

Conflict transformation

Conflict transformation is a concept designed to reframe the way in which [peacebuilding](#) initiatives are discussed and pursued, particularly in contexts of [ethnic conflict](#). Traditionally the emphasis has been on [conflict resolution](#) and [conflict management](#) methods, which focus on reducing or defusing outbreaks of hostility. **Conflict transformation**, in contrast, places a greater weight on addressing the underlying conditions which give rise to that conflict, preferably well in advance of any hostility, but also to ensure a [sustainable](#) peace. In other terms, it attempts to make explicit and then reshape the social structures and dynamics behind the conflict, often employing analytical tools borrowed from [systems thinking](#). "The very structure of parties and relationships may be embedded in a pattern of conflictual relationships that extend beyond the particular site of conflict. Conflict transformation is therefore a process of engaging with and transforming the relationships, interests, discourses and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuation of violent conflict".

Approaches, definitions

Conflict transformation approaches differ from those of [conflict management](#) or [conflict resolution](#). Whereas conflict transformation involves transforming the relationships that support violence, conflict management approaches seek to merely manage and contain conflict, and conflict resolution approaches seek to move conflict parties away from [zero-sum](#) positions towards positive outcomes, often with the help of external actors.

Conflict transformation theory and practice are often associated with the academics and practitioners [Johan Galtung](#) and [John Paul Lederach](#). According to [Johan Galtung's](#) [Transcend Method](#) conflict transformation theory and practice, and process/es, comprise

1. *Mapping the conflict formation: all parties, all goals, and all issues;*
2. *Bringing in forgotten parties with important stakes in the conflict;*
3. *Having highly empathic dialogues with all parties singly;*
4. *Each conflict worker may specialize on one conflict party;*
5. *In these dialogues identifying acceptable goals in all parties;*
6. *Bringing in forgotten goals that may open new perspectives;*
7. *Arriving at overarching goals acceptable to all parties;*
8. *Arriving at short, evocative, goal-formulations;*
9. *Helping define the tasks for all parties with that goal in mind; disembedding the conflict from where it was, embedding it elsewhere, bringing in forgotten parties, goals;*
10. *Verifying how realizing that goal would realize parties' goals;*
11. *Helping parties meet at the table for self-sustaining process;*
12. *Withdrawing from the conflict, go on to the next, being on call.*

BALM 306 - CONFLICT MANAGEMENT & TRANSFORMATION

and are based upon *basic premises* inspired by main world religions:

1. following [Hindu](#) thought...
Conflict the Destroyer and Conflict the Creator; conflict as a source of violence and conflict as a source of development. The conflict [i.e. conflict transformation] worker has the third role as Preserver, transforming the conflict by avoiding violence, promoting development.
2. following [Buddhist](#) thought...
Codependent origination, everything grows together in mutual causation. Conflicts have no beginning and no end, we all share the responsibility; no single actor (like statesmen) carries all the responsibility (monopoly) and no single actor carries all the guilt.
3. following [Christian](#) thought...
Ultimately, the responsibility for conflict transformation lies with individuals and their individual responsibility and decisions to act so as to promote peace rather than violence, and the principle of hope.
4. following [Daoist](#) thought...
Everything is yin and yang, good and bad, there is the high likelihood that the action chosen also has negative consequences and that action not chosen may have positive consequences; hence the need for reversibility, only doing what can be undone.
5. following [Islamic](#) thought...
The strength deriving from submitting together to a common goal, including the concrete responsibility for the well-being of all.
6. following [Judaic](#) thought...
The truth lies less in a verbal formula than in the dialogue to arrive at the formula, and that dialogue has no beginning and no end.

According to [Berghof Foundation](#), conflict transformation means:

A generic, comprehensive term referring to actions and processes seeking to alter the various characteristics and manifestations of violent conflict by addressing the root causes of a particular conflict over the long term. It aims to transform negative destructive conflict into positive constructive conflict and deals with structural, behavioural and attitudinal aspects of conflict. The term refers to both the process and the completion of the process. As such, it incorporates the activities of processes such as conflict prevention and conflict resolution and goes farther than conflict settlement or conflict management.

According to [Institute for Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding](#) (ICP), conflict transformation means:

BALM 306 - CONFLICT MANAGEMENT & TRANSFORMATION

Conflict transformation, in contrast to conflict resolution, does not only seek to resolve the contradiction in a conflict setting. It also aims at addressing structural and social root causes by challenging injustices and restoring human relations and it deals with ethnical and value-based dimensions. Conflict transformation is not only an approach or a tool but primarily a mindset. Conflict transformation, according to our 3 Cs approach, needs to be comprehensive, compassionate and creative.

