision.

Listening circles

Listening Circles (LCs), or Councils, are perhaps the large-scale listening method most closely aligned with how listening is conceptualized in the interpersonal domain. LCs use storytelling as a means of promoting empathy, building emotional connections, and fostering mutual understanding (Higgins, 2011). They consist of 10–25 members facing one another in a circle, typically with 1–2 trained facilitators, who brief participants on the rules: everyone participates via speaking and/or listening; only one person at a time can speak, although speaking is not mandatory; and speaking turns are often signaled by holding an object (e.g., stick, ball), which is passed from person to person or placed in the middle of the circle to be picked up by another group member (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017). As Itzchakov and Kluger (2017) described, facilitators "invite the participants to consider four 'intentions' when they participate: to listen from the heart, to talk from the heart, to talk succinctly, and to talk with spontaneity" (p. 664). While neutral expressions of support are encouraged (e.g., "Oh" or "Amen"), circle members are asked to avoid providing positive or negative feedback. Following several practice sessions, facilitators identify a topic of discussion.

The LC model is at the heart of a practice utilized by the *Alluvial Collective* (2021; AC; formerly the William Winter Institute of Racial Reconciliation). Since 1999, the AC has hosted a series of events they call *The Welcome Table* ("Table") which highlight the importance of "listening, storytelling, and relationship building as prerequisites for producing real and measurable change" (see *The Welcome Table*). To date, the AC has made measurable change in communities and school districts across Mississippi. For instance, the AC convened a set of Tables between 2015 and 2016 in Lafayette County, Mississippi, from which grew an ongoing and developing project around lynching memorialization (Lafayette County Remembrance Project, 2021). Members of these Tables were invited, as were other members of the community, to an April 2017 presentation by a Northeastern Law School student who was conducting research on lynching. By November 2017, a formal steering committee was formed to research the feasibility of placing markers around the county. The first marker memorialized Elwood Higginbottom and was unveiled in an October 2018 ceremony that drew over 500 people. One additional marker has been placed on the grounds of the county courthouse to memorialize the seven known lynching victims in the county, including Mr. Higginbottom. Although the *Welcome Table* is not the only part of the AC's important work, it opens a space for honest conversation, founded on the principle that participants listen first to understand. More importantly, such listening can lead to further action

and notable change that is community driven and sustainable. Of course, *can* is the operative word in that last sentence as systemic change does not necessarily follow individual shifts in attitudes, mindsets, or opinions.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is, according to Forsberg (2001), "the process of developing a mutual conciliatory accommodation between formerly antagonistic groups" (p. 63). This definition assumes the commitment of all parties in conflict to ending hostility and creating a conducive environment for lasting peace, a process that requires acknowledgment of the past so "that it will cease to poison the present and instead become simply the past" (Shriver, 2001, p. 259). Such acknowledgment is typically described in terms of four elements that facilitate reconciliation: truth-telling, forgiveness, justice, and peace (Pruitt & Kim, 1983, p. 225).[3]

Within truth-telling, there is an honest accounting of past injustices, allowing perpetrators to confess to wrongdoings and/or crimes and clarifying accountability. When done well, perpetrators express sincere remorse and repentance so that victims forgive their perpetrators, and victims are provided a platform to tell their stories. In most cases, post-traumatic experiences tend to be more painful when victims are not heard and supported (see Sankaranarayan et al., Chapter 9). When societies fail to provide platforms for victims to tell their stories and share their pains, it harvests bitterness, which can contribute to a spiral of violence. In contrast, creating an infrastructure in which victims narrate their suffering and perpetrators express sincere remorse is a step in the right direction. The combination of the two, perpetrators' confession and victims' narration, can enable victims to regain their dignity, and regaining one's dignity is vital in the reconciliation process; however, it may not bring complete closure (Shriver, 2001), and some have argued that forgiveness, or what Ledrach (1997) labeled mercy, "alone is superficial. It covers up. It moves on too quickly" (p. 28).

