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# PUBLIC RELATIONS THEORY II

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CHAPTER

12

# Public Relations Theory and Practice in Nation Building

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## INTRODUCTION

What is a nation? How are nations created? When does a nation cease to exist? For example, at what point did the region of the United States of America cease being an English colony and instead become a nation? Was it when the War of Independence ended (a war that the British call the American Revolution)? Was it when the United States first signed its Constitution? Or was it much later, perhaps after the Civil War, when Americans could clearly articulate a common vision of the nation that they belonged to? Questions about nations are not easily answered because building a nation requires more than just a declaration of independence. Nation building is a process that necessitates interactions between citizens and between the state and other nations. Indeed, as Burke points out in *Language as Symbolic Action*, identification is based on

the idea of similarity (1973, pp. 263–275) and differences, or negatives (1966, pp. 3–24). That is, individuals and nations understand themselves in relation to others, and in relation to what they are not. An approach to nation building that looks at how communication can contribute to national identity and unity is a timely endeavor. Communication, especially mass communication, has been discussed as a central part of most nation-building programs. However, nation building is a dynamic human process. A public relations approach to nation building utilizes a more elaborate model of communication that focuses on how meanings such as national identity, national unity, and the nation state are socially constructed.

Much attention has been given to defining a nation and exploring how nations are created and maintained (James, 1996). At the most basic level, a nation exists by the consent of its people and by recognition of a common heritage that is communicated by various social practices (Hobsbawm, 1994; Yack, 1999). Nations in all stages of economic, social, and political development rely on nation building to accomplish specific national goals. Nation building is a strategic process that involves various resources and policies, and communication is one of the most important of those resources.

Over the past 15 years there has been a growing interest in the application of public relations in the nation-building process. This chapter explores the role that public relations can play in the nation-building process. The first sections of the chapter explain the phenomenon of nation building and ground nation building in theories of political science and public relations. Relationship building is a dynamic activity. Relationships that foster nation building occur between governments and publics as well as between nation-states and publics in other countries. The next sections of the chapter explore various public relations theories and practices in internal and external nation building strategies. The chapter concludes with a discussion of public relations as a strategic and ethical approach to building national and international relationships.

## POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NATION BUILDING

The term *nation building* is associated with building political institutions in newly formed (or transformed) states (Huntington, 1968). The goal of the political institutions is to mediate the infrastructure demands by citizens for roads, schools, fire protection, and personal safety, with the political capabilities of the government. Nation building in this approach most accurately describes institution building. The creation of institutions such as political parties, nonpartisan professional organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) supportive of the government is an important part of the nation-building process. Other less tangible conditions are also necessary. For instance, creation of national identity and national unity are integral parts of the nation-building process.

### National Identity

The creation of a national identity is a foundation of the nation building process (Scott, 1966). A *national identity* can be defined as the conscious identification of a group of people with shared national goals. People often have many different identities—religious, ethnic, professional—that define who they are and what values they hold. Efforts to build national identity seek to create a loyalty to the nation that supersedes local or ethnic loyalties and will help a nation to maximize its development potential (Scott, 1966). Communication campaigns can be used to create national identities that allow a nation's people to think together and act together (Deutsch, 1963). Communication is a central part of nation building because communication channels act as relationship-building tools that bring citizens together and, in times of crisis or threats, can help to unify them. A national identity is a prerequisite to national unity and, therefore, must be part of the initial stages of nation building.

### National Unity

National unity refers to cultural orientations about events and institutions that bring people together and enable them to cooperate to achieve national goals (Emerson, 1966). National unity most often emerges when there is some kind of threat to a people who share common identifications. Nation unity creates a common ground that facilitates cooperative efforts for the benefit of the state. Creating and maintaining national unity is difficult in culturally diverse states where citizens do not already share national visions or have common enemies and goals (Foltz, 1966).

Examples of events in the United States that work to create shared identities and national unity include Thanksgiving celebrations, remembrance ceremonies and holidays for war veterans, and public events of mourning, such as what occurred as a result of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Every nation enacts ceremonies to celebrate religious, cultural, and social institutions as a means of building national unity.