According to [Search for Common Ground](#) conflict transformation initiatives are often characterized by longtime horizons and interventions at multiple levels, aimed at changing perceptions and improving communications skills addressing the roots of conflict, including inequality and social injustice.

The *Principles of Conflict Transformation*, by [TransConflict](#), specify further in order to help with defining conflict transformation:

- *Conflict should not be regarded as an isolated event that can be resolved or managed, but as an integral part of society's on-going evolution and development;*
- *Conflict should not be understood solely as an inherently negative and destructive occurrence, but rather as a potentially positive and productive force for change if harnessed constructively;*
- *Conflict transformation goes beyond merely seeking to contain and manage conflict, instead seeking to transform the root causes of a particular conflict;*
- *Conflict transformation is a long-term, gradual and complex process, requiring sustained engagement and interaction;*
- *Conflict transformation is not just an approach and set of techniques, but a way of thinking about and understanding conflict itself;*
- *Conflict transformation is particularly intended for intractable conflicts, where deep-rooted issues fuel protracted violence;*
...continued by some ten more...

Conflict Transformation Theory

“There is no way to peace,”

“Peace is the way.”

- A. J. Muste

Peace and Conflict

The last decades of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a number of political and intellectual movements led by such diverse groups as the nationalities, ethnic communities, indigenous peoples, feminists, gay men and lesbians and the environmentalists, etc. These movements with different ideologies, cultures, practices, life-styles, views and ways of life represent a struggle for freedom, self-determination and dignity and against contingent, ideologically biased and oppressive views and practices claiming false objectivity and universal validity. These are movements for liberation. These movements have been waging for recognition of the inherent individuals' rights and collective rights as a whole. However, the struggle for freedom, self-determination, human rights and dignity is met with modern states' coercive forces and repressive measures. And it is true, the conflict between these movements and the modern states continued until today. Some of these world's conflicts have been resolved while several conflicts are yet to see peace, peace which are informed by the principles of human rights, liberty, equality, justice and truth.

The questions of conflict and peace have captured the world's political scenario for the past several decades. People have seen and experienced enough of bloodsheds and gun battles on the earth's surface. People of different national origins have suffered immensely because of continuing violence and gun shooting. Million of people around the world have become mere victims of power politics in the international political affairs. Wars and violence had dominated the political system across the continents. How do we get out of this culture of violence and killings? We must seek out for a better option than this cruel acts and worse reality. The alternative to this violent situation is none other than peace itself and cooperation among nations and peoples. The quest for peace with justice and truth has to be made a forceful motive in the hearts and minds of

BALM 306 - CONFLICT MANAGEMENT & TRANSFORMATION

the people. And, it is certainly true that the issues of peace and conflict have mounted in intensity and urgency with the passage of time and events. It is increasingly felt that there are no sufficient mechanisms and remedial measures in rooting out all these conflicts around the world. The international community ought to have different policies and strategies to transform various kinds of conflicts happening at different contexts and scenarios. There is a need for all disciplines of studies particularly the social sciences discipline to vigorously pursue and search out for a theory and practice which will transcend the present inadequacy in addressing these varied conflicts and violence in the world.

The euphoria over the end of the Cold War that began in the fall of 1989 which prompted Francis Fukuyama to announce “The End of History”, heralding a “triumph of liberalism,” and John Mueller’s thesis that major wars between nations are on the decline calling this prolonged avoidance of war since the days of the Roman Empire “History’s greatest non-event”. However, these understandings were not shared by peace researchers because many new types of conflict were emerging. This was conceptualised by Harold Lasswell in his Garrison-State Thesis early in the post Second World War. Despite the fact that East Timor-Indonesian conflict was resolved in 2002 where the right to Self-Determination of a struggling people is recognized by the United Nations, we are still faced with the hard reality of several unresolved protracted conflicts at different geographical locations. These old conflicts are different in nature. Some conflicts are over socio-economic transformation while some others are over cultural preservation and development. And yet, conflicts over political identities or the contestations between minority nationalities and the states has become one of the most complex questions for all social science disciplines in particular and the international community in general.

BALM 306 - CONFLICT MANAGEMENT & TRANSFORMATION

Most of the scholars, academicians of various disciplines and policy-makers depict these protracted conflicts as internal or intra-state conflict. However, such 'internalist' accounts of state-related activities and problems have often been criticized for neglecting extra-state or international factors in the analysis of so-called 'domestic' issues, and the notion that identity-based conflict is a purely domestic matter has been dismissed as 'simply one more statist myth'. The end of the Cold War left a vast number of researchers and practitioners struggling to understand why the world was not a more peaceful way. The 'New World Order' had not emerged as planned. In addition, conflict studies began to analyse and code a new class of conflicts; those referred to as 'ethnic conflict'. When it became clear that this new class of conflict (Actually it is not new; rather, it is newly noticed) often incorporated identities not associated strictly with ethnicity, other classifications emerged, among them 'ethnopolitical conflict', 'communal conflict', 'protracted social conflict', and finally the new-common appellation identity-based conflict.

