CONFLICT RESOLUTION REASERCH: The Dynamics of conflict

The dynamics of conflict and conflict transformation are also related to the social and international capacity for handling conflicts. In general, this capacity is likely to be higher in societies with a past tradition of handling change peacefully, in which institutions are legitimate and rules and norms are accepted. Correspondingly, it may be threatened and undermined in times of extreme conflict and war. The modified version of Azar's theory, presented in Figure 1, suggests the relationship between conflict dynamics and conflict handling capacity in divided societies.

Constructive conflict handling reinforces the society's confidence in its civic institutions, culture and capacity to manage conflict peacefully. Further it not only transforms relationships in conflict, it also strengthens the society's system of governance and capacity for conflict handling and peaceful change.

Destructive conflict, on the other hand, results in an intensification of damage to the participants in conflicts and the bystanders. It further destroys their cooperative capacities, including the system of governance, the economic order and the social relationships of the society, in some cases even the state. In protracted conflicts, all the institutions of society become thoroughly deformed.

These rather broad theoretical considerations suggest a framework through which we can analyse and evaluate conflict transformation practices, and consider the gaps and weaknesses in the international capacity for handling conflict.

Practices of Conflict Resolution

Actors of Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation usually involves a broad range of actors, who make use of a wide repertoire of practices. These can, however, be categorised into four main groups of actors, who shape the development of contemporary practice:

- states and inter-governmental organisations;
- development and humanitarian organisations;
- international NGOs concerned with conflict prevention and transformation;
- parties to the conflict and other relevant groups within the affected societies.

I will briefly discuss some of the characteristic practices of each group, before considering the issues that arise when they come together.

Track I practitioners, states and international organisations, are among the most influential of all the actors as their practice impinges most directly and powerfully on the conflict parties, and the positive and negative consequences of their interventions are fully in the public eye. The 1990s began with a hopeful phase in which the UN set out to implement the expanded conception of peacemaking envisioned in Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Peace*, with notable peacebuilding operations in areas with recent peace settlements, including Cambodia, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique and El Salvador.

A general model for UN peacebuilding has emerged from these cases. It calls for military measures to secure the demobilization, disarmament and cantonment of opposing forces; constitutional measures to implement elections and establish a transitional government; governance measures to support civilian government and infrastructure, including the training and, if necessary, supervision of local police; human rights measures; return of refugees; and restoration of the war-damaged infrastructure. At first, this model appeared to have striking successes, and in some cases such as Namibia and Mozambique a peaceful transformation from war was indeed achieved. In others, however, such as Angola and Cambodia, violent conflict resumed. The UN and the major states continue to learn from these operations and are extending their peacebuilding operations, for example in Bosnia and Kosovo. While international interventions have in these cases seem to have halted ethnic wars, the extent of transformation of the underlying conflict remains limited. Ethno-nationalist leaderships remain and settlements based on the realities of ethnic divisions in the war have preserved these divisions in the peace.

These high-profile cases, of course, involved imposed settlements, achieved after considerable vacillation on the part of a divided international community. More impressive have been the cases in which conflicts were prevented even before they became violent, and where deep or structural and light or operational conflict prevention have worked together. Here, real changes in the context of the conflict and in the structure of the societies have resulted in some impressive transformations.

In the case of Estonia, for example, a potential ethnic conflict was averted in part through the well-known interventions of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, supported by the EU and Scandinavian governments. In part, the transformed economic context served to change the incentives for the Russian-speaking community. Moreover an additional key factor was the introduction of an electoral system that created incentives for cross-ethnic voting, thus resulting in a transition from ethnic politics to a politics of economic and regional interest groups. Non-Estonian politicians were included in the party lists of Estonian parties, and the Estonian Centre Party won wide support from Russian-speakers as a vehicle for promoting their interests. This is a particularly striking success for the conflict management and ethnic accommodation approaches, made possible by the transformation of the Estonian context after 1991.

The second type of actors are development and humanitarian agencies. In the 1980s and 1990s, these agencies were increasingly drawn into the costly business of rebuilding war-torn societies, and were responding to the acute damage to development, which had resulted from armed conflicts, by targeting development programmes specifically towards peacebuilding. In some cases, their activities supported UN peacebuilding operations, for example in Mozambique where donors helped to keep the elections on schedule and supported the transformation of RENAMO into a political party. In other cases, development aid can be channelled to directly mitigate conflict, as when donors supported refugees in neglected parts of Somalia with the intention of reducing discontent in a politically unstable area. Programmes to support the re-integration of child soldiers or the rehabilitation of agricultural land are further examples of development tasks that can readily have a peacebuilding component. Capacity-building and support for indigenous conflict handling capacity are also crucial. A notable example of such work is Oxfam‘s conflict transformation work in Northern Kenya (*see* Box 5).

