

# Understanding Intergroup Conflict Complexity: An Application of the Socioecological Framework and the Integrative Identity Negotiation Theory

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## Keywords

Citizenship Amendment Act, identity negotiation theory, intercultural conflict competence, intergroup conflict, intergroup dialogue, social-ecological analysis.

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doi: 10.1111/ncmr.12190

## Abstract

This research article used a controversial in-progress conflict case story, namely the Citizenship Amendment Act in India, to illustrate the benefit of using a combined socioecological framework and integrative identity negotiation theory in explaining intergroup conflict complexity. The essay is structured in four sections. First, we present a highly controversial conflict case story of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that was recently passed in India. The real-life case story is embedded in the nexus of multifaceted identity conflict and multileveled socioecological interpretations. Second, we introduce the socioecological (SE) framework and its essential principles and illustrative examples of the various levels of analysis. Third, we review selective assumptions of the integrative identity negotiation theory (IINT) and, together with the SE framework, analyze the CAA India case story with explanatory depth and multilevel insights. Fourth, we conclude with a summary and seven strategy recommendations that can be applied to managing polarized intergroup conflict complexity constructively.

With the recent heartbreaking news event on the violent death of Mr. George Floyd's pleading for his life under the knee of Officer Derek Chauvin: "I can't breathe," the Black Lives Matter movement erupted across the globe. Police reform, election reform, immigration reform are issues that demand a systematic and judicious analysis at multiple institutional and contextual levels. To engage in difficult conversations, polarized group members need to come together to listen, to converse, and to co-create the conditions that lead to a long-term peace-building resolution. In this article, we analyzed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) case story in India from a dual lens of the socioecological framework and the integrative identity negotiation theory. Through the careful analysis of the CAA case from a multilevel identity stance, a set of civil discourse strategies is provided to promote constructive dialogue and inclusive listening processes between groups, communities, and various nation states.

## Introduction

While conflict is inevitable in all walks of life, researchers have focused on the study of either intercultural conflict or community conflict on one level of analysis to the neglect of multilevel analysis consideration. We recognize that most conflict scholars have focused on one particular identity locus (e.g., China vs. U.S. national culture or multiple cultures; Zhang, Ting-Toomey, & Oetzel, 2014) and significantly contributed to the intercultural conflict literature; however, this essay advocates special attention to the

multiple identity complexity factor in explaining a contentious intergroup conflict case. We believe that a systematic case study analysis method would help to yield deep insights in understanding the multilayered conflict contexts in the global arena.

Indeed, in the field of conflict communication, scholars have theorized about and discussed various ways of dealing with conflicts and conflict competence issues in interpersonal, workplace, community, and intercultural–international contexts (see, Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2013). Researchers have also espoused different frameworks to explain intergroup conflict and division (for a detailed review, see Bohm, Rusch, & Baron, 2018; see also, Dorjee, 2013; Ellis, 2010; Giles, Reid, & Harwood, 2010). Dorjee (2013), for example, discussed the principles of nonviolence and middle way approach in Buddhism and advanced middle way-based dialogue to resolving intergroup conflict. Ellis (2010) applied the principles of argumentation and deliberation to ethnopolitically divided groups, such as Israelis and Palestinians, to address difficult and intractable identity conflicts. More recently, Ellis (2019) also advocated for the importance of closely attending to macro state-level, mid civil societal-level, and individual-level framing of ethnopolitical conflict processes. Notably, this case study analytical approach is intended to fill in the gap of a much-needed multilevel explanation of a polarized intergroup conflict case.

In addition to the importance of emphasizing multilevel conflict analysis, we contend that communication is central to managing all types of conflict and, in particular, we focus on understanding intergroup conflict complexity. The development of this research is based on three premises. First, we assert that any polarized intergroup conflict issues are oftentimes located in the various meaning construction processes of identity complexity from multiple group membership standpoints (Tropp, 2012; Yuki & Brewer, 2014). Second, these multifaceted identity construction processes can be understood systematically from a multilayered, socioecological framework (Oetzel, Dhar, & Kirschbaum, 2007; Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, & Rinderle, 2006). Third, we believe that in order to address obdurate intergroup conflict, group members need to come together to learn to listen, to dialogue, to reframe, and to find some common ground amidst the polarized conflict chaos (Barge, 2006; Broome, 2013; Frantell, Miles, & Ruwe, 2019; Littlejohn, 2006; Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007).

We propose the use of both the social–ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dorjee, Baig, & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Oetzel et al., 2006; Stokols, 1996) and the integrative identity negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2015, 2019) to understand intractable intergroup conflict issues. The rationale for using this dual lens is multifold. First, conflict parties are located in dynamic socioecological spaces and how they see themselves and how others attribute identity motivations to them are shaped by macro-, exo-, meso-, micro-, and interaction-level factors. Second, sociocultural identity construction and negotiation play a central role in perceived intergroup conflict escalation and deescalation. Third, competent and respectful identity negotiation has the best chance to build intergroup reconciliation and peace on multiple levels of identity attunement. These points will be elaborated upon in later sections.

To the best of our knowledge, conflict scholars or practitioners have not yet analyzed deeply the multiple-level dynamics and intergroup identity-laced conflict processes in the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) case development in India. This controversial CAA case story holds some parallels for understanding the U.S. DREAM (Development, Relief, Education for Alien Minors) Act which lasted 19 years of evolution and with continuous uproars and sociopolitical debates (spanning from 2001 to current 2020 U.S. election year; The DREAM Act, 2019). The goal of the DREAM Act is to enact official legislation to allow young undocumented children (under 18) to forge a pathway to attain U.S. citizenship; thus, the storyline has some parallels to the CAA case story. This CAA case history also involves entrenched sociopolitical-related issues including immigration, health, climate, economy, and religious freedom during and after an election season in the United States. These divisive issues furthermore reverberate in countries such as Germany, United Kingdom, and France. As it now stands, in the U.S. political canvas, Republicans and Democrats continuously and vehemently disagree over these “hot button” issues and their respective policies. We believe that these heated polarized arguments are predominantly embedded in identity complexity and multilayered socioecological circumstances.

We organize this study in four sections. First, we present a highly controversial conflict case story of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that was recently passed in India. The real-life case story is embedded in multifaceted identity conflict struggles and challenges. Second, we introduce the socioecological (SE) framework and its essential principles and the various levels of contextual analysis: macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem. Third, we review relevant assumptions and concepts of the integrative identity negotiation theory and, together with the SE framework, examine the CAA India case story with explanatory depth. Lastly, we conclude with a summary and seven strategy recommendations that can be applied to managing intergroup conflict complexity mindfully and constructively.

