CONFLICT RESOLUTION REASERCH: NORMATIVE AIMS

Peacekeeping efforts by armed forces can provide one means to limit and ultimately resolve conflict

The normative aims of peace studies are conflict transformation and conflict resolution through mechanisms such as peacekeeping, peacebuilding (e.g., tackling disparities in rights, institutions and the distribution of world wealth) and peacemaking (e.g., mediation and conflict resolution). Peacekeeping falls under the aegis of negative peace, whereas efforts toward positive peace involve elements of peace building and peacemaking.

Teaching peace and conflict studies to the military

One of the interesting developments within peace and conflict studies is the number of military personnel undertaking such studies. This poses some challenges, as the military is an institution overtly committed to combat. In the article "Teaching Peace to the Military", published in the journal Peace Review, James Page argues for five principles that ought to undergird this undertaking, namely, respect but do not privilege military experience, teach the just war theory, encourage students to be aware of the tradition and techniques of nonviolence, encourage students to deconstruct and demythologize, and recognize the importance of military virtue.

Critical peace and conflict studies: hybridity, trans-rational peace, and elicitive conflict transformation

Scholars working in the areas of peace and conflict studies have made significant contributions to the policies used by non-governmental organisations, development agencies, international financial institutions, and the UN system, in the specific areas of conflict resolution and citizen diplomacy, development, political, social, and economic reform, peacekeeping, mediation, early warning, prevention, peacebuilding, and statebuilding. This represented a shift in interest from conflict management approaches oriented towards a "negative peace" to conflict resolution and

peacebuilding approaches aimed at a "positive peace". This emerged rapidly at the end of the Cold War, and was encapsulated in the report of then-UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace*. Indeed, it might be said that much of the machinery of what has been called "liberal peacebuilding" by a number of scholars and "statebuilding" by another is based largely on the work that has been carried out in this area. Many scholars in the area have advocated a more "emancipatory" form of peacebuilding, however, based upon a "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P), human security, local ownership and participation in such processes, especially after the limited success of liberal peacebuilding/ statebuilding in places as diverse as Cambodia, the Balkans, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Iraq. This research agenda is in the process of establishing a more nuanced agenda for peacebuilding which also connects with the original, qualitatively and normatively oriented work that emerged in the peace studies and conflict research schools of the 1960s (e.g. see the Oslo Peace Research Institute research project on "Liberal Peace and the Ethics of Peacebuilding" and the "Liberal Peace Transitions" project at the University of St Andrews) and more critical ideas about peacebuilding that have recently developed in many European and non-western academic and policy circles. Some scholars have pointed towards the hybrid outcomes that have arisen in practice, indicating both the potential and problems of hybrid forms of peace, with an everyday orientation, and suggestive of the emergence of a post-liberal framework.

The UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies at the University of Innsbruck/Austria proposed in 2008 a culture-based classification of peace interpretations: energetic, moral, modern, post-modern and trans-rational approaches. The trans-rational approach unites existing spiritual interpretations of society and relation with the mechanistic methods of modern peace. Hence this school prefers the strictly relational and systemic method of elicitive conflict transformation (Lederach) to the prescriptive approaches of modern conflict resolution.

Criticism and controversy

A serious number of well established criticisms have been aimed at peace and conflict studies, often but not necessarily from outside the realms of university system, including that peace studies:

- do not produce practical prescriptions for managing or resolving global conflicts because "ideology always trumps objectivity and pragmatism";
- are focused on putting a "respectable face on Western self-loathing";
- are hypocritical because they "tacitly or openly support terrorism as a permissible strategy for the 'disempowered' to redress real or perceived grievances against the powerful" (i.e. ideological anti-Western concepts developed by social scientists such as Johan Galtung which arguably add a sense of unjustified acceptability which is used in support of radicalism)
- have curricula that are (according to human rights activist Caroline Cox and philosopher Roger Scruton) "intellectually incoherent, riddled with bias and unworthy of academic status...";
- have policies proposed to "eliminate the causes of violence" are uniformly leftist policies, and not necessarily policies which would find broad agreement among social scientists.

Responses

Such views have been strongly opposed by scholars who claim that these criticisms underestimate the development of detailed interdisciplinary, theoretical, methodological, and

empirical research into the causes of violence and dynamics of peace that has occurred via academic and policy networks around the world.