National unity, national identity, and nation building are all created, maintained, and nurtured through strategic communication efforts. Interpersonal communication, mass media campaigns, and government policies all contribute to important national communication initiatives. Benier (1999), however, noted that state-controlled broadcast media (radio and television) are primary tools in many nation-building programs. Connor (1994) agreed, suggesting that one-way communication, from a national government to the people, is the preferred means of nation building. Although the link between communication and nation building is clear, the majority of the research that has addressed the linkage is not found in the communication literature, but

rather, in the political science literature. An examination of the two schools of thought that have most thoroughly explored the role of communication in nation building shows why a communication approach, grounded in public relations theory and practice, may help better explain nation building as a public-centered process.

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NATION BUILDING

Taylor (2000b) reviewed the literature on nation building and found that the field of political science has most clearly described the relationship between nation building and communication. The political science literature is split between two schools of thought: the primordialists and the integrationists. The primordialist approach is most often associated with anthropologist Clifford Geertz and political theorist Walker Connor. Geertz (1973) first described primordial sentiments as competing loyalties between groups. Geertz observed that ethnic or religious groups prefer to stay within their own community and will minimize contact with others. This practice is known as in-group and out-group identification. When taken to extremes, primordial sentiments can undermine the political and social balance within a culturally plural nation. Primordial sentiments often inhibit national unity efforts because heterogeneous ethnic affiliations create the "basis for the demarcation of autonomous political units" (Geertz, 1973, p. 110), rather than harmonious relations. In other words, primordial groups often oppose efforts aimed at national harmony and instead support interests of value to their own members. Nations where political parties encompass only one ethnic group, such as the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) in Malaysia, and the Serb Nationalist party (SNS) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, are examples of how primordial sentiments can have negative repercussions for the nation-building process.

Primordialist scholars have argued that in developing, multiethnic nations increased communication through radio, newspapers, and television can end the historical isolation of ethnic groups. However, when previously unrelated groups receive mediated messages about national and local issues, members of primordial groups become even more aware of the differences between themselves and other groups. In response to the new awareness of difference, groups often try to minimize contact with others. Primordialist scholars believe that communication can have negative repercussions for the nation state, because the increased communication between groups in culturally plural states can lead to secessionist movements and even civil wars.

Walker Connor (1972, 1992, 1994), a primordialist, has posited that one-way communication from governments to national publics increases ethnic identification and brings ethnic and religious issues to national attention. Connor argued that if the government officials who create the nation-building messages differ in language, dialect, or colloquialisms from their intended publics, their

messages might strengthen the cultural heterogeneity of the social group and draw attention to divisive rather than common traits. Thus, the primordialists argue, increased communication among different ethnic groups will foster conflict and separatism, rather than achieving the intended goal of nation building.

Although the primordialist approach acknowledges the role of communication, it does not explain why and how in some situations ethnic conflicts in the developing world has been minimized by communication. The ethnic conflicts in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo, although horrific, are the exceptions and not the rule for culturally plural states. In most nations, government communication serves an integrative function rather than a demarcative function.

A second approach to the role of communication in nation building can be found in the integrationist approach. Karl W. Deutsch argued that individuals and small groups became nations when various communication mediums allow people to share common social habits (1963, 1966a, 1966b). For Deutsch, social integration of individuals, groups, associations, and institutions is directly related to communication channels. Communication channels transfer information from one group or network to another and build the relations necessary for attaining national goals. More specifically, a nation is enacted by the communicative competency of both the government and its citizens (Deutsch, 1963). Communication competency allows nations, especially ethnically diverse nations, to foster cooperative relationships that achieve national goals.

Integration, through various communication channels, is the means through which nations are built. Integration, through communication, creates a collective national consciousness. Mediated messages through the print and broadcast channels, and now the Internet, create a collective consciousness that leads to national integration. However, there is much more to nation building than one-way communication. Mediated channels alone cannot, and never will, be the sole communicative element of national unity and nation building. Interpersonal communication and inter-organizational relationships are also needed.