## **A Case Story: The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in India**

Beginning from December 2019 to the present timeline of 2020, India has been reeling with the contentious citizenship amendment issues. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with India's Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah officially introduced a Citizen Amendment Bill (CAB). On December 10, 2019, the CAB was passed in the Lower House of the Parliament (Lok Sabha), and few days later, it was cleared in the Upper House of the Parliament (Rajya Sabha). The Indian President, Ram Nath Kovind, then signed it into law, and thus, it became the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). In essence, the law provides a fast-track pathway for persecuted religious minorities, namely Hindus, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, Parsi, and Christians, from the neighboring countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan in obtaining Indian citizenship based on their faith. According to the BJP, these three are Islamic countries where Muslims enjoy religious freedom while other religious minorities (e.g., Hindus and Christians) have been historically persecuted and, thus, lack religious freedom. CAA is intended to protect the religious freedom rights of the specified minority immigrants in India from the three Islamic neighboring countries. The passing of CAA provided them with official passageway forward to attain Indian citizenship. However, the new bill glaringly excludes persecuted Muslims such as Shi'a and Ahmadi from applying for Indian citizenship based on their faith. In this regard, CAA has been challenged as an unsecular amendment and highly discriminatory against Muslims.

The Citizenship Amendment Act or CAA has become a decidedly thorny conflict issue among Indians, especially between the two major political parties. BJP argued that CAA was designed and intended for protecting the previously mentioned persecuted religious minorities (e.g., Hindus and Sikhs) and their religious freedom from the aforementioned Muslim countries. Thus, BJP fulfilled its campaign promise made during parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2019. To counter the BJP-approved Citizenship Amendment Act, the Congress Party argued against CAA for violating the secular constitutional foundation of India and fearing its use to disfranchise Indian Muslims.

Since CAA became the law, anti-CAA protests have erupted in various parts of India, especially in the northeast Indian state of Assam. Some alleged that BJP is making India a Hindu nation. Many Chief Ministers of States, such as Kerala, Punjab, and West Bengal, announced that they will not implement the law in their states. The Congress Party, and including some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), submitted petitions to the Supreme Court of India challenging the constitutionality of CAA as it violates Section 14 (equality before the law) of the Indian Constitution. International bodies such as the United Nations and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) have expressed their concerns about the law.

All of these factional voices demonstrate socioecological entanglement and conflict complexity in this one real-life discordant case. The case story itself calls for an urgent need for a holistic-contextual perspective to tease out the various multilevel conflict density factors. We will first offer a synoptic discussion on the socioecological (SE) framework's core principles and ideas, and then use SE framework, along with the integrative identity negotiation theory (IINT) discussed later, to analyze the CAA case story with deeper heuristic insights.

## Socioecological (SE) Framework: Core Principles and Analytical Levels

Intercultural–intergroup conflict is a multilevel and multicontextual phenomenon. While past intercultural studies tend to use either a macro-level lens or a micro-level view to analyze intercultural or intergroup conflict, the social–ecological framework pays particular attention to multiple levels of analysis of a complex conflict case. A multilevel framework in analyzing an intergroup conflict case provides the opportunity to understand (and possibly challenge) what are the deeply held assumptions of a particular cultural conflict worldview or particular group membership ideology (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2013).

A multilevel theorizing process may illustrate that a particular intercultural conflict case contains both consistencies and inconsistencies at multiple levels of analysis. Additionally, a holistic framework can illustrate the multitude of factors that shape cultural worldview-level, institutional-level, immediate community-level, and individual-level concerning conflict decoding process within and across distinct levels (Oetzel et al., 2006; Zhang & Ting-Toomey, 2014). On a broad level, Stokols (1996) explains SE framework consists of five core principles. First, communication outcomes are influenced by the cumulative effects of multiple physical, cultural, social, and temporal factors. Second, communication outcomes are also affected by individual attributes and specific situations. Third, social ecology incorporates concepts from systems theory, such as interdependence and homeostasis change, and also identifies the links between individuals and their broader contexts. Fourth, social ecology recognizes not only the interconnections among multiple settings, but also the interdependence of conditions within particular settings. Fifth, the SE framework is interdisciplinary, involves multilevel domain analysis, and incorporates diverse methodologies (Oetzel et al., 2006; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2013).

More specifically, in utilizing a socioecological (SE) multilevel theoretical framework, there are four levels of research analytical units: macro-, exo-, meso-, and micro-level analyses (Kilanowski, 2017). Brofenbrenner (1979) viewed these four SE contexts as nested Russian dolls with reciprocal causal effects influencing each sphere. The *macro-level* analysis refers to the larger sociocultural contexts, histories, worldviews, beliefs, values, and ideologies that shape the individual outlooks and the various embedded systems under this broad umbrella. The term *exo-level* (i.e., external environment to formal institutional environment emphasis) analysis refers to the larger, formal institutions (e.g., government agency system, courtroom system, police system, religious institution, healthcare system, or school system) which hold power resources and established personnel (with clear roles and responsibilities) to create, enforce, or modify policies and standards, and execute institutional rulings or doctrines that shape the various conflict ideologies, viewpoints, and experiences. Interestingly, based on a country's political system and policies, social to digital media and mass media factors can be located on either the exo-level analysis or the meso-level inquiry level, or on the threshold of both levels.

Intriguingly, contemporary mass media occupies an interesting position in the social–ecological model. The traditional mass media (e.g., BBC News and CNN news) can be located at the exo level of social institutional context of influence (e.g., in some countries, the governments run and control the media broadcasts, and in other countries, the media may occupy a more informal yet still widespread persuasion role). Alternatively, the contemporary social media role can also be located at multiple levels of analysis (e.g., on the exo, meso, and micro level)—depending on how the social media is being used (institutionally, communally, or interpersonally) and in what particular layered role membership or relational situations. These exo features often have direct to indirect (i.e., filtered or mediating) influence on the community-level or individual-level conflict attitudes, responses, and reactions. With the prevalence of social media usage (e.g., Twitter and Facebook) via both direct and filtered channels on a global scale, researchers using the SE framework may need to develop additional theoretical lens to account for the role of social or digital media on conflict communication (Cai & Fink, 2017).

The *meso-level* analysis refers to the immediate units of influence such as a local neighborhood, a local church or temple group, an extended family unit, a workplace setting, and social media niche group that

have some direct or indirect impact on the developmental conflict interactions. Finally, the *micro-level* analysis refers to both the intrapersonal-level (i.e., individuated and sociocultural identity-based meaning construction on the personal level, attributional level, and conflict emotions) and interpersonal-level features (e.g., the ongoing interpersonal conflicts, conflict eyewitnesses, or the actual face-to-face or mediated conflict encounters) plus the actual physical settings in which the individuals live their daily lives. The same micro-level context also emphasizes the importance of how individuals can act as active agents to construct or reframe meanings and interpretations of a given intergroup conflict communication event. In addition to the macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem of analysis, Bronfenbrenner (1979) also later added a fifth context, the “chronosystem-level” analysis—this level refers to the evolution phases, transitions, patterns, and consequences of developmental conflict changes over time.