Most academics in the area argue that the accusations that peace studies approaches are not objective, and derived from mainly leftist or inexpert sources, are not practical, support violence rather than reject it, or have not led to policy developments, are clearly incorrect. They note that the development of UN and major donor policies (including the EU, US, and UK, as well as many others including those of Japan, Canada, Norway, etc.) towards and in conflict and post-conflict countries have been heavily influenced by such debates. A range of key policy documents and responses have been developed by these governments in the last decade and more, and in UN (or related) documentation such as "Agenda for Peace", "Agenda for Development", "Agenda for Democratization", the Millennium Development Goals, Responsibility to Protect, and the "High Level Panel Report". They have also been significant for the work of the World Bank, International Development Agencies, and a wide range of Non Governmental Organisations. It has been influential in the work of, among others, the UN, UNDP, UN Peacebuilding Commission, UNHCR, World Bank, EU, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, for national donors including USAID, DFID, CIDA, NORAD, DANIDA, Japan Aid, GTZ, and international NGOs such as International Alert or International Crisis Group, as well as many local NGOs. Major databases have been generated by the work of scholars in these areas.

Finally, peace and conflict studies debates have generally confirmed, not undermined, a broad consensus (western and beyond) on the importance of human security, human rights, development, democracy, and a rule of law (though there is a vibrant debate ongoing about the contextual variations and applications of these frameworks). At the same time, the research field is characterized by a number of challenges including the tension between "the objective of doing critical research and being of practical relevance".

Conflict Transformation: A Multi-Dimensional Task

Introduction

What is the state-of-the-art in conflict transformation theory? Does a theory of conflict transformation already exist, and if so, what are its main foundations? Can practitioners rely on this theory to guide their practice? Can analysts make use of it to understand the dynamics of conflict and to assess the effects of interventions?

This paper aims to identify what is distinctive about conflict transformation theory and practice, as well as to identify its key dimensions. We need such a theory of conflict transformation if we are to have an adequate basis for the analysis of conflicts, as well as for devising appropriate responses to them and evaluating the effects of these responses. The paper argues that such theories need to be continually adjusted in response to the changing nature of conflicts, and that current theories must be adapted in order to take proper account of the globalisation of conflicts and conflict interventions.

The first section of the article distinguishes conflict transformation theory from theories of conflict management and conflict resolution. It explores some of the principal conflict transformation approaches in more detail, and then asks whether they add up to a coherent body of theory. Following this, it suggests a shift from *theories of conflict to theories of conflict-in-context*, arguing that in the context of globalisation our analyses of conflict must give proper consideration to the social, regional and international context. We need to consider both the factors that promote peacebuilding and those that exacerbate conflict at these different levels over an extended time period from before the outbreak of violent conflict to well after its resolution. Within this broader setting, this section thus attempts to extend Galtung‘s and Azar‘s theories of conflict formation to theories of conflict transformation. It also proposes a framework of five types of conflict transformation, which should be useful as a basis for planning and assessing interventions in conflicts.

The second section of the article discusses current developments in conflict transformation practice as they have occurred in the four principal kinds of practice – that of governmental and intergovernmental representatives, of development agencies, of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and of local parties and groups within the conflict setting. The issues involved in coordinating initiatives between these different groups are also discussed.

The final section of the paper discusses conflict transformation as a potential seed for change, requiring change both in the peacebuilder as well as in the society in conflict.

Theories of Conflict Transformation

Is There a Theory of Conflict Transformation?

At the very least, the foundations of a theory of conflict transformation have now been laid. Nevertheless it is also true that a wide variety of theoretical approaches are in use among different schools of thought and practice in the field. These theories reflect both differing paradigms and different types of intervenors (state and non-state, internal and external). Different authors and

practitioners use basic concepts and terms in inconsistent ways. In particular, it is not clear whether the term conflict transformation is intended to describe the field broadly, and thus be synonymous with conflict management and conflict resolution, or whether conflict transformation instead is characterised by distinct elements that can be differentiated from the other two approaches.

I will argue here for the latter: a distinctive theory of conflict transformation is indeed emerging. Nevertheless I note also that this new theory draws on many of the familiar concepts of conflict management and conflict resolution, and that it also rests on the same tradition of theorising about conflict. It is best viewed not as a wholly new approach, but rather as a re-conceptualisation of the field in order to make it more relevant to contemporary conflicts.

Certain crucial changes in the nature of conflict call for such a re-conceptualisation. First of all, most contemporary violent conflicts are asymmetric, marked by inequalities of power and status. Second (*see* contribution of Dan Smith in this volume), many contemporary conflicts are protracted, crossing repeatedly into and out of violence and thus defying cyclical or bell-shaped models of conflict phases. Thirdly, protracted conflicts warp the societies, economies and regions in which they are situated, creating complex emergencies fuelled on the one hand by local struggles and on the other by global factors such as the arms trade and support for regimes or rebels by outside states. The complexity of these situations contrasts starkly with the relative simplicity of the core theories we can find in conflict resolution, especially those advocating win-win outcomes in two-party contests.