If we were to shift nation-building research to focus on relationships, where would it fall in the communication research spectrum? The answer is obvious, public relations. Public relations theory and practice has the unique potential to create, maintain, and change relationships between citizens and governments. Public relations campaigns can be used to improve citizens' lives and to promote democracy in the developing world. For instance, literacy campaigns using public relations strategies and tactics can empower the uneducated and offer them opportunities to participate in the political process. Information campaigns about family planning can help women take control over their own futures. And campaigns for voter registration, voter education, and getting out the vote can provide marginalized individuals and groups with the knowledge and relational skills to articulate their needs in a political system. Given public relations' focus on relationship building, mediated

communication, and organizational adaptation, nation building might fall within a relationship-building framework as a subspecialty in public relations.

## RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

An approach to nation building that looks at how communication can contribute to national identity and unity is a timely endeavor. The political science literature on nation building reflects a political communication bias. Communication is viewed only as a channel or network in this literature. However, nation building is a dynamic human process. A public relations approach to nation building utilizes a more elaborate model of communication that focuses on how meanings are socially constructed. A public relations approach to nation building picks up where the integrationists leave off, because it offers a focus on communication and relationships. Although integrationism provides a starting point for a public relations approach to nation building, a communicative approach to nation building differs because it treats the process of communication rather than the content of messages, as that which shapes the collective consciousness of individuals, groups, communities, and the nation.

Although the uses for communication in the nation-building process are numerous, most considerations of communication in the nation building process have been limited to discussions of media ownership and control, national development programs, and mass communication technology and hardware (Bates, 1988; Hornik, 1988; Stevenson, 1988). Few dispute that communication acts as an important tool in the nation-building practices of developing nations. Recent research about development communication and nation building is starting to take a more participatory approach (Gudykunst & Moody, 2002). The next section of this chapter builds on the recent shift to participatory approaches to nation building. We argue that the importance of communication in nation building is found not so much in technological advances or the amount of information disseminated but in the relationships that communication creates, maintains, and alters.

### Relationship Building With National Publics

A new understanding of the relationship-building role that communication plays in the nation-building process is needed. Public relations offers a valuable lens through which to view the nation-building process. Early public relations assumptions held that public relations was a business and management function. However, today there are different perspectives that show how public relations contributes to relationship building and nation building. For instance, Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) identified public relations as a way to

rebuild community. Extending the Chicago School's concept of community, Kruckeberg and Starck argued:

public relations is better defined and practiced as the active attempt to restore and maintain a sense of community. Only with this goal as a primary objective can public relations become a full partner in the information and communication milieu that forms the lifeblood of United States society and, to a growing extent, the world. (1988, p. xi; cf. also, Starck & Kruckeberg, 2001)

If public relations can be used to rebuild communities in the United States, then it can also be used to create and recreate communities around the world. Moreover, Botan (1992) argued that public relations should be viewed as a tool to build relationships between previously unrelated social systems or as a tool to modify existing relationships between organizations and publics. When communication and public relations are viewed as tools for creating and maintaining relationships nationally, then the nation state emerges as a truly communicatively constructed system.

All nation-building campaigns include large communication components that are essentially public relations campaigns. Deutsch's integrationist theory provides the framework for a focus on the relationships that are created and maintained through communication. Public relations, as a tool for building relationships between previously unrelated social systems, offers a new approach to nation building. Because public relations focuses on how communication efforts are used to establish, maintain, or change relationships between organizations and publics, primarily mass publics, public relations is an appropriate, yet underutilized, approach to the study of nation building. For the past 15 years there has been a growing interest in the link between public relations and nation building, and the following applied examples show how public relations has been enacted in nation building efforts in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe.

Africa is one of many regions in the world that would benefit from nation-building efforts. The nations of Africa, created by colonialism with little regard for ethnic or cultural boundaries, have experienced political, economic, and social upheaval. Pratt (1985, 1986) discussed nation building in articles about public relations practitioners who represent multinational corporations (MNCs) in Africa. Pratt (1985) noted that developing nations in Africa attempt to establish practices that are "consistent with their political ideologies, level of development, established patterns of symbolic communication, and sociopolitical controls" (p. 12). Pratt's treatments of public relations in the developing world emerged as early and valuable contributions to our understanding of international public relations. Pratt's articles offered a different perspective on public relations practice, and much of the current work on international public relations and nation building is based on Pratt's analyses.