Indeed, these conflicts can be rightly "*called inter-nations conflicts or what Rothman called identity-based conflict.*" The use of the terms inter-nations conflicts or identity-based conflict instead of ethnic or internal conflicts would be more appropriate for such conflicts as far as the conflicting parties, political histories and contexts are concerned. Indeed, many of these conflicts cannot be totally depicted as internal conflicts due to the fact that the conflicts transcend the internal boundary of a country or state, and the problems are not domestic issues. The conflicts are more to do with political and other related issues. Among other things, the Indo-Naga conflict is a case in point. This chapter attempts to study the Indo-Naga political conflict in a critical way. The nature of the Indo-Naga conflict transcends the internal boundaries of India and Burma because the Nagas have been living in both India and Burma (Myanmar) historically before the British colonialism. However, since the departure of the British in 1947, the Nagas have

BALM 306 - CONFLICT MANAGEMENT & TRANSFORMATION

been resisting the occupations of 'neo-colonial India and Burma', and their totalizing agencies within nation state projects. The protracted conflicts of the Nagas' struggle for their right to self-determination could be easily gauged if BBC news which periodically reports the struggle for complete political independence is any indication which it characterizes as "the forgotten war in Nagaland" and "the world's longest running conflict."

Citing a similar kind of conflicts attempted to absolve within the totalizing force can be enunciated through, in the Northern Ireland case, (the) early proposals viewed the conflict as merely an internal one; hence, the British attempt to establish an internal solution (e.g., the Stormont Parliament of 1973). When the British (and Irish) governments perceived the conflict as having not only an internal component but also an external one, the structures that they proposed became less "Consociational" and more incorporative of overlapping identities.

The British-Irish Peace Agreement creates four new democratic institutions for Northern Ireland: a Northern Ireland Assembly, a North/South Ministerial Council, a British-Irish Council, and a British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. Additionally, the text of the Agreement includes links to the European Union, the fifth institution in which sovereignty is pooled and promotes overlapping identities (cross-categories). Unlike the prescription of internal institutions for consociational governments, this agreement specifically has an international institutional component. Furthermore, Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution have been amended to delete reference to the goal of complete unification of the island of Ireland. The British Government has also agreed to respect any free decision of the majority of the people of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland as to the relationship between Northern Ireland and Britain.

BALM 306 - CONFLICT MANAGEMENT & TRANSFORMATION

The governments which are parties to these conflicts in different countries have applied varied mechanisms of constitutional autonomy, developmental packages and the age old tactic of counter-insurgency to solve the problems. Several attempts have been made to manage, resolve, and transform the conflicts at various levels ranging from regional to international system. However, various attempts at solving these conflicts have stooped to inaccurate analysis, poor definitions, and wrong perception of the conflicts in the various conflict zones. These unsuccessful stories of the conflict resolution attempts stemmed mainly because methods and models used are traditional in nature and practice. Traditional methods of conflict resolution tend to be ineffective in dealing with protracted social or political conflicts, because they do not deal the structural inequalities of the system or the deprivation of human needs that failed to focus primary roots of the symptoms. It is even argued that the use of traditional approaches, which focus on resources and power politics, to resolve identity conflicts often has the effect of exacerbating or prolonging the struggle. It is clear that conflicts involving identity do, in fact, contain interests; however, as conflict theorist Kelman has written extensively with reference most specifically to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, bargaining over those issues without prior and adequate attention first to identity issues has the effect of further polarizing the parties. Ross further describes the need to sequence interventions in intractable conflicts by first beginning with methods that address the 'Psychocultural' dynamics of the situation prior to efforts to settle the more material and tangible interests at stake.

The field of international relations and dispute resolution takes insufficient note of these newer approaches dealing with identity-based conflicts, perhaps traditional methods of resolution which worked well in interstate conflicts where identity issues were not central, are not the best, or at least not the initial, tools to use in the types of challenging wars seen today, wars which are so centrally rooted in relatively non-

BALM 306 - CONFLICT MANAGEMENT & TRANSFORMATION

negotiable issues of identity. It is, therefore, imperative that the study needs to identify suitable and workable approaches so that the people are emancipated from the repression, exploitation, subjugation, 'carrot and stick' policy, denial of the recognition of their identities, values and their historical and political rights.