Development aid can, of course, have unintended as well as intended consequences; in some circumstances, aid is captured by the parties to conflict and then sustains the fighting. Current work on establishing a framework of indicators for assessing the impact of development projects on conflicts goes some way towards meeting the need for a framework for better evaluation (*see* contributions of Mark Hoffman and Mary Anderson in this volume). Such a framework of indicators should in turn be linked to a framework for understanding the overall transformation of the conflict, such as the one offered above.

Although development agencies are increasingly important and influential in this field, they generally see their role as principally to support and encourage the work of others, rather than to take prime responsibility for transforming particular conflicts (this role is still seen as a new and untested function). Most of the conflict transformation work has therefore been left to NGOs.

Box 5: Conflict Transformation Work in Northern Kenya

In Northern Kenya, the growing pressure on arid land and the introduction of a Kalashnikov culture into traditional cattle-raiding has led to an increase in both the extent and intensity of conflicts between nomadic pastoral communities, as well as between pastoralists and agriculturalists. Not only historical rivals such as the Turkana and Pokot or Somali and Borana, but also communities which coexisted peacefully in the 1980s are now engulfed in war. The militarisation of these pastoralist communities is severely affecting the security of Kenya and the neighbouring territories, and damaging the affected communities. In response, Oxfam facilitated peace talks relying on local elders in the Baragoi Pastoral Project of 1997. A crucial aspect of Oxfam's ongoing work in the area is an effort to appreciate the codes of honour and conduct of these peoples and their understanding of conflict, through lexical and ethnographic analysis (Kona 1999). In this vein, a local committee of women from the affected communities set up the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, a network of 27 governmental organisations and NGOs in north-eastern Kenya. This group conducts training and capacity-building, and contributed to a cease-fire in 1993 and continuing efforts to prevent and resolve local conflicts in the region.

(European Platform for Conflict Prevention 1999a, 152; 1999b, 243-47)

Of all the groups of practitioners discussed here, it is probably the NGOs who have paid most attention to theories of conflict transformation. Following Lederach, NGO practitioners advocate a sustained level of engagement over a longer time-period. They seek an in-depth understanding of the roots of conflict, working closely with people both within and outside the conflict parties. They seek to open a space for dialogue, sustain local or national conferences and workshops on paths towards peace, identify opportunities for development and engage in peacebuilding, relationship-building and institution-building over the longer term.

The methods and tools employed by Track II actors include supporting and sustaining local groups and social movements, building peace constituencies, strengthening capacity, empowering key actors, organisational development and networking and training. A notable example of this kind of work is the programme of the London-based NGO Conciliation Resources (CR) in Fiji, undertaken in coalition with local actors. CR supported the Citizens' Constitutional Forum in

Fiji, an organisation which made a significant contribution to the new constitutional settlement in 1996 with the introduction of the alternative-vote system and power-sharing (Conciliation Resources 2000). Unfortunately, the coup in Fiji in May 2000 and the return to a narrowly-based government indicates only too clearly the setbacks confronted by this kind of work.

One key requirement for this work is good conflict analysis (*see* Box 6), which is best developed in conjunction with groups in conflict. Tracking the changing dynamics of a conflict over time is clearly one of the areas in which practice must draw on appropriately developed theory.

Box 6: Conflict Analysis

The original conflict mapping guide of Wehr (1979) is still of value. More recent guides can be found in Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse (1999, 92-3), Bloomfield and Reilly (1998, 41-43) and Leonhardt (2000). The basic technique is to take a snapshot of the conflict, identifying key actors, stakeholders, issues and relationships, and then identify the actors, third-parties or potential peace alliances capable of bringing about change. More sophisticated conflict tracking relies on indicators of conflict which are also used for early warning purposes and impact assessment (Schmid 1997; Jongmaan 2000; *see* contribution of Paffenholz in this volume).

Finally, and most importantly, the local actors themselves have the greatest responsibility, and the greatest opportunity, for transforming their own conflicts. There are cases of ‚embedded third-parties' who emerge out of conflict parties and play a significant role in opening channels of dialogue and opening political space – such as John Hume in Northern Ireland; cases of groups within political parties who can bring about an actor transformation such as the shift towards political forms of struggle in Sinn Féin; and civil society actors and local NGOs who often have an enormous influence on bridge-building between political parties and local communities exemplified by the Clonard monastery in Northern Ireland, and the Corrymeela Community working on respect for cultural traditions thereby addressing the problems of historical memories and reconciliation. The impact of this peacebuilding on the macro level of the conflict is hard to evaluate; but on a small scale, the personal and group transformations that it can achieve are keenly felt.