In *Listening for Democracy*, Andrew Dobson (2014) tells the story of Jo Berry, the daughter of Sir Anthony Berry who died in a 1984 bombing of the Grand Hotel in Brighton (UK), and Patrick Magee, the man imprisoned for planting the bomb. After Magee's release from prison in 2000, he and Berry began a series of conversations that involved what Dr. Scherto Gill of the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace called "deep listening" (that mirrors in many ways restorative justice practices; Johnston & Van Ness, 2011, Sotelo Castro, Chapter 10). Consistent with what we (above) suggested about genuine listening, Berry reflected that the point of her conversations with Magee was not to (p. 24)

> reach an end state such as reconciliation or forgiveness, but to focus on the process. And a key part of the process is listening … [What] is more important … is being interested in listening to the other perspective and trying to understand it, even if you are not willing to agree with it.

Similarly, Magee was quoted as referring "to listening when asked what he has learnt from his meetings with Berry: Slowing the dialogue down to ensure you hear properly and explain adequately may be the best means of engaging with someone you have hurt" (p. 24).

Because the reconciliation between Berry and Magee was primarily personal in nature (rather than systemic), their mode of compassionate listening seemed not only reasonable but perhaps ideal. When it comes to social polarization, intractable conflict, or larger-scale injustices, however, compassionate listening may fall on deaf ears. As we have already noted, it is largely void of action and does little about the systems and structures that perpetuate the violence that has led to a need for reconciliation. Thus, although both Berry and Magee gained insight from their conversations, it is unclear that these conversations did much to solve deep-seated structural issues that were the ultimate reason Magee staged his attack.

Therefore, the power of listening (and the larger process of reconciliation), if it is to be truly transformative, must include justice; that is, societies must create mechanisms to deal with wrongdoings so that injustices do not occur again. The question is not whether justice is important, but what is the best course of action that would not undermine the reconciliation? How, in the language of Pankhurst (1999, p. 244) can we get the balance (between justice and reconciliation) right? Goldstone (2000) best summarized the importance of justice in this way: "It is my belief that when nations ignore victims' calls for justice, they are condemning their people to the terrible consequences of ongoing hatred and revenge" (p. 60). Furthermore, ignoring victims' calls for justice can also create a vicious cycle of violence and revenge. Justice comes in many forms, of course. Some might opt for vengeful justice in order to gain instant gratification or, in some cases, short-term solutions. However, that form of justice tends to be "an-eye-for-an-eye [which] makes the whole world blind."[4]

To extend this metaphor, what reconciliation ultimately attempts is an eye-opening, but not one that focuses on the past. While the first three elements (truth-telling, forgiveness, and justice) involve looking back, peace is forward-looking. Understanding and learning from the past lays the foundation for charting a new path. That is what countries such as Ireland, South Africa, and Rwanda (see Mugume et al., Chapter 12) have done. Peace cannot be achieved until the past has been confronted and effectively dealt with. By tackling past injustices and committing to peace, perpetrators and victims can create conditions for future harmony, unity, cooperation, and security (Pruitt & Kim, 1983). As Lederach argued (1997, p. 28):

> with peace came images of harmony, unity, well-being. It is the feeling and prevalence of respect and security. But, it was observed, peace is not just for a few, and if it is preserved for the benefit of some and not others it represents a farce.

Of course, depending on the magnitude and severity of past misdeeds, the pain and trauma endured might be too severe to forgive. As was observed during the South African Truth and Reconciliation deliberations, some preferred a formal judicial process to handle some cases. However, there was a dilemma: When an entire group is implicated in past injustices and crimes as occurred in South Africa and Rwanda, how could one help a society move beyond its tragic past and herald a new era? One answer is to achieve a "balance between forgiveness and justice. Without justice, apology and forgiveness are hollow. Without forgiveness, a demand for justice is harsh. Both extremes are likely to derail the reconciliation process" (Pruitt & Kim, 1983, p. 223).