Africa is not alone in its need for nation building. The emerging democracies in Asia also recognize the value of public relations as a nation-building function. Mohd Hamdam Adnan, Honorary Secretary of the Institute for Public Relations in Malaysia, has outlined how public relations programs served the nation-building process in his country. Adnan (1986) highlighted public relations practices and government-sponsored communication programs utilizing two-way communication to "create permanent mutual understanding and harmony among individuals and organizations" (p. 42). Malaysian public relations activities attempted to "build a good image" and create unity for all members of the Malaysian society (p. 42).

Hamadah Karim also included nation building as a function of public relations. Karim (1989) described the Filipino and Singaporean governments' use of public relations offices to serve as nerve centers linking governmental agencies with various media sources. Practitioners facilitate relationship building between the government and the people and help create processes that allow for communication and feedback. Karim viewed nation building as an essential governmental function that helps to build the national character of developing nations. Moreover, nation building is linked to the creation and maintenance of national values. Public relations practitioners who assist with nation-building efforts need to understand the priorities and values of the host culture(s) and government structure. Karim (1989) acknowledged that the practice of public relations in developing nations "will become in time a part of the government's tool for nation building" (p. 21).

Van Leuven (1996) has also addressed the topic of nation building and public relations. After a 4-month study in Singapore and Malaysia, Van Leuven reported that public relations in Southeast Asia has progressed through a nation-building phase in which "virtually all public relations work emanated from government information ministries" (p. 210) to a regional interdependence phase whereby public relations departments and agencies create the majority of strategic communication messages. In the nation-building phase Van Leuven reported that the relationship between government and the media and government and the public is a one-way relationship. The government dominated the tone and content of communication. However, as the economy developed and new relationships were formed, Van Leuven acknowledged the government-media relationship as well as the government-public relationship has matured. Van Leuven's observations are correct. In many nations public relations has progressed from a complete monopoly of government control over national communication to a shared-power situation. However, nation building does not end once a nation begins to develop economically. More specifically, public relations for nation building must continuously ensure that all public voices are tolerated and valued, and government-public relationships are allowed to mature.

Taylor and Botan (1997), and Taylor (2000b), examined a nation building campaign in Malaysia. The Neighborliness Campaign was a public education campaign that attempted to build relationships between people of different ethnic groups in Malaysia. Worth noting is that the outcomes of nation-building campaigns like the Neighborliness Campaign are not always congruent with the stated goals of the planners. Nation building campaigns often have unanticipated and detrimental results for national identity and unity (Taylor, 2000b). In the case of the Neighborliness Campaign, interethnic tensions may have actually been exacerbated by the government's nation-building efforts. Taylor (2000b) found that Malaysians in the Neighborliness communities had lower levels of national unity and lower levels of national identity. One reason for this outcome may be the disconnect between the message of the Neighborliness Campaign which stated that all Malaysians were equal, and the government programs which favored one ethnic group over the others. The Malaysian government's failure to create consistent messages and enact consistent policies congruent to the goals of Neighborliness Campaign no doubt contributed to the unanticipated consequences of the effort.

Also worth noting is that governments are not the only organizations that can participate in creating nation-building messages. In a study of Bosnia, Taylor examined how NGOs contribute to nation building and civil society efforts (2000a; cf. also, Taylor & Kent, 2000). Many different types of social and political organizations seek to influence the direction of Bosnian civil society. Through news releases, news conferences, and invitations to the media to cover newsworthy events, NGOs seek to reach publics with pro-democracy and civil society messages. Increased dialogue with media representatives adds up to a new level of relationship building between the organizations that seek to improve the situation in a nation and the various publics who benefit from NGO actions. There is, however, another way that public relations theory and practice contribute to nation building—relationships at the international level.