Coordination and Multi-Track Diplomacy

A particular challenge for conflict transformation work is the question of how best to work effectively with interventions occurring at other tracks. At times, very effective collaboration takes place, for example in the case of Macedonia (*see* Box 7).

All too often, however, internal and external actors in the various tracks are at cross-purposes. This is not surprising, given the clash between paradigms. Actions on one track can sometimes wreck efforts on another. For example, it may be difficult for an organisation that strives for non-violent resolution of conflicts to cooperate with a government that relies on coercive methods to pressure the local protagonists to accept a settlement. Conversely, foreign ministries are not usually enthusiastic about the intrusion of NGOs into diplomacy.

Practitioners of conflict transformation activities at the non-state level must pursue their aims with sensitivity to both the culture of the conflict area and the goals and constraints of other actors. They must always remember that they may not be able to influence other actors whose actions will in turn affect their own work. Moreover, their task may broaden when conflict transformation involves changing the policies of Track I bodies outside the conflict area. For example, it is increasingly recognized that bodies like the World Bank can have a significant impact on conflicts. Campaigns to influence their policies have thus become a regular part of the wider task of conflict transformation.

Box 7: Cooperative Multi-Track Diplomacy in Macedonia

Macedonia offers a case in which the various initiatives of different tracks appear to have been genuinely complementary. For example, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (external Track I) together with the Open Society Institute in Skopje (internal Track III) proposed several compromise solutions on the university issue. The International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia (Track I) brokered a compromise between Macedonia and the ethnic Serbs, while Mr. Holbrooke and the US government (Track I) clinched the agreement between Greece and Macedonia which ended the blockade. The NGO Search for Common Ground (external Track III) developed a long-term programme aiming to meet the common needs of both communities at the grassroots level, particularly by promoting ‚inclusive journalism', respect for the common cultural legacy and the monuments of both communities, and also bicommunal efforts to protect the environment (Ackermann 2000). Tensions between the two communities remain sharp and have been further exacerbated by the effects of the war in Kosovo. Indeed the fighting in May/June 2000 threatened to expand into civil war. Underlying disagreements over the acceptance of the identity and status of the groups have not been resolved. Nevertheless, an inter-ethnic coalition is still intact in Parliament (Track 1) – this is probably the most vital factor in restraining violent conflict. Although at the time of writing these tensions could still overwhelm Macedonia, internal and external actors have so far worked together effectively to create a significant capacity, at least at the top-level, for accommodating differences.

Assessing the Impact of Practice

What is the overall impact of these kinds of practice on conflict? It is still difficult to say. There are reports of significant achievements in building peace constituencies for example in Lederach's work (1997). Compilations of recent work include some impressive stories of apparent successes (European Platform for Conflict Prevention 1999a,b). Only recently, however, some comparative research studies have started to identify key variables of impact assessment more systematically such as *Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP)* and *Lessons Learned in Conflict Interventions* by the European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation. Bercovitch's research (1996) suggests that conflict management approaches, including the use of power resources, are the most effective at delivering settlements. On the other hand, these settlements often fail to genuinely transform the conflict, and the long-term work necessary to build relationships and capacity may be more important than reaching fragile short-term political settlements.

The overall evidence of the ending of ethnic conflicts is particularly sobering. In a study of peacefully settled conflicts in Europe, the Middle East and Africa since 1945 (Pfetsch and Roloff 2000) the authors found only 13 out of 121 cases of conflicts over ethnicity, religion or regional autonomy that were resolved through peaceful negotiation (these include the Aland Islands, Northern Epirus, the Saar and South Tyrol). 51 remain undecided, 8 were resolved by the threat of force or other forms of coercion, and 49 by violence. The great majority of the peaceful cases were republics of the former Soviet Union which peacefully broke away in 1991. Indeed, despite the violent conflicts in Chechnya, Tajikistan, Nagorno-Karabakh and elsewhere, the number of ethnic conflicts which appear to have been transformed without violence in the former Soviet Union is startling.