It is helpful to distinguish three separate schools within this overall field (*see* contribution of Reimann in this volume), while at the same time recognizing the significant areas of overlap between them. All three not only articulate varying approaches to conflict intervention, but also reflect different conceptualisations of conflict.

Conflict management theorists see violent conflicts as an ineradicable consequence of differences of values and interests within and between communities. The propensity to violence arises from existing institutions and historical relationships, as well as from the established distribution of power. Resolving such conflicts is viewed as unrealistic: the best that can be done is to manage and contain them, and occasionally to reach a historic compromise in which violence may be laid aside and normal politics resumed. Conflict management is the art of appropriate intervention to achieve political settlements, particularly by those powerful actors having the power and resources to bring pressure on the conflicting parties in order to induce them to settle. It is also the art of designing appropriate institutions to guide the inevitable conflict into appropriate channels. In the words of Bloomfield and Reilly:

> *Conflict management is the positive and constructive handling of difference and divergence. Rather than advocating methods for removing conflict, [it] addresses the more realistic question of managing conflict: how to deal with it in a constructive way, how to bring opposing sides together in a cooperative process, how to design a practical, achievable, cooperative system for the constructive management of difference (Bloomfield and Reilly 1998, 18).*

Conflict resolution theorists, in contrast, reject this power political view of conflict, arguing instead that in communal and identity conflicts, people cannot compromise on their fundamental needs. However, they argue that it is possible to *transcend* conflicts if parties can be helped to explore, analyse, question and reframe their positions and interests. Conflict resolution therefore emphasises intervention by skilled but powerless third-parties working unofficially with the parties to foster new thinking and new relationships. They seek to explore what the roots of the conflict really are and to identify creative solutions that the parties may have missed in their commitment to entrenched positions. Conflict resolution is about how parties can move from zero-

sum, destructive patterns of conflict to positive-sum constructive outcomes. The aim is to develop „processes of conflict resolution that appear to be acceptable to parties in dispute, and effective in resolving conflict“ (Azar and Burton 1986, 1).

Conflict transformation theorists argue that contemporary conflicts require more than the reframing of positions and the identification of win-win outcomes. 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. Constructive conflict is seen as a vital agent or catalyst for change. People within the conflict parties, within the society or region affected, and outsiders with relevant human and material resources all have complementary roles to play in the long-term process of peacebuilding. This suggests a comprehensive and wide-ranging approach, emphasising support for groups within the society in conflict rather than for the mediation of outsiders. It also recognizes that conflicts are transformed gradually, through a series of smaller or larger changes as well as specific steps by means of which a variety of actors may play important roles. In the words of Lederach:

> *Conflict transformation must actively envision, include, respect, and promote the human and cultural resources from within a given setting. This involves a new set of lenses through which we do not primarily ‚see' the setting and the people in it as the ‚problem' and the outsider as the ‚answer'. Rather, we understand the long-term goal of transformation as validating and building on people and resources within the setting (Lederach 1995).*

Contributions to Theories of Conflict Transformation

Theorists of conflict transformation draw on a variety of conceptual building blocks, some recent, some older and some borrowed from other schools. The idea of conflict formation was already present in the work of the European structural theorists who analysed conflict formations (e.g. Senghaas 1973; Krippendorf 1973). Perhaps the most influential work to date has been that of Galtung (brought together in Galtung 1996, 70-126), which offers a rich brew of core concepts.

Conflicts, he suggests, have both life-affirming and life-destroying aspects. They form from contradictions in the structure of society. They then become manifest in attitudes and behaviour. Once formed, conflicts undergo a variety of transformational processes: articulation or dis-articulation, conscientisation or de-conscientisation, complexification or simplification, polarisation or depolarisation, escalation or de-escalation (1996, 90). The incompatibility which arises between parties may be eliminated by transcending the contradiction, by compromise, by deepening or widening the conflict structure, and by associating or dissociating the actors (1996, 116). Galtung, Krippendorf and others also emphasise the relationship between conflicts and larger conflicts embedded in the structure of world society and the world economy.

Curle‘s work (1971) built on Galtung‘s approach. He traces how asymmetric relationships can be transformed, through a shift from unbalanced to balanced relationships achieved through a process of conscientisation, confrontation, negotiation and development. Lederach took up Curle‘s ideas, as did Francis who develops them in her contribution to this handbook. Contributions from theorists on non-violence have also been important (Sharp 1973; Wehr, Burgess and Burgess 1994; Clark 2000). A non-violent campaign can transform conflict by detaching the props sustaining it such as groups resisting land reform and harnessing them to support social alternatives (International Alert 1996, 22, 31-33).