Nested in these multilayered socioecological contexts are the identities of faction leaders and the polarized public. In particular, political and religious identities seem to be at the core of CAA and contentious debates and protests. To unpack multifaceted identity issues in a complex conflict case, we gleaned some of the core assumptions and key concepts from the integrative identity negotiation (IIN) theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019) to deepen our case study analysis. While SE framework is a sound organizational schema to guide the systematic analysis of a complex conflict case story on multiple levels of attention, the IIN theory helps to bring in the essential explanatory concepts of *in situ* sociocultural membership identity construction and personal identity features (or ambitions) at various conflict dissonance or convergence levels. Furthermore, drawing from the IIN theory, the dynamic dialectical notions of, for example, membership inclusion and differentiation and identity continuity and change help to capture the emotional complexity that reflects contentious intergroup hostilities and arguments. Lastly, the IIN theory has also built-in theoretical assumptions and skill sets to move incompetent conflict negotiation performance to competent intergroup–interpersonal conflict practices.

## **Analyzing the “Citizenship Amendment Act” (CAA) Indian Case Story: Application of the Conjoint SE Framework and the Integrative Identity Negotiation Theory**

This section offers a synoptic review of the integrative identity negotiation (IIN) theory and its selective assumptions and relevant concepts. Together with the SE multicontextual framework, the dual lens is then used to analyze the CAA conflict case story from an identity-sensitive and contextual-sensitive schema.

### **Integrative Identity Negotiation (IIN) Theory: Selective Assumptions**

The integrative identity negotiation (IIN) theory (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2015, 2019) draws theoretical insights from several prominent theories, namely social identity complexity theory (SICT; Brewer, 1991, 2010), communication accommodation theory (CAT; Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2005; Giles, 2012), and identity negotiation theory (INT; Ting-Toomey, 2005). The IIN theory advocates for vitally attending to multiple salient sociocultural identity, sociorelational role identity, and personal identity issues in diverse ethnopolitical and social settings via competent communication skill sets.

Two selective assumptions (out of 10) in the IIN theory include the following. First, the core dynamics of people’s construction of multiple identities are as follows: sociocultural group membership identities (e.g., cultural/ethnic and religious memberships), sociorelational role identities (e.g., political/institutional affiliations, community/family roles), and personal identities (e.g., unique attributes) are formed via symbolic communication with others. Second, individuals in all sociocultural identity groups have the basic motivation needs for identity security, inclusion, interaction predictability, connection, and historical consistency on both group-based and person-based identity striving levels. However, too much emotional security will lead to tight and defensive ethnocentrism, and too much emotional vulnerability

will lead to anxiety or fear of outgroups or cultural strangers. The same underlying principle applies to the identity inclusion, predictability, connection, and historical consistency poles. The dialectical counterparts of the aforementioned dialectical spectrums are membership differentiation, interaction unpredictability, autonomy, and identity change spectrums. An optimal range exists on the various identity negotiation dialectical spectrums (e.g., concurrently, moving beyond the threshold spectrum points can lead to identity exclusion/marginalization, interaction chaos, disconnection, and identity strain and lost). The tripartite IIN identity facets are interdependent with the concepts of avowed identity and ascribed identity.

Broadly stated, avowed identity and ascribed identity influence social interactions. *Avowed identity* refers to how an actor attaches meanings to her or his own self-definitional identity labels or traits, and *ascribed identity* refers to how others assigned labels, meanings, or motives to the perceived others (Chen & Collier, 2012; Collier, 2005). Along the IIN's three facets of identity outlook, polarized group members can activate self-avowed identity claims and, concurrently, opposing members can ascribe stereotypic identity categories in constructing their filtered or biased meanings of their rivals' actions. While individuals (plus on the collective ingroup membership level), for example, can include self-avowed salient ethnic, racial, religious, and historical identity features, unfamiliar others may ascribe gender, sexual orientation, and age identity features as the primary membership identity motivations. On the sociorelational roles' facet, individuals may claim their generational and family roles as their vital self-avowed roles, while others may attribute political affiliation and military roles in constructing their adversarial images. Similarly, on the personal identity facet, for example, individuals may see their distinctive personality styles as ambiverts or omniverts, but others may ascribe polarized terms such as shy (introverts) or outgoing (extroverts) and interact with them according to preconceived identity and expectancy notions. Therefore, avowed and ascribed identities are intertwined with the tripartite IIN identity facets and filtered through biased intergroup stereotypes and presumptions.

Thus, from an intergroup communication framework, contentious/difficult issues and conversation more often than not involve negotiating interlaced social identities representing various group memberships and the relationships among the dominant group/s and the co-sociocultural groups (Dorjee, 2013; Giles, 2012; Giles et al., 2010). Relatedly, intergroup conflict complexity is defined as the *perceived or actual incompatibility of identity membership beliefs and ideologies, norms, face orientations, goals, emotions, scarce resources, styles/processes, and/or outcomes in a face-to-face or mediated context within a multi-layered, sociocultural embedded system across time*. The dominant and co-sociocultural group members often have different lived experiences based on socioeconomic status and power, gender, religion/spirituality, age, sexual orientation, race, abilities, and myriad of other variables. From the IIN theoretical lens, competent intergroup conflict negotiation entails the acquisition of inclusive knowledge of multiple intergroup histories and *in situ* interactional dynamics, practicing mind-shifting and behavioral code-switching skills, and mastering core conflict competence skills (e.g., inclusive listening, mutual-face concern dialogue, imaginative reframing, and being in-the-moment presence with mindfulness; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019).

The IIN theoretical insights concerning dialectical tensions or paradoxes can complement the SE framework in analyzing the controversial CAA case story. The identity complexity of CAA consists of political and religious ideologies and worldviews coupled with personal identity ambitions and power struggles and, concurrently, intertwining with the social media reports and segmentation of the public outcries and reactions. A systematic application of the integrative identity negotiation (IIN) lens in conjunction with the four levels of the SE framework is ideally suited to address these identity-loaded conflict complexity strata.



## Identity Negotiation Complexity at the Macro Level of Analysis

Historically and chronologically, Britain ruled India that consisted of all the regions of today's Pakistan and Bangladesh before 1947 (i.e., British India); there was no Pakistan and Bangladesh as separate nations then. India was partitioned in 1947 into India and Pakistan. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan was formed and became an independent country on August 14, 1947, and the following day (August 15, 1947), India became an independent country. Ideologically, India and Pakistan are different on political and religious levels (Gatrell, 2013).