### Relationship Building With International Publics

According to Boulding (1956), all societies have a stock of images, created by discourse, that represent organizations and nation-states. "The basic bond of any society, culture, subculture, or organization is a 'public image'" (Boulding, 1956, p. 64). Citizens have particular images (or conceptions) of their own nation in relations to other nations, and those images reflect specific values and emotions. People in one nation make attributions about those living in other nations even when they have not visited a particular country. And when individuals discuss their personal images with others, they contribute to the creation of public images. The public images of nation-states emanate from a "universe of discourse" (Boulding, 1956, p. 15). For instance, consider the

number of people who have never visited Iraq or Afghanistan, yet have an image of the nation and the people who live there?

Nations, like individuals and organizations, attempt to manage their image and create favorable impressions for particular audiences. Although national images can be changed through new information or experience, they are relatively enduring (Boulding, 1956). Efforts to shape national images are not a recent phenomenon. Nations throughout history have consciously attempted to alter national images for both domestic and international audiences. Indeed, the building, maintaining, and dismantling of national images has been traced back through biblical times and even to the ancient Egyptians (Kunczik, 1990).

An image that portrays a unified, stable, and quickly developing nation is a prerequisite for attracting and maintaining business ventures as well as gaining international development aid (Pratt, 1985). Nations that do not present a unified national image are often unable to attract foreign investment even when there is development potential. For example, South Africa and some of the former East Bloc nations regularly invite foreign investment, but, because they do not project an image of political stability to corporate audiences, they fail to gain international trust. Many nations are also focusing nation-building efforts on external publics. There are several reasons for this, but economic development may be one of the most important reasons why nations cultivate their image for external audiences. Although a unified national image is an important factor for any nation, for "small nations in particular, it is often crucially important for economic reasons to cultivate their national image abroad" (Kunczik, p. 22).

In a text directed toward readers in developing nations, Kunczik presented an historical overview of image cultivation by a variety of governments and offered practical applications on international image cultivation for practitioners and government leaders. International image cultivation is based on research about public relations, advertising, prejudice, attitudes, and political decision making (p. 7). Moreover, Kunczik's text explained dozens of successful and unsuccessful attempts by nations to cultivate their image in the international arena. In Kunczik's text, case studies are accompanied by prescriptions for public relations practitioners and governments on how to create bonds with journalists, prepare material for press kits, manage a press conference, and correct negative media portrayals. Kunczik's approach offered an overview of what variables are involved in the creation or changing of a national image in the international arena. Kunczik offered practical applications of international image cultivation and attempted to link the case studies in his book with traditional scientific research. Kunczik's final statement argued that "the conclusion to be drawn from the research findings and the experiences of the practitioners is that clearly the best form of image cultivation for states is for them to be democratic, to observe human rights, and to pursue policies of openness" (p. 282).

Other public relations scholars have discussed government public relations with international audiences. Signitzer and Coombs (1992) discussed how public diplomacy and public relations share similar assumptions and also share similar methodological practices. L'Etang (1998) also argued that the fields of diplomacy and public relations are historically linked. Manheim (1994) explored strategic public diplomacy, a communication process that "is practiced less as an art than as an applied social science of human behavior. It is . . . the practice of propaganda in the earliest sense of the term, but enlightened by half a century of empirical research into human motivation and behavior" (p. 7). Nations have employed strategic public diplomacy either to cultivate a positive international image or to minimize negative publicity. For instance, a 1983 study that focused on the impact of public relations campaigns in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) showed that "when Rhodesia hired a public relations firm to advise it, negative comment declined sharply in the *New York Times*, although incidents of violence remained virtually unaffected" (Albritton & Manheim, 1983, p. 622).

Albritton and Manheim (1983, 1985) examined how the public relations campaigns by developing nations are portrayed in the United States media. Their studies revealed that when developing nations such as Argentina, Indonesia, Korea, the Philippines, and Turkey retained American public relations agencies, the national image of each country, as portrayed in *New York Times* stories, improved (1985). Manheim (1994) later examined the strategic public diplomacy efforts of developing nations such as the Philippines, Korea, Kuwait, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and Argentina on United States policy makers and the American public. He found that public diplomacy campaigns were created and implemented "for purposes of improving the setting for which foreign policy decisions of interest . . . are made, and of stimulating or deterring . . . decision making" (1994, p. 158).