Summary

Reconciliation and the larger project of peacebuilding in a particular region should not be considered individual operations, and neither exists outside of a dynamic of community engagement and citizen participation. Each method we have discussed (and those that follow in the chapters of this book) are endeavors undertaken at the community level. The whole point of a book focused on the role of listening in building communities and peace is that we are human *through* (not in spite of) others, connected through our shared humanity. And yet, as Tutu observed, "You can only be human in a humane society. If you live with hatred and revenge in your heart, you dehumanize not only yourself, but your community" (as quoted in Krog, 1999, p. 143). A minimum requirement, thus, appears to be that parties should be willing to listen to each other with respect and without judgment. Those opportunities should, ideally, be built by the very people with the most at stake. And while a single event cannot resolve or heal problems in a community much less "bring" peace to a region marked by decades of intractable conflict, what they can do is "give people a voice and allow them to choose how to understand themselves and their relation to others and, especially, to live with difference" (Cleven et al., 2018, p. 55).

How to read this book

This book takes seriously the idea that listening is fundamental to engaging diverse others in meaningful change. What we want to highlight is the importance community engagement and peacebuilding scholars place on listening, and yet how this term is also often treated as a catchphrase rather than one deserving of close scrutiny. Communities "being served" by urban planning initiatives, community members "invited" to civic engagement initiatives, voters "attending" political listening tours, and stakeholders with competing interests asked to "engage" with peacebuilding efforts, may or may not actually be allowed "a voice" in the decision-making process, especially those who live on the margins; those voices are not, in fact, often heard. We hope this book will enable practitioners to develop the ability

to construct genuine listening moments and increase their awareness of how to successfully engage and empower "the people."

We have divided this book into two units, not because community engagement and peacebuilding are two distinctly different lines of scholarship, but because it allows us to provide an overview and multiple examples of each (to strike a balance between these related fields if you will). Each unit opens with a chapter that provides definitions of key terms and phrases and reviews past research at an aggregate level. Those chapters that follow these unit openers can be thought of as case studies of sorts, though not all authors provide in-depth exploration of a single method or project. What each chapter author does do, however, is provide practical guides for implementing their methods of practice. Finally, the astute reader has likely noticed we did not provide explicit definitions of community engagement or peacebuilding. We have done this intentionally, allowing each author to wrestle with those terms as they see fit.

Notes

1 Although a full review of what constitutes empathy is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is instructive to note the varied uses of this term as well as the conflation of empathy with other prosocial behaviors (e.g., Batson, 2009). Most notable is the distinction several make between empathy and sympathy, but also terms such as compassion, open-mindedness, intellectual humility, and moral sensitivity (see Mower, 2020). Regardless of the specific term used, from this perspective, competence in listening is one's ability to open space for someone to share personally sensitive information without fear of judgment, leading to enhanced understanding of one's emotions, thoughts, and feelings as well as emotional improvement and other markers of well-being (Jones, 2011).

2 Even the idea that someone merely "receives" aid suggests that past and perhaps current practices of international aid (and perhaps, as an extension, the community engagement and peacebuilding efforts often tied to these efforts) are grounded in a less-than-ideal culture of listening. As Johansson (2017) pointed out, "in peacekeeping research, even the terminology used indicates a tendency to downplay local perspectives, despite what is said" using as an example the work of Fortna and Howard who referred to "internationals … as active subjects [while] the local population is treated as passive and called the 'peacekept'" (p. 15). Although culture is more than language, how we talk about and reference the "objects" of our work provides one perspective on how we might view listening as something fully participatory or not.

3 When these differences involve understanding language and cultural differences (e.g., nuances and meaning that can shade interpretations even when people are from the same region or country and seemingly speak the same language), some process of intercultural mediation (IM) may be necessary (Katan, 2013).

4 This quote is attributed most often to Mahatma Gandhi.

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