While India is politically the largest democratic nation, Pakistan has formed itself into an Islamic democratic nation based on its constitution of 1956. Due to civil war and India's military intervention, East Pakistan seceded from Pakistan and became an independent nation of Bangladesh. These macro-level factors have impacted interstate relations among these nations such as territorial, diplomacy, and citizenship issues. For example, India and Pakistan have diplomatically managed to deal with Kashmir, terrorism, and interfaith conflicts among other issues.

At the macro level, Croucher Brazuinaite and Oommen (2012) identified religious principles/teachings toward conflict in three major world religions: Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity. These principles/teachings shape understanding of, and behavior toward, conflict. Arguably, religious ideology and divide are the dominant macro-level factor that may have contributed to CAA in India. Hinduism and Islam are radically different faiths in terms of religious ideologies and practices. For example, Hindus believe in thousands of gods and goddesses (e.g., Shiva, Indra, Vishnu, Brahma, Krishna, Saraswati, Uma Devi, Sheralvali, and others) and worship their idols, whereas Muslims believe in just one God—Allah and does not believe in idols (you cannot find idols in Mosques). India's history is replete with intractable religious conflicts and wars between Hindu and Muslim kings and respective faith followers (De La Fosse, 1917; Nilakanta Sastri & Srinivasachari, 1971). Ultimately, interfaith and power dynamic issues resulted in the partition of India and Pakistan (Hartnack, 2012). That said, millions of Muslims decided to live in India as Indians due to socio-cultural identification, a sense of ingroup loyalty or solidarity, and relational connectedness.

Integrative identity negotiation theory contented that identity complexity set that consists of salient or master sociocultural identity, sociorelational role identity, and personal identity and their accompanying dialectical themes need to be accounted for fully for effective identity negotiation to take place and moving forward to reach satisfactory conflict resolution. The CAA case in India embodies the complexity of this identity set and dialectical themes. Social identity is based upon both avowed (by self) and ascribed (by others) group membership construction, meanings, ingroup–outgroup viewpoints, and situational embeddedness. In accordance with the conjoint lens of both IIN theory and the SE framework, the CAA enactment reveals that religious faiths are used to construct and contest religious freedom and safety issues between dominant and religious minorities in India, especially Hindus and Muslim. As noted above, millions of Muslims chose India as their affiliated home country over Pakistan after the partition because of nationalism, loyalty, and relational obligation. However, they have been consistently marginalized as outgroup members from sociocultural and religious point of view based on their perceived religious minority status and perceived historical interfaith conflict. Reinforcing historical tradition, unfortunately, Muslims' religious identity is once again marked, excluded, and discriminated against as a result of the CAA and they experience identity differentiation, insecurity, vulnerability, and religious freedom violation.

Nested in this contentious identity complexity set of CAA are some of the dialectical themes highlighted in the IIN theory. According to the IIN theory lens, group members and individuals can affectively and cognitively swing between the identity dialectical poles of identity security–vulnerability, identity inclusion–differentiation, and identity consistency–change differently and situationally. These dialectical struggles can be experienced within groups, within an individual, and between two group

factions. These struggles also manifested themselves more strongly in polarized intergroup or multigroup conflict situations.

Overall, in analyzing the CAA case story, Hindus in India largely experienced IIN-related group membership identity security, inclusion, and consistency due to BJP's rule at the federal and many states. Concurrently, they also simultaneously experienced identity vulnerability/apprehension, differentiation, and change in Muslim-majority areas and states ruled by other political parties. Overall, and in comparative sharp contrast terms, Muslims in India experienced group membership identity insecurity, differentiation, and change at the national level and in states ruled by BJP. Concomitantly, they experienced relative identity security, inclusion, and consistency in Hindu minority areas and states ruled by political parties other than BJP. Thus, many Indian as insiders and global watcher as outsiders voiced serious concerns for the erosion of the secular nature of India and her constitution, and the perceived threat of changing India into Hindu Nation.

### **Identity Negotiation Complexity at the Exo Level of Analysis**

At this exo-level analysis, institutions such as government, democratic institution, and media can significantly impact social group memberships. In India, the central and many state governments are run by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its leaderships. They employed democratic institutions, formal procedures, and policies to further their political and religious agenda. The ruling BJP with Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah at its helm (as high power-holders) successfully advocated for CAA and made it law. All of these have accentuated the salience of Hindu identity, dominant status, and power in contrast to Muslim identity, minority status, and low power in India.

The BJP government advocated CAA as protecting the rights and freedom of persecuted religious minorities, namely Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Jains, and Parsis from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who have been in India before December 31, 2014. The BJP leaders recognized these neighboring countries as Muslim-majority nations with the assumption that all Muslims are fine with their religious freedom. Given this presumption context, CAA has unilaterally excluded Muslim refugees in India from these neighboring countries in granting them a legitimate pathway to Indian citizenship. Majority of these persecuted religious minorities included Muslim refugees who fled from their home countries and seeking safety, religious freedom, and better lives in India for themselves and their families.

In this regard, both in India and abroad, voices have been raised that CAA has discriminated against Muslim faith minorities. USCIRF has published that Shia and Ahmadis in Pakistan have been persecuted for their faith and those who fled to India deserve protection as other religious minorities, but these issues were bypassed or excluded from CAA (see Annual Report, 2019, [www.uscirf.gov](http://www.uscirf.gov)).

Meanwhile, the opposition Congress Party (e.g., Sonia Gandhi, Interim President) has vehemently opposed CAA and the party has stood for the secular constitution of India and the freedom of religion for all faith including Islam. Unlike BJP, its political party membership is not rooted in a particular faith such as Hinduism. They petitioned the Supreme Court of India to investigate the legality or constitutionality of CAA based on the secular foundation of India and respect for all faiths including Islamic faith. The secularism as defined and enshrined in the Indian Constitution must be upheld for the unity of multilingual and multifaitth nation like India. The ultimate goal of addressing the CAA via a respectful dialogue format is to promote peaceful coexistence and cothriving for diverse identity groups to learn from each other, to augment each other's strengths and shortcomings, and to laugh and cry together in peaceful and crisis times. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama often said in public address, "The 21st is a century of dialogue." He said conflicts are human-made problems and they should be resolved through dialogue and peace.

In one sense, religion and religious institutions involve both macro-level (worldview and belief and value framework) and exo-level intersection (how institutions and group membership shape members and their identity definitional issues). Religion also serves as an aspect of identity that navigates between



macro and local levels. Parker Gumucio (2008) noted that, on the one hand, religion is study of power and regional/international geopolitical imbalance. On the other hand, however, he argued that religious conflicts should be studied as intercultural conflicts and that religion only exists through local cultures and local institutions. Religiosity often is created and reinforced in exo-level institutions. Relatedly, the strength of religion or religiosity shapes conflict approaches and tendencies. While religiosity and religious fundamentalism serve as a buffer to anxiety created by stressors (Salzman, 2008), religiosity is a factor that connects with particular conflict attitudes and strategies (Croucher, Braziunaite, & Oommen, 2012; Soliz & Colaner, 2014).