Azar's work (1990) on protracted social conflicts has also had an important influence on conflict transformation theory, by offering an explanation for the protracted quality of contemporary conflicts. He suggests an approach that is more appropriately suited to the characteristics of contemporary conflicts in fragile states. His work concentrates on the genesis and maintenance of protracted conflicts. By developing his theory, it can also be used as a theory of conflict transformation.

Figure 1 is drawn from Azar's model of protracted social conflict. It is extended here to demonstrate that, with some modification, Azar's model can be used to capture both the formation and the transformation (or deformation) of this type of conflict.

Reading the diagram from left to right, as in Azar's book, one can trace the formation of a protracted conflict. It arises from the historical context, and from the denial of basic human needs of access, identity and security, as well as through the roles played by the state, international political and economic linkages and the military in politics. If the state and communal groups choose suppression and violent rebellion as their strategies, a conflict may then become destructive. Reading from right back to left, destructive conflict then results in a more dependent and exploitative pattern of development, a distorted pattern of governance and a militarised form of politics. This leads to the further denial of basic needs. The result is a protracted cycle of institutional deformation and destructive conflict.

On the other hand, if there is sufficient capacity in governance and society, if politics are not too militarised, and if the international environment is supportive, states may instead choose accommodation, and communal groups may choose political forms of confrontation. This can lead to a pattern of constructive conflict that in turn promotes legitimate decision-making capacity, strengthens autonomous development and sustains civil rather than military politics. All these are conducive to the meeting of basic needs. The model goes beyond simple structural or behavioural explanations and suggests how patterns of conflict interact with the satisfaction of human needs, the adequacy of political and economic institutions and the choices made by political actors. It also suggests how different options can lead to benign or malignant spirals of conflict.

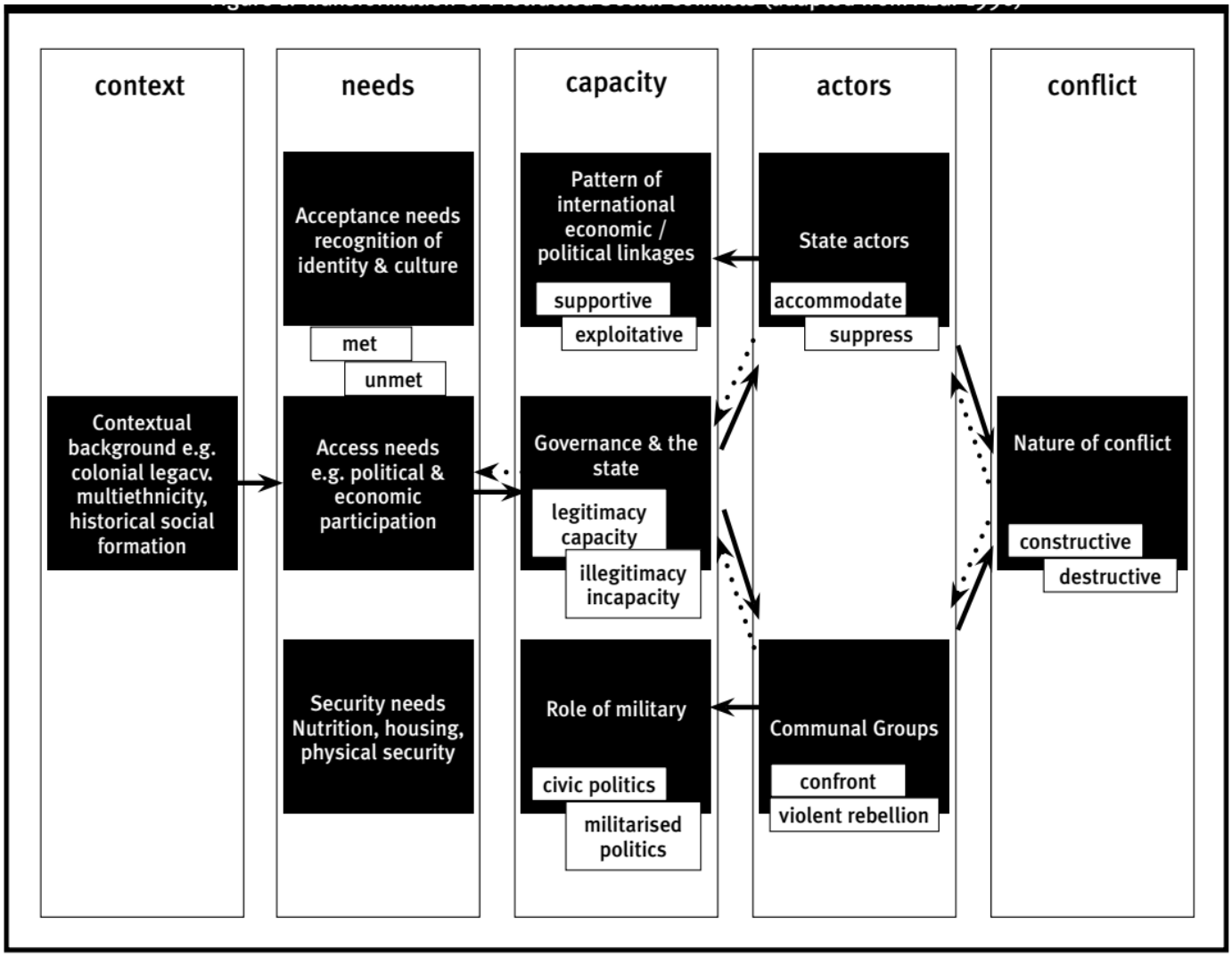
Vayrynen argues for a conflict theory based on the idea of transformation rather than settlement, stressing that it is important to understand how conflicts are transformed in dynamic terms:

> *The bulk of conflict theory regards the issues, actors and interests as given and on that basis makes efforts to find a solution to mitigate or eliminate contradictions between them. Yet the issues, actors and interests change over time as a consequence of the social, economic and political dynamics of societies (Vayrynen 1991, 4).*

His approach is primarily analytical and theoretical, but is also suggestive of the types of intervention that peacebuilders should be considering (*see* Vayrynen 1991):

- actor transformations – internal changes in parties, or the appearance of new parties;
- issue transformations – altering the agenda of conflict issues;
- rule transformations – changes in the norms or rules governing a conflict;
- structural transformations – the entire structure of relationships and power distribution in the conflict is transformed.

Rupesinghe (1995, 1998) argues for a comprehensive, eclectic approach to conflict transformation that embraces multitrack interventions. He proposes building peace constituencies at the grassroots level and across the parties at the civil society level (where it exists), and also creating peace alliances with any groups able to bring about change, such as business groups, the media and the military. He sees conflict transformation as a broad approach incorporating conflict resolution training and Track I interventions including diplomatic interventions and peacekeeping.



Lederach's work (1997) serves as one of the most comprehensive statements to date of conflict transformation thinking for practitioners. He sees peacebuilding as a long-term transformation of a war system into a peace system, inspired by a quest for the values of peace and justice, truth and mercy. The key dimensions of this process are changes in the personal, structural, relational and cultural aspects of conflict, brought about over different time-periods (short-, mid- and long-term) and affecting different system levels at different times.

Peacebuilding is thus seen as a structure-process. An appropriate strategy (such as networking between mid-level leaders with links to parties across the conflict) is linked to an appropriate time-frame (such as concentrating on mid-term steps to build a peace constituency, while at the same time embracing a vision of the desired future and an awareness of the current crisis). In thinking about structure, Lederach contributes the idea of the pyramid with elite leaders and decision-makers at the top, leaders of social organisations, churches, top journalists in the mid-level and grassroots community leaders at the base. A comprehensive peace process should address complementary changes at all these levels.

One strength of his model is that it widens its view from the conflict and the conflict parties and indicates the scope for drawing peacebuilding resources from the wider society. A weakness is the limited attention it gives to the autonomous processes of change that transpire within the political system of the conflict-affected society.

An important issue, raised by Lederach and widely discussed by the conflict resolution school in the context of conflict intervention, is the issue of sequencing. What type of action or intervention is appropriate, by whom, and at what time? Glasl (1982) suggested nine stages of escalation in conflicts. He argues that different types of intervention might be appropriate at different times. Fishers and Keashly's (1991) contingency theory built on these foundations. Their idea is that the nature of intervention should be matched to the stage of the conflict. At the early stages of conflict, they suggest that facilitation may be appropriate; but when a conflict has reached a high stage of polarisation power-based mediation (or even coercion) is required. Lederach (1997) offers another version of a contingency model based on Curle's (1971) progression of conflict, avoiding coercion.

Authors within the conflict transformation tradition also draw heavily on ideas about conflict dynamics common to all three schools. For example, conflicts sometimes develop strong tendencies towards vicious or benign spirals. The common pattern is for conflict to broaden (suck in new issues), widen (suck in new actors) and intensify (suck in new victims). But it is also possible for conflict to be transformed, as parties shift positions and adopt new goals, new actors emerge and new situations develop allowing for new relationships and changed structures.