Clearly public relations plays an important role on the international level of relationship building at home and abroad. At home, nations seek to create their own national identities that will encourage citizens to differentiate themselves from their regional neighbors. Simultaneously, nations also attempt to create positive national images and to influence international media coverage for their own benefit. One question needs to be asked about public relations and nation building: What theories can be used to guide the practice and extend scholarly development? The next section discusses several theoretical models that have implications for public relations as a framework for nation building.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS THEORY

The practice of nation building continues today, and it will always continue as long as the nation-state exists as a viable economic, political, and social entity.

Nations are using strategic communication to build relationships between national governments and indigenous publics, as well as to build relationships with publics in other nations. Most of the nation-building communication follows a top-down model and serves the needs of the governments in power rather than the public in general. From a public relations standpoint, the focus on communicating the state's needs to the public, rather than developing stable relationships that cut across racial and ethnic boundaries, is problematic. Diamond (1990) suggests that in multiethnic nations, crosscutting cleavages or broad patterns of social alignment are central to creating a tolerant and enlightened citizenry. Indeed, the assumption of the top-down approach presupposes that a small group of decision makers, often from the elite class, knows what is best for all citizens.

A public relations approach to nation building assumes that what is ultimately more important is to create stable interpersonal and intergroup relationships, and to foster trust in the nation state as a viable and responsive social entity. Trust and cooperative relationships serve as foundations for stable nations (Taylor & Doerfel, 2003). Trust and cooperation are important because nations do not draw their strength from placating, silencing, suppressing, or privileging one group over another. Nations are strong when there exist many long-term relationships among various ethnic, social, and political groups. With relationships at the core of the nation-state, a public relations approach to nation building can be both practical and ethical.

### Theories to Guide Nation Building

Relational theory may offer a useful framework for a public relations perspective. If, as most definitions of public relations suggest, one of public relations' central strengths is its emphasis on relationship building as a means of creating trust and support among publics, then an approach to nation building that focuses on relational stability is warranted. Three public relations theoretical approaches that provide practical and ethical frameworks to nation building include coorientation, dialogue, and civil society.

*Coorientation theory* may help governments and organizations to identify and measure issues where organizations and publics differ. Stable interpersonal relationships (and by extension, inter-group relationships) are premised on the notion of intersubjectivity, or interpersonal behavioral models that help explain the actions of others. Coorientation theory examines how groups see each other and what they believe the other groups think about them. That is, in any interaction, individuals and groups have at least three perspectives to consider: (1) how they think about themselves (as honest, strategic, powerful, etc.), (2) how they view other individuals or groups (as self-serving, manipulative, elitist, etc.), and (3) how they think other individuals and groups view them.

Coorientation encompasses efforts to come to honest or objective understanding of other groups or organizations' position and to understand how other groups think about one's own group or organization. When (or if) both parties in an exchange share the same view(s) of the other, intersubjectivity has been achieved. Intersubjectivity is difficult and often unobtainable depending upon the degree of ideological, economic, or social distance between parties. A lack of intersubjectivity on the part of individuals is why it is so difficult for people in many nations of the world to understand why other nations fear, hate, or mistrust them.

*Coorientation* involves a commitment among individuals and groups to try to understand others' perceptions of reality and events, in spite of whether that definition is shared. For intersubjectivity to be achieved, both parties in an interaction must be willing to see the world differently and accept that the other's view of the world is not necessarily "wrong," only different (Broom, 1977; Springston & Keyton, 2001).

One approach to measuring or identifying coorientation is the idea of public relations field dynamics (PRFD). Springston and Keyton (2001) suggest that PRFD is a tool for coorientation "to identify which publics are potentially open for collaboration and which publics are not. In addition, PRFD can be used to determine the views of other publics on the issue central to the situation" (p. 123). The PRFD approach would be especially important for NGOs and social activist organizations to identify strategic partners when they seek to leverage activities. And, PRFD would also help governments to identify organizations, whether indigenous or external, that share similar national development objectives.