As one can imagine, media reports have informed people's understanding, discussion, and standpoint with regard to interpreting the CAA case story. Importantly, media as an institution and institutional agency may impact social group memberships differently on how they frame and edit their coverage. For example, Akshita Jain writes in the *HuffPost* issue of December 17, 2019, in terms of how foreign media covered CAA protests in *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Al Jazeera*, *South China Morning Post*, *The Telegraph*, and *The New Yorker*. Citing *New York Times*, Jain reports: "Critics are deeply worried that Mr. Modi is trying to wrench India away from its secular, democratic roots and turn this nation of 1.3 billion people into a religious state, a homeland for Hindus." Citing *Al Jazeera*, she reports on how police used abusive language and harshly hit anti-CAA protestors (See CAA: How Foreign Media Covered The Protests, *HuffPost India*, December 17, 2019). Possibly, these anti-CAA media coverage reports may accentuate intergroup–interpersonal anxiety and insecurity for Indian Muslims and especially Muslims seeking refuge in India from the oppressive neighboring countries. They would desperately appreciate any identity support from within and outside India—especially advocating for their Indian citizenship rights and religious freedom.

On the other hand, Archit Mehta and Kinjal's media report analysis in *Alt News* found that the Asian News International or ANI based in New Delhi positively skewed their reports on CAA in various cities abroad. These include Edinburgh, Scotland; London, U.K.; New York, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., U.S.A.; and Tokyo, Japan. ANI failed to report even one single anti-CAA protest abroad (see Media Analysis: ANI's Skewed Coverage of CAA Protests Abroad, *Alt News*, February 6, 2020). Possibly, these pro-CAA media coverage reports may accentuate the CAA standpoint and emotional security of many Hindus who are defensively ethnocentric about religious minorities especially Muslims. For example, cow protection vigilantes often harass and act violently against Muslims over either real or imagined events on selling beefs. Cow protection or Gau Raksha provision in the Constitution forbids killing cows as they are regarded as vital Hindu symbol.

Interestingly, India Today also reported widespread coverage of intensified protests across India in major Indian newspapers including *The Times of India*, *The Hindustan Times*, *The Indian Express*, *Decan Herald*, and *The Telegraph* (see Protests Against CAA Intensify Across Country: How Indian newspapers covered the stir, December 20, 2019). India Today reported that "...several parts of the country were under lockdown, with heavy police deployment and internet snapped." Relatedly, Muslims may perceive threat to their identity and faith and even to their lives and, thus, heighten intractable intergroup conflict spirals between Hindus and Muslims (Croucher, 2013; Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

### Identity Negotiation Complexity at the Meso Level of Analysis

On meso level, the roles of groups, communities, and organizations can impact and also provide insights into intergroup conflict situations. As in most societies, dominant group exerts sociopolitical and religious influences on minority groups and their social identities. India is a multilingual and multireligious nation with the Hindu majority of about 80% (estimates from the 2011 Census of India) and religious minorities including Baha'is, Buddhists, Christians, Jains, Muslims, and Sikhs (and others) and, as a matter of fact, predominantly Muslims feel persecuted often on religious criterion (see Annual USCIRF Report, 2019).

The case in point is CAA-related riots have accentuated intergroup anxiety and insecurity of the Muslims in India. Very recently, in the capital city of New Delhi, mob violence by Hindu nationalists, potentially encouraged by the Hindu-faith-based BJP leadership, involved beating, lynching, burning alive 43 innocent people, mostly Muslims, and destroying Muslim homes and properties. The Guardian headline reads: "Inside Delhi: beaten, lynched, and burnt alive," and subheadline in bold reads: "Violence in Indian capital has left more than 40 dead and hundreds injured after a Hindu nationalist rampage, stocked by the rhetoric of Narendra Modi's populist government." According to the Guardian, "His (PM Modi) landslide re-election victory in May 2019 prompted an escalation of the Hindu nationalist agenda. But it was the passing of the citizenship amendment act (CAA) in December last year that proved the tipping point. . . ." (see The Guardian, March 1, 2020).

The Delhi riots sparked tragic memories of the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan along religious lines that cost the lives of few million Hindus and Muslims. On March 5, 2020, the opposition parties disrupted parliamentary proceedings and demanded discussion over the Delhi riots in Lok Sabha. In Lok Sabha, some ruling and opposition members of parliament (MPs) pushed and shoved each other and the Chair of the House abruptly adjourned for the day (see The Economic Times, March 5, 2020). Fortunately, other religious minorities have stepped in to defuse interfaith tensions between Hindus and Muslims and promote interfaith harmony.

According to the BBC report of March 6, 2020, during the Delhi riots, some religious faith groups such as Sikhs stepped in to save lives. For example, a Sikh father and son have saved many Muslims hiding them in their home. Another example, the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee organized Langkar or Public Kitchen to feed about 4000 people regardless of faiths or minority statuses. In other cases, Muslims neighbors braved mob wrath to save minority Hindus in their community (The Indian Express, February 27, 2020). In other news reports, Hindus and Muslims helped each other as mobs vandalized their communities and they patrolled to protect each other's lives and places of worship. On January 12, Sunday, 2020, different faiths came together to participate in "sarva dharma sambhava" (equal respect for and peaceful coexistence of all faiths) interfaith harmony ceremony at Delhi's Shaheen Bagh. "Scriptures from the Geeta, the Bible, the Quran were read and Gurbani held. Then the Preamble of the Constitution was also read out by people from varying faiths who are supporting this movement," said Syed Taseer Ahmed, one of the initial organizers of the protest (India Today, January 12, 2020). Historically, Mahatma Gandhi held such event for interfaith harmony during struggle against British rule. Importantly, these members of different faiths transcended religious divide and polarized identity complexity and make efforts to work in unity to save neighbors and their communities from mob violence related to CAA. Notably, equal respect and compassion in action as preached by all religions matter much for intergroup conflict resolution. These efforts promote superordinate identity such as pan-religious harmony identity that reduces intergroup conflict and anxiety (Turner, 1985).

As a globalized world, CAA and Delhi riots have received attention from leaders and groups abroad. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei on March 26, 2020, criticized communal violence in India and tweeted, "The hearts of Muslims all over the world are grieving over the massacre of Muslims in India. The government of India should confront extremist Hindus and their parties, and stop the massacre of Muslims in order to prevent India's isolation from the world of Islam" (Indian Express, March 26, 2020). India summoned Iranian Ambassador in Delhi and lodged strong protests against such remarks as "unwarranted" and interference in Indian internal affairs. In addition, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom ([www.uscirf.gov](http://www.uscirf.gov)) condemned violence in Delhi that killed many and urged "the Indian government to take serious efforts to protect Muslims and others targeted by mob violence." India rejected these comments as inaccurate and misleading.