It should be evident from this brief review of approaches to conflict transformation theory that some theories, exemplified by Azar and Vayrynen, are primarily analytical and interpretative, attempting to explain the formation and transformation of contemporary conflicts. Others, such as Curle and Lederach, are prescriptive, offering peacebuilders a means to conceptualise the path from conflict towards desired outcomes. Perhaps Galtung's approach comes closest to a synthesis.

From a Theory of Conflict to a Theory of Conflict-in-Context

As the practice of peacemaking has extended from prevention to post-conflict peacebuilding, and as globalisation exerts an increasing impact on internal conflicts, the scope of conflict transformation theories must correspondingly be extended. On the one hand, they need to be concerned with the factors exacerbating conflict and restraining conflict over a number of different phases (*see* Box 1):

Box 1: Factors Exacerbating or Restraining Conflict at Different Phases

phase / factors	pre-violence	crisis	escalation	protracted	post-settlement
exacerbating	underlying causes	triggers	escalators	deformers	triggers
restraining	deep preventors	light preventors	de- escalators	transformers	peacebuilders

On the other hand, however, these theories must also deal adequately with the interplay of causes and preventors at all the different levels of the international system. One can identify five different levels at which contemporary conflicts are caused: the global, regional, societal, conflict party and individual/elite (Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 1999). Box 2 provides specific examples of causes and preventors of violent conflicts at these levels, using examples from Rwanda.

Box 2: Causes and Preventors of Violent Conflicts at Different Levels

level	examples of causes	examples of preventors
global	post-colonial legacy	international minority rights
regional	conflict spillover in great lakes	conflict prevention by OSCE
state/society	state capture by ethnic groups	cross-ethnic party voting
conflict party	Hutu hostility towards Tutsi	pragmatic approach of minority
elite/international	Hutu leaders launch genocide	president accepts OSCE advice

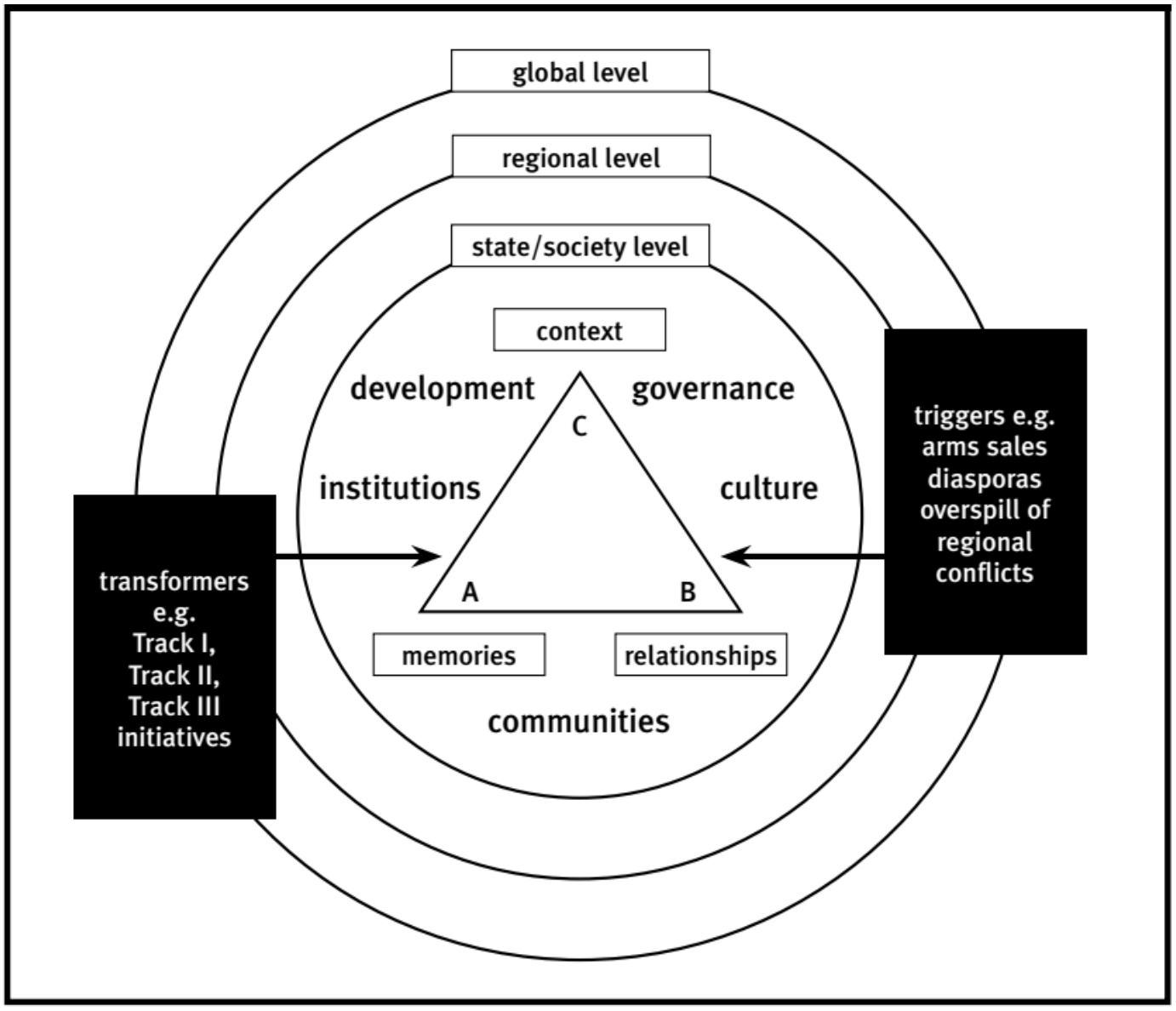
Conflict theories, if viewed too narrowly, will be seen to concentrate overly on the conflict party level, focusing on parties, issues, goals and so on to the exclusion of the context within which the conflict is situated as well as of the factors which characterize the self-fuelling of conflicts, e.g. markets and cultures of violence. It is possible, however, to add more representation of the background, for example building on Galtung‘s simple triangular formulation of conflict. On to ‚contradiction‘, we can build ‚context‘; on to ‚attitudes‘, ‚memory‘ and on to ‚behaviour‘, ‚relations‘ (*see* Figure 2). This recognizes that the meaning of a conflict depends largely on the context out of which it arises. The attitudes the parties have towards one another are shaped by previous relationships. The behaviour they adopt is not purely reactive but is based on their memory of what has happened in the past, and expectations of what may happen in the future.