One of the starting points of a coorientational approach to nation building is understanding and tolerance. From a nation-building standpoint, efforts to promote cultural understanding and tolerance are practiced all the time. The Neighborliness Campaign in Malaysia is an example, although an unsuccessful one, where the government encouraged citizens from different ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) to come together in an attempt to promote understanding and tolerance among citizens. In the United States an assortment of secular events (speeches, parades, picnics, etc.) are used to bring together citizens from all walks of life in an effort to promote tolerance and intergroup understanding.

But coorientation is more than just tolerance. From a public relations standpoint, coorientation means that two or more individuals or parties have an awareness of how they are actually perceived by others not just a guess about what they think the other group or public thinks about them. They know. Coorientation requires individuals or groups to engage the other to learn about how they see the world and what they actually believe. To give a local example, for the United States to practice a coorientational perspective with other nations would require that the United States interact with citizens and leaders of

other nations and not just dismiss them as fanatics. Through interaction, United States leaders would eventually learn what the citizens of other nations actually think and believe about the United States—not from third-hand briefing reports by intelligence agencies but through actual interaction. Such a bold step would be an eye opener for any government. Although, as suggested above, nations can engage in formal coorientational assessment (through PRFD and other techniques), on the most basic level coorientation requires a commitment to understanding, a willingness to listen, and the capacity to change.

*Dialogic theory* is a second public relations approach to nation building that may be helpful for both scholars and practitioners. Like coorientational theory, dialogic theory suggests that understanding and tolerance of other individuals and groups is central to effective government–public relationships. Unlike coorientational theory, however, dialogue is about fostering honest and mutually beneficial relationships with individuals rather than groups. Dialogue is ideal for creating government–public relationships. That is, while coorientation may be useful for nations to understand how other nations or groups think about each other, dialogue necessitates a commitment to effective organization–individual relations. As Kent and Taylor (2002) explain, “dialogue is not about the ‘process’ used, it is about the products that emerge—trust, satisfaction, sympathy” (p. 32). According to Kent and Taylor:

Dialogue as an orientation includes five features: *mutuality*, or the recognition of organization–public relationships; *propinquity*, or the temporality and spontaneity of interactions with publics; *empathy*, or the supportiveness and confirmation of public goals and interests; *risk*, or the willingness to interact with individuals and publics on their own terms; and finally, *commitment*, or the extent to which an organization gives itself over to dialogue, interpretation, and understanding in its interactions with publics. (Kent & Taylor, 2002, pp. 24–25, authors’ emphasis)

A dialogic approach to nation building necessitates public forums and open decision making practices as a means to provide the framework for public participation. Indeed, although the dialogic approach to nation building does not require democratic political structures per se, it does privilege liberal democratic notions in which public participation and public voice are emphasized.

Dialogic theory in the nation-building process can be studied by examining the communication structures within a nation—the mass media, Internet and government Web sites, and government–citizen outreach efforts. Ultimately, successful nation building is premised on the development of civil society structures that try to meet the needs of an assortment of publics rather than simply serving the needs of those in power.

*Civil society theory* may provide a third framework for theorizing a public relations approach to nation building. When there is coorientation and dialogue between publics and government officials, then there is the potential

for civil society. Civil society describes a system whereby groups and organizations mediate the relationship between citizens and government. Taylor (2000a) described civil society development in Bosnia, noting that “public relations, through its focus on media relations and relationship-building, is an integral part of the civil society function. Civil society organizations need to reach various publics with information and create links between like-minded groups” (p. 3). Thus, examining relationships between groups and between governments and publics is one way to bring public relations and relational theory into nation building.

Civil society can be studied by examining the interpersonal and inter-organizational linkages created and changed as citizens participate in groups that cross racial, ethnic, religious, class, and geographic regions and allegiances. In a civil society, people belong to many groups that focus on different interests. Network methodology can be used to measure relationship building in civil society efforts. Taylor and Doerfel (2003) measured the strength of a civil society movement in Croatia. Using measures such as network density, structural holes, and multiplex links, Taylor and Doerfel were able to identify the organizations that were most central to the civil society movement. Moreover, the researchers identified which types of organizations serve necessary network roles. Coorientation, dialogue, and civil society theories provide both practical and ethical frameworks for enacting and studying nation building.