As discussed above, both domestic groups and communities and international bodies play significant roles on the meso level of conflict meaning construction process from their own field of experience. Social-ecological (SE) framework surmises that various factors at these different levels—from macro

level to meso level—spill over to the individual and interpersonal level of interpretation of the CAA at the micro level.

### **Identity Negotiation Complexity at the Micro-Level and Interaction-Level Analysis**

At this level, both intrapersonal and interpersonal factors intersect and influence individuals and their communicative behaviors. Intrapersonal factors include self-construals of their personal and social identities and how they see others, attributions, and conflict emotions. Interpersonal factors include anxiety, security, relationships, and physical settings in which interpersonal experiences and interactions take place. Micro level also recognizes the importance of how individuals intra- and interpersonally construct or reframe meanings and interpretations of a given intergroup conflict communication event.

For example, individuals who are pro-CAA tend to view it personally and interpersonally as long overdue to accentuate their religious social identity intersecting with Indian identity. However, others such as persecuted Muslims in India personally and interpersonally view CAA as a major threat to and discrimination against their religious social identity intersecting with the larger Indian national identity. Theoretically, it is easier to look at and discuss factors and their roles on each of the clean-cut social-ecological level; however, in reality many factors intersect or interact with each other compounding the complexity of socioecological model to understand CAA on its pure level-by-level analysis.

With regard to an interactional-level analysis, arguably individual aspirations of Indian leaders, at the federal and state levels, for political gains designed Hindu-faith-based agenda catering to the individual aspirations of Hindu majority constituencies. Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Shah at the federal and Chief Ministers of States such as Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka successfully run their political campaigns and got elected as national and state leaders. On the other hand, the opposition Congress Party run their platform on socioeconomic and political agenda rather than based on a particular faith-based agenda and, at the federal level, they did not win the highest national leadership positions. Historically, the interactional effect of individual faiths along with intractable interfaith conflicts resulted in the partition of the British India into India and Pakistan.

From a political standpoint, once the BJP won the national elections fulfilling individual leadership aspirations as well as Hindu-faith-based election agenda, the PM and the Home Minister utilized parliamentary democratic procedures to introduce and pass CAA. This success story is due to a combined interactional effect of various macro-, exo-, meso-, and micro-level factors discussed earlier. The interactional effect of multilevel factors is also observed in the aftermath of CAA. Generally stated, Hindus feel empowered with a strong identification with the national leadership and CAA whereas Muslims feel isolated and disempowered with anxiety, insecurity, and uncertainty. Often Hindus and Muslims encountered interfaith conflicts based on violations of religious freedom. International human rights groups and United States Commission on International Religious Freedom criticized India for CAA and religious freedom violations (see [www.uscirf.gov](http://www.uscirf.gov)).

From a socioecological perspective, all these levels and factors and their interactional complexity must be taken into simultaneous account to deeply understand and address CAA and its impact on intergroup identities, relations, conflict escalating tensions, and potential intergroup conflict resolutions. In essence, the crux of the intergroup conflict as spelled out in the CAA case story is about the exclusion of Islam-faith-based immigrants from the three Muslim neighboring countries of India. From an intergroup identity membership perspective, the CAA law is about outright social identity-based religious discrimination against Muslim immigrants by BJP favoring their dominant religious social identity-based power and Hindus status. Importantly, faith matters equally to both dominant and minority groups despite their differences in power and status positions. Spiritual faith is deeply ingrained in the affect and the psychology of the faithful ones as it constitutes the core of their identity complexity and spill over to impacting intergroup relations and conflict antagonism or conflict resolution. Spiritual faith tinged with

institutional power can either corrupt or motivate the mass to move forward to engage in collaborative goal-building and nation-building.

Based on the above explanatory analysis of the CAA case story from the socioecological framework and the IIN theory, the concluding section provides a summary and strategy recommendations on how international mediators can help to facilitate a productive dialogue process and move polarized factions forward to depolarize the conflict tension and move toward a peace-building process and outcome. We hope that the strategy guidelines would also have pragmatic implications for other conflict practitioners who are interested in mediating complex intergroup conflict cases such as the DREAM Act case in the United States or the immigration debates on asylum seekers in France.

## Conclusion: A Summary and Strategy Recommendations

To summarize, we presented a highly controversial and in-progress conflict case story of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in India—unfolding in real time currently and with turmoil playing out in both India and the global arena. We subscribe to the notion that the escalating conflict and violence happening in the streets of India is predominantly due to the interlaced identity complexity (e.g., religious identity, ethnic identity, political institutional identity, and insider–outsider group membership) issues as occurring at different levels of the social–ecological system. To augment the organizational schema of the SE macro-, exo-, meso, and micro-level analysis, we drew upon some key ideas from the integrated identity negotiation (IIN) theory to explain identity membership dialectical complexity facets.

Drawing from our in-depth analysis of the case, we conclude here with several conflict strategy guidelines for local and global mediator teams to step in to conduct effective mediation sessions or CAA-related peace-building intergroup conflict management program.

### Strategy Guideline 1: Be Aware that Intergroup Conflict Complexity Takes Place at Multiple Levels of a Sociohistorical System

In a recent article, Ellis (2019) emphasized the importance of tending to the macro state-level, mid civil societal-level, and individual-level analysis of intractable intergroup conflict and the importance of drawing out pragmatic implications on multiple conflict levels. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2013) also advocated for a multilevel and multicontextualism approach in explaining embedded and protracted intercultural conflict. Heeding these calls, we used the dual lens of the SE framework and the IIN theory to analyze the CAA case history.

Our detailed CAA case study analysis suggests that an effective mediator of intergroup conflict needs to have a strong mastery and discernment of how the conflict is playing out at multiple levels of analysis. Mastering the core vocabulary of the SE framework may be an essential first step that any global mediators need to train themselves—in order to assess the complex sociohistorical case on the macro, exo, meso, micro, and historical-chronemic levels of understanding. Furthermore, drawing from the IIN theory lens and its associated dialectical spectrum analysis, for example, on identity security–vulnerability, identity inclusion–differentiation, and identity consistency–change, the theory offers us more sophisticated understanding of intergroup vulnerability and fear, perceived identity threat, and the psychology of holding on more tightly to polarized group membership ethnocentrism and power resources on multiple levels of analysis (Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

Competent intergroup negotiators should learn to observe attentively, listen respectfully without judgment, and record data from multiple voices of diverse groups. They should pay close attention to the various conflict membership and individual interests, conflict agendas, conflict processes, conflict goals, and divergent and convergent points of contention. They should probe deeper and harder at different levels of the SE framework and also the IIN theory-related identity entanglement facets: sociocultural identity

facet, sociorelational role identity facet, and personal identity facet and how these have been translated to defensive and ethnocentric verbal and nonverbal expressions.