The *context* of conflict includes the society in conflict and the wider international and regional level. Within the society, crucial background aspects are culture, governance arrangements, institutions, social roles, norms, the rules and codes in place in a society, and its path of development. For example, in conflicts involving ethnicity, minorities or challenges to state structures, it is the very structure of the state that is at issue. As globalisation proceeds, local conflicts are inevitably influenced by wider economic and political forces. These have tended to strengthen trade investment and technological networks in some areas of the world, but also to marginalise other areas such as Africa and the former Soviet Union. The result is a weakening of states and economies in these areas and, in some cases, the creation of a real crisis of the state. Internal conflicts are increasingly associated with fragile states and mal-adaptive reactions to the impact of globalisation.

Relationships involve the whole fabric of interaction within the society in which the conflict takes place as well as beyond to other societies. As Lederach (1997) argues, these relational aspects of conflict are crucial. Poor relationships between groups are all too often a trigger for conflict, and remain a critical hindrance to peacebuilding efforts after the violence is over.

Memories are part of each party's socially constructed understanding of the situation, shaped by culture and learning, and discourse and belief. The way groups remember and construct their past is often central to the mobilization for conflict, and thus a crucial matter to address in reconciliation and cultural traditions work.

Context, relationships and memories are all part of the tissue connecting the contradictions, attitudes and behaviours in the conflict formations, within the wider background in space and time.



This template enables a better understanding of the types of transformation that take place. Building on Vayrynen‘s approach, Box 3 illustrates five types of transformation, or transformers.

Context transformations refer to changes in the context of conflict that may radically alter each party‘s perception of the conflict situation, as well as their motives. The impact of the end of the Cold War on regional conflicts is a dramatic example. A somewhat less far-reaching instance might be the proposed change in the rules of the diamond trade to outlaw ‚conflict diamonds‘, that could well have a significant impact on the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Angola. The establishment of the World Diamond Council (www.worlddiamondcouncil.com) is a promising start but it is, as yet, too early to see if it will have a significant impact.

Structural transformations refer to changes in the basic structure of the conflict, that is to the set of actors, their issues, incompatible goals and relationships, or to the society, economy or state within which the conflict is embedded. Asymmetric conflicts cannot be transformed, for instance, without changing the unbalanced and contested relationships that lie at their roots. While such changes will take place only gradually, internal and external actors can support them along the way. For example Steve Biko‘s ‚Black Consciousness‘ movement raised awareness of the power of the poor people in the townships in South Africa, and the Anti-Apartheid Movement helped to press the case for dis-investment by foreign-owned businesses well before the end of the apartheid regime. Many recent conflicts in West Africa have demonstrated the futility in attempting conflict transformation without addressing the economic interests that fuel wars.