A useful line of work is to identify these peaceful cases and ascertain the reasons why violence has been avoided, and how ethnic and other internal conflicts have been managed or addressed. But conflict ending measured by the end of violence is too final and crude an indicator on which to base the planning and assessment of conflict transformation initiatives. For this, a more finely-grained, differentiated approach is needed and indicators such as those developed in work on Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) systems offer one such approach (*see* contribution of Hoffman in this volume). If conflict transformation can be broken down into a sequence of changes in the conflict structure, the parties' goals and into issues over time, as suggested in the first part of this paper, it may become more feasible to relate interventions to particular transformations in the conflict.

The impact of endeavours for conflict transformation should not only be seen as an issue which affects the parties in conflict. It is also of direct relevance for all the individuals involved. The challenges, difficulties, hardships, setbacks and tenacity inherent in all conflict transformation mean that we must also ‚transform the transformers'. We must include this group as we focus on activities designed to enhance peace education, to improve training programmes and to create opportunities for self-reflection and spirituality (*see* Box 8).

Box 8: Transforming the Transformers – Smiling as a Method

One of the world's most notable transformers of conflict uses a method that does not usually appear in books about conflict and is completely absent from conflict theories. It is, however, a method that works. The method is to smile. „Breathing in, I calm my mind and body. Breathing out, I smile. This is the present moment. This is the only moment." Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, poet and peace activist. He is not the only exponent of the smiling approach to conflict transformation. The Dalai Lama, Adam Curle and Nelson

Mandela are all instinctive smilers. Thich Nhat Hanh not only smiles wonderfully, he also offers a comprehensive guide to the theory and practice of smiling, rooted in traditional wisdom and experience (Nhat Hanh 1987). „If we are peaceful, if we are happy we can smile and blossom like a flower and everyone in our family in our entire society will benefit from our peace.“ The idea of smiling as an approach to conflict transformation is based on the theory of interdependent co-origination. The practice of smiling is part of the practice of engaged mindfulness and reminds us that the conflict transformer must also take responsibility for transforming him- or herself in the process. The theory of interdependent co-origination states that everything has an influence on everything else. Everything inter-is with everything else. A flower is partly a flower, but it also has the sun and the rain and the earth inside it. The flower is made up of non-flower elements. Similarly, our self is made up of non-self elements. We can touch that of ourselves in the other and be touched by that of the other in ourselves. According to Buddhist psychology, we have a mental consciousness and a storehouse consciousness. Seeds develop in the storehouse consciousness and when they come to occupy our mental consciousness, we water them and they grow. In conflict we water the seed of anger until the anger within our storehouse consciousness grows very strong. It can then govern our thoughts and behaviour. But this is not inevitable. The practice of engaged mindfulness can transform anger, pain, and hate into compassion, joy and love. Conflict transformation, like mindfulness, tends and waters seeds, without knowing exactly how they will grow. Memory, relationships and conflicts are seeds in the collective storehouse consciousness. Transforming collective conflicts requires a deep awareness of ourselves and our interbeing with others.

• Conclusion

This paper has argued that a distinctive school of conflict transformation theory and practice has developed over the past decade. This new approach can be differentiated from conflict management and conflict resolution, although all three schools rely on a shared tradition of thinking about conflict and intervention.

Conflict transformation is a comprehensive approach, addressing a range of dimensions (micro- to macro- issues, local to global levels, grassroots to elite actors, short-term to long-term timescales). It aims to develop capacity and to support structural change, rather than to facilitate outcomes or deliver settlements. It seeks to engage with conflict at the pre-violence and post-violence phases, and with the causes and consequences of violent conflict, which usually extend beyond the site of fighting.

This paper has argued that the ambitious prescriptive theories need to be better integrated with the incremental analytical approach. At the same time, the analytical theories must be extended in time-scale and scope. The paper proposed expanding conflict theory to include conflict-in-context, and suggested a theoretically informed framework for evaluation.

A number of questions and gaps in the theory remain. We still lack sufficiently precise dynamic theories to adequately capture the emergent properties of conflict, including the formation of new actors and new issues. Most theories concentrate either on the causes and development of conflict or on the creation and sustenance of a peacebuilding capacity, and fail to sufficiently integrate an understanding of how the preventors and causes of conflict interact. There has been a somewhat uncritical willingness to embrace multi-track diplomacy, without an adequate

conceptualisation of how activity in the various tracks can fit together. We still have an incomplete understanding of the impact of conflict transformation activities on conflict, which makes them difficult to evaluate.

As the task of conflict transformation broadens, it may seem even more daunting. Any one practitioner or theorist can tackle only a part of this enormous field. All we can to is, to undertake a piece of work in good faith and do it well is all we can do. We plant seeds, and trust that interdependent co-origination will take care of the rest.

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