### **Strategy Guideline 2: Intractable Intergroup Conflict is Often about the Clash of Moral Conflict**

According to Littlejohn (2006), moral conflict is about “a clash between opposing parties based on differences in deeply held assumptions about being, knowledge, and the world... how we respond to such conflict can create disturbing conditions that warrant careful attention, creative intervention, and scholarly study” (p. 395; see also Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). Based on our analysis of the CAA case story especially on the macro and exo level of scrutiny, the different religious worldviews of the Hindus and Muslims, the historical partition background of Pakistan and India, and the political ideologies of the BJP faction and the opposing Congress Party faction—all these factors contribute to the incommensurate social worlds of the two groups (Pearce, 2005; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997).

According to Littlejohn (2006), in order to manage moral conflict productively, mediators need to attend most sensitively to the dimensions of moral reality, conflict reality, and justice reality. Moral reality is about distinctive traditions and divergent value orientation issues. Conflict reality is about how different membership factions view the meaning of conflict, the perceived conflict story, and how conflict should be addressed and managed. Lastly, justice reality connotes the development of criteria or standards of what constitutes a just or right solution to all parties involved or in a power-imbalance case, the disenfranchised groups. To understand power dynamics and imbalance issues, international mediators need to attend closely to the nuances and complexity of identity issues within individuals, groups, and intergroup relations in a society.

### **Strategy Guideline 3: Attuning to Multifaceted Identity Set as the Cornerstone of Managing Intergroup Conflict Effectively**

At the core of each prolonged or intractable conflict lie the paradoxical knots of identity conflict at multiple levels (Ellis, 2019; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019). In the CAA conflict case story, the multiple identity-based struggles involve individuals and party membership affiliations that can be classified as the Pro-CAA groupings that include the dominant-ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Prime Minister Modi, and Home Minister Amit Shah, and the anti-CAA groupings that include the opposing Congress Party and Chief Ministers of States from Kerala, Punjab, and West Bengal. The CAA case also involved the international concerned groups: NGOs, USCIRF, and Home Foreign Affairs Committee; the Impartial groups such as the Indian Supreme Court; and lastly the Hybrid Citizenship groupings. Each distinctive identity group holds different moral reality, conflict reality, and justice reality as well as mixed emotions and stilted attitudes toward the newly passed CAA Law.

From the ground-up peace-building effort, effective mediators can attune to and understand the complexity of the identity clashes and divergent viewpoints of different political parties and those of the associated Indian citizens. From the middle range, exo-analytical top-down spillover effort, news media can balance their reports of the CAA-related “mob hate scenes and violent death toll” with positive reports and images of how different religious faith members coming together to uplift and help each other through this dark time in India. Media should cover more stories of how individual members of different faiths including Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, and others rose above the divisive CAA issues and protected each other and their properties from mob violence and destruction. Media can play a vital role for community harmony.

### **Strategy Guideline 4: Competent Conflict Communication Practice Requires Respectful Dialogue and Moving Toward Superordinate Conflict Goals**

Human respect is a prerequisite for any form of competent intergroup dialogic communication. Identity-sensitive respectful dialogue means displaying the commitment to truly want to understand the complex identities of the opposing conflict party on the sociocultural, sociorelational role, and personal identity levels and also the willingness to take some risks and sharing part of our vulnerable selves.

According to Littlejohn (2006; see also Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007), to address intractable moral conflict or intergroup conflict, mediators need to practice transcendent dialogue skills with the factional mediating parties. Concurrently, Barge (2006; Barge & Andreas, 2013) also mentioned that astute conflict practitioners should cultivate these four sensibilities in mediating polarized community conflict: affirmative sensibility, relational sensibility, generative sensitivity, and imaginative sensibility. Barge concludes (2006), in order to practice constructive community dialogue skill sets, mediators need to learn to respect multivocality, honor the sense of otherness, tend to situational complexity, flush out new possibilities, and forge superordinate goals and visions.

Furthermore, according to Broome (2013), in building a “culture of peace via dialogue,” intergroup mediators need to mindfully attend to the following skill set: (a) promoting constructive and sustained intergroup contact, (b) reducing deep-seated intergroup hostility via emotional resonance and forgiveness, (c) nurturing respect for the *Other* via deep listening, (d) developing a narrative of hope and peace via an acute awareness of our humanistic interconnectedness, and (e) establishing a basis for intergroup collaboration via incremental time, patience, good faith, hard work, respect, and trust.

From the applied dialogue training arena, mediators can also heed the dialogue techniques gleaned from Huan-Nissen’s (1999) applied dialogue perspective: (a) treat culturally different or marginalized others as co-colleagues and equal-status peers despite institutional roles or membership status differences, (b) create an uncluttered empty space in our mind to learn and listen and listen some more without ethnocentric judgment, (c) set aside our own assumptions and allow diverse meanings to emerge and take shape, (d) postpone preplanned agenda and predetermined goals, and focus on learning with a sense of curiosity, and (e) inquire with open-ended questions and keep the commitment to want to understand deeply and with humility (for more extensive dialogue review studies, see Dessel & Rogge, 2008; Frantell, Miles, & Ruwe, 2019). In order to practice transcendent dialogic communication, international mediators or conflict parties need to cultivate an ethnorelative attitude and a sense of open-heartedness.

### **Strategy Guideline 5: Competent Conflict Communication Practice Starts with Open-Hearted Attitude and Mindful Listening**

According to Assumption 9 of the IIN theory: competent identity negotiation process emphasizes the importance of integrating the necessary intergroup membership identity-based knowledge, open-hearted mindfulness, and culture-sensitive interaction skills to communicate appropriately, effectively, and adaptively with culturally dissimilar others (Ting-Toomey, 2018; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2015, 2019).

While cultivating an ethnorelative mindset means seeing things from the other person’s holistic and complex identity angle, an open-hearted attitude implies the combination of compassion for self and affective empathy and resonance for others. In essence, an open-hearted attitude is to sit without judgment, to listen without biased filters, and to acknowledge things as they are, with equanimity and transparency. Concurrently, engaging in an open-hearted paradigm shift entails exercising dual perceptual wisdom and balance between self, others, and situations (Ting-Toomey, 2018).

According to Ting-Toomey (2018), IIN-related perspective, mindful listening means listening with focused attunement and observing an unfolding conflict mediation episode with one-pointed



wakefulness and watchfulness. Mindful and effective mediators must learn to listen to the underlying identity, relational, and content meanings as expressed by the pro-CAA and the anti-CAA groups sitting at the mediation table. Identity-fused conflict complexity is basically about emotional uproars to protect power resources, vulnerable assets, and fear of the unpredictable present and future. Thus, mindful listening in any mediation session means listening to (or even flushing out) the hidden beliefs, worldviews, values, biased assumptions, grievance stories, and nuanced nonverbal tones between the two aggrieved groups.