### Importance of Public Relations to Nation Building

The previous sections have shown that there are a variety of ways to look at the relationship between communication and nation building. The practice of nation building includes efforts by developing national governments to promote a national identity and unity. Many developing nations are still recovering from the vestiges of colonialism and communism. These countries create national communication campaigns to assist in their political, social, and economic development. Because many developing nations encompass various ethnic and religious groups, governments often sense a need for unifying national ideologies to maintain popular support (or the status quo). Developed nations such as those from the former Eastern Bloc have similar nation-building needs for identity building. Communication campaigns can help people during difficult times of social, economic, and identity transformation.

Although the importance of a unifying national vision is obvious—it leads to collective action on the part of citizens, it allows a government to conserve resources and focus national energies—a stable nation cannot be built at the expense of segments of its citizenry. Top-down public relations efforts by officials, whether elected or appointed, that attempt to create national identities superseding local and ethnic loyalties to solidify support for a non-democratic government are self-serving. These one-way campaigns are doomed to fail

to achieve their goals because they fail to address the real needs of a transitional nation—strong interpersonal and inter-organizational relationships that will strengthen the nation state. The coorientation, dialogic, and civil society theories of nation building, however, offer better models because of their ability to create solidarity, tolerance, and mutual understanding among citizens, governments, groups, organizations, and international publics.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed how public relations has been involved in many facets of nation building in Asia, Africa, and Europe. Inherent in nation building is the idea of connectiveness and linkages that build relationships between governments and publics as well as between publics that have been previously unrelated. Relationships between governments and publics created through public relations are an important part of the national development process. Moreover, relationships are not limited to relationships between governments and internal publics. Communication for national development also includes public diplomacy practices and communication to multinational corporations.

Public relations has enormous democratic potential both as a strategic communication function and as a relationship-building function. Through both strategic campaign activities and relational communication activities, public relations can improve citizens' lives and promote democracy throughout the world. Public relations professionals need to look at how communication in general and public relations in particular can be used in all parts of the world to help identify and solve local and national problems. Many nations already employ communication campaigns as a tool to maintain or alter relationships. Communication campaigns can educate and empower, level the playing field, and bring the nation to a state of equilibrium in which all people have the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential.

Relationship building includes those efforts that attempt to create the conditions under which people of various ethnic groups can be mobilized to cooperate with each other. Moreover, relationship building helps to achieve national goals such as mobilization during times of external threat or for national development objectives.

A public relations approach to nation building, with an explicit focus on relationships at both the interpersonal and organization–public levels, can extend both the primordialist and integrationist models. Relationship building is not easily accomplished; and creating relationships among individuals of various ethnic groups and between individuals and the government still requires additional study. However, several assumptions about communication, relationships, and public relations campaigns that guide nation building already exist.

Interpersonal and inter-organizational relationships can be encouraged through dialogic, coorientational, and civil society efforts. Communication campaigns are one vehicle for relationship building. Relationships must also be negotiated between individuals and governments. Negotiation involves compromise, trust, risk, mutuality, and respect for other parties—features of dialogue. Communication campaigns need to be flexible, and organizations must be able to address the diverse needs of publics.

The principles of dialogue and mutuality serve as the foundation for a public relations approach to nation building and call for both interpersonal and organization–public relationships. Mutual understanding and the recognition that some change on the part of the interactants must be the goal of communication efforts. The assumptions of the coorientational, dialogic, and civil-society approaches also provide a rationale for the locus of control of nation building to be placed not with the government, but with the people who participate in civil society organizations. Jacobson and Jang (2002) noted that NGOs and civil-society organizations have “influenced forums that are traditionally dominated by state actors. They facilitate informed participation in policy processes at both the national and international levels” (p. 350). Indeed, in many societies the civil society organizations play the most influential role in citizens' lives. Coorientational, dialogic, and civil-society approaches may be best to explain and describe this new type of grass-roots development.

The nation-building principles discussed here are only a starting point. Perhaps our most important contribution to the study of nation building is the attempt to reframe the way that researchers examine communication in the nation-building process. Communication as a tool for nation building must be understood as that which creates and maintains relationships, and not simply as a channel or medium for government communication efforts.

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