Box 3: Transformers of Conflict

type	examples
1. context transformations	change in the international or regional environment
2. structure transformations	change from asymmetric to symmetric relations change in power structures changes of markets of violence
3. actor transformations	changes of leadership changes of goals intra-party change change in party‘s constituencies changing actors
4. issue transformations	transcendence of contested issues constructive compromise changing issues de-linking or re-linking issues
5. personal/elite transformations	changes of perspective changes of heart changes of will gestures of conciliation

Actor transformations include decisions on the part of actors to change their goals or alter their general approach to conflict. This would include decisions to seek peace or to initiate a peace process. They also include changes of leadership, often crucial to the securing of transformation in conflicts. Also included are changes in the situation of the public constituencies and supporters of the respective political leaders. This opens a number of lines for specific conflict transformation work, as those who work within a party to bring about change in that party‘s position often prove to be crucial actors in the peace process, and may have more influence than external Track I and Track II actors.

Issue transformations concern the reformulations of positions that parties take on key issues at the heart of the conflict as well as the way in which parties redefine or reframe those positions in order to reach compromises or resolutions. A good example of an issue transformation was the decision by the Unionist Party in Northern Ireland to accept a de-linking of the decommissioning issue from the question of the convocation of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Making ‚progress‘ on issues in conflict is often tortuously slow and painfully subject to reversals, and of course what counts as progress is itself contentious.

Personal changes of heart or mind within individual leaders or small groups with decision-making power at critical moments may be crucial. Some external intervenors try to reach these leaders and bring about this personal change directly (Curle 1987; Mitchell 2000). Conciliatory gestures by leaders, which express personal changes, would play an important role in this context.

These five types of transformation can be readily related to the levels of conflict causation or prevention identified above. Context transformations usually occur within the global or regional setting. Structural transformations usually happen at the state/society level. Actor and issue transformations take place at the conflict party and elite levels. Personal transformations demand competencies on the individual level.

The transformation types can also be connected to the different parts of conflict formation, whether this is seen in Azar‘s terms (*see* Figure 1) or in Galtung‘s (*see* Figure 2). Context, structural and issue transformations all affect the context and contradictions at the heart of the conflict. Actor and personal transformations particularly affect attitudes and memory, behaviour and relationships. These in turn, of course, are interrelated.

Finally, these different types of transformation further relate to the phases of conflicts and the timing of intervention. Context and structural changes tend to take place over a longer time-scale, and affect the setting of the conflict; the other types of transformations occur more rapidly and sequentially, as part of the dynamics of the conflict. The sequencing of changes varies with each peace process depending on the logic of the situation (*see* Box 4 for the Northern Ireland case). Only in the very simplest conflicts is conflict transformation likely to be a rapid or immediate process. More typically, it is slow and tortuous with turning points usually followed by sticking points. This makes the evaluation of individual measures extremely difficult.

Box 4: Transformers of the Northern Ireland Conflict

As one of the most intensively managed conflicts, as well as one of the more intractable conflicts of the twentieth century, Northern Ireland offers many lessons for conflict transformation. We can find evidence of all five levels of transformation at different points. The *context* of the conflict was altered by long-term changes in the British and Irish societies, the development of the EU and the end of the Cold War. The conflict *structure* changed as the pan-Nationalist coalition developed sufficient alliances and confidence to balance the hitherto asymmetric relationships between the parties. *Actor transformations* included changes of government in Britain, the fundamental shift in thinking within the Sinn Féin leadership, and division and change among the Unionists. *Issue transformations* included the mutual agreements reached in the Good Friday agreement to reconcile the legitimacy of the two cultural traditions and establish institutions which reinforce both the Irish and British dimensions of governance. All this could not have taken place without significant changes of mind at the *individual and elite level*. Even so, conflict remains and continues, as each marching season reinvokes the old atmosphere of division and fear. Northern Ireland offers a striking example of the complementarity of approaches on different tracks and of the interrelationship between ‚structural' and ‚cultural' approaches (Bloomfield 1997). For example, the patient work of the Community Relations Council on the ground built sufficient credibility to enable the Council to facilitate quiet dialogue with young politicians (Fitzduff 1999). We have not yet gained a clear understanding of the role that ‚civil society' played in this peace process and in the longer term process of healing the divisions between the communities. Cochrane and Dunn (2002) provides an in-depth assessment.