Global mediators who can skillfully translate what they have heard from the opposing parties and reframe inventively the conflict messages into parallel stories that the polarized parties can resonate are first-class mediators in moving the mediation session forward to conflict resolution outcome. From mindful listening, international mediation teams or conflict parties can exercise their imagination to create new frames to interpret the intergroup conflict story.

### **Strategy Guideline 6: Competent Conflict Communication Practice Calls for Imaginative Reframing**

Barge (2006) emphasizes that community mediators need to cultivate “imaginative sensibility.” This “imaginative sensibility” connotes “creating programs and interventions that are... novel and engaging. Community transformation depends on capturing the imagination of participants, which involves creating events that inspire one’s imaginative abilities” (Barge, 2006, p. 538).

From the global mediation standpoint, imaginative reframing is a highly creative, mutual-face-honoring skill (Ting-Toomey, 2017). It means creating alternative contexts to frame the opposing parties’ understanding of the antagonistic intergroup conflict problem. Reframing is a mindful and imaginative process of using strategic language to change the way each person defines, thinks about, and views the conflict situation. It is “one of the most effective ways to begin the path to transformation and resolution” (Ellis, 2010, p. 138). In essence, language and language labels matter as it has the transformational power to either uplift the people from the abyss of despair or push them further down to anxiety and chaos.

In the CAA case story, global mediators can attempt the following interactional practices in facilitating peace-building reframing skills between the pro- and anti-CAA parties: (a) restate conflict positions into superordinate common-interest community terms, (b) change intergroup blaming and defensive statements into particular requests supported by well-reasoned facts and evidence, (c) move from blaming statements to mutually beneficial problem-solving solutions, (d) help the opposing parties in the antagonistic conflict situation to recognize the benefits of a win-win synergistic approach as versus the costs, and (e) help conflict parties understand the “big picture” and also the law of the land. In practicing mindful-imaginative reframing skills, conflict practitioners can help to soften intergroup animosity and defensiveness, reduce tension, and increase incremental intergroup and interpersonal understanding.

In light of the above discussion, reframing CAA as a vital common national task rather than intergroup political party rivalry agenda can lead to a fair and productive outcome. In the interest of national unity and well-being of the persecuted religious immigrants in India, BJP and Congress Party and others can reframe pro- and anti-CAA stances via constructive dialogue format. Together, they can explore avenues to redefine the scope of CAA to include persecuted Muslim refugees from the neighboring countries just like other persecuted religious minorities. Mediators can also use invitational dialogue skills and flush out the connotative meaning of the term “secular constitution” and probe how each faction views and defines this thorny symbolic term that fuels escalatory intergroup conflict spirals. They can also use conflict mapping technique and visualizations to appeal to how different polarized groups imagine “community peace,” “community safety,” or “community harmony” and then launch forward for some meaningful “living room or community dialogue processes” (Ting-Toomey & Martinez, 2020, p. 42).

### **Strategy Guideline 7: Managing Intergroup Conflict Complexity Demands the Practice of Inclusive Pluralism as a Moral Imperative**

The underlying characteristics that constitute moral inclusion (Opatow, 1990a) include (a) the belief that considerations of fairness apply to all other identity groups; (b) the willingness to redistribute political, social, and economic resources to the underprivileged identity groups; (c) the willingness to make sacrifices to foster another's well-being; (d) the view that conflicts are opportunities for learning and that individuals are willing to integrate diverse perspectives—so that solutions will include mutually agreed-upon procedures to divide resources fairly and justly; and (e) the genuine belief of the “we” group in incorporating individuals from all walks of life—on a truly global humanistic level.

Moral exclusion occurs when individuals or groups are perceived as “outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply. Those who are excluded are perceived as nonentities, expendable, or undeserving; consequently, harming them appears acceptable, appropriate, or just” (Opatow, 1990b, p. 1). Moral exclusion can be severe that includes human rights violations, genocide, and religious and political persecution or mild that includes emotional hurts, shame, and micro-aggressions based on personal and social identities. Importantly, moral inclusion expands the scope of justice (or fairness) to include all individuals across all diverse communities whereas moral exclusion applies the scope of justice to a handful of concerned, self-interested communities (e.g., political affiliation group, special-interest group, and dominant gender or racial groups).

Moral inclusion/exclusion is tied directly with our stance, attitude, and practice on intergroup social justice issues. As Sorrells (2016) aptly notes that social justice should be viewed as a dynamic process, the pathway process is as important as the outcome goal. She clarifies that social justice process entails: “Processes where social actors engage with democratic, participatory, and inclusive practices and values that uphold our individual and collective capacities and agency to create change” (Sorrells, 2016, p. 231). Change usually comes about when people are informed and educated with multiple viewpoints and multiple levels’ analysis of a socially unjust contentious situation, and in this instance, the CAA of India.

To conclude, transcendent dialogue is the most reasonable approach to resolve intergroup conflict and difficult issues (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). It is a communication process that involves meaningful and constructive interaction and exchanges of ideas without polemics and polarization (Barge & Andreas, 2013; Isaacson, Ricci, & Littlejohn, 2020). We further contend that a win-win intergroup conflict trajectory can be based on a middle way-based dialogue approach and communication. Middle way dialogue seeks mutually beneficial reconciliation and acknowledges the dialectical spectrums of identity struggles and complementary emotions. The peace-making approach shuns intergroup diatribes and a binary win-lose stance. It emphasizes open-hearted forgiveness and intergroup empathy and resonance. It stands for “inclusive pluralism” and advances five key principles (Dorjee, 2013): (a) Dialogue is central to resolving intergroup conflict issues, (b) recognizing positive interdependent relationship in a conflict situation can lead to intergroup peace-building progress and trust, (c) advocating high mutual-interest concern and is central to developing community harmony, (d) the need for imaginative and creative thinking that transcends polarized and rigidified hardline positions, and (e) lastly, with long-term implementation on multiple levels of a socioecological framework, a middle way dialogue peace-building program can resolve intergroup conflict responsively and authentically.

For all these guideline recommendations to work, intergroup conflict parties need to make serious commitment to work mindfully with each other in the spirit of “we” and not “us versus them” mentality. With sustained human hope, faith, and creative imagination, intergroup tensions can be incrementally dissolved and peace-building visions can be realized. With mutual-empowering moves and mutual identity affirmation efforts, intergroup collaboration can be made possible. From a human-to-human level and eye-to-eye peace-seeking level, the common human motivations for safety, a sense of belonging, and a sense of connection with other fellow humans may be some of the powerful forces for all factions to

pause, to reflect, and to practice conflict peace-building work—for their loved ones, for their neighbors, for their shared community, and for the next many generations